

THE

GM
GAME MASTER

HAS

LOGGED IN TO
ANOTHER
WORLD

01

AKATSUKI

ILLUSTRATORS
MERONTOMARI/
YUUI





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The Game Master Has Logged
In to Another World Vol.1

Side Story: Adel's Thoughts

Afterword

Chapter 1

“I would like to confirm something with those who haven’t been able to start the event. Have you perhaps forgotten to talk to the NPC that triggers it?”

“What? Of course not... You didn’t either, right?”

“Hmm... Hang on. First, I...”

It was past midnight and I was dealing with players while sitting alone at my computer, my workstation lit only by an overhead light.

I, Toudou Masaki, work as a GM—a Game Master. While I’m often the target of the players’ ire, I’m leading a pretty satisfying life, having succeeded in landing a job in the video game industry. That said...the lack of personnel sometimes means that I have to pull all-nighters. I’ve gotten used to it. I didn’t really get a choice anyway.

“It seems like that guy *did* mess up. Thank you for coming to help us out.”

“Right... Thank you very much. I’ll go warp myself real quick and start the event!”

“See ya!”

“I’m glad to see your issue has been resolved. Please enjoy your virtual life to the fullest.”

This time, the player was pretty easy to deal with. It happens all the time. People forget to launch the event and end up stuck right in front of the boss room. When it happens to shitty people, they tend to whine to GMs that have nothing to do with it.

Although I guess some of the GMs give out sloppy advice, so it’s hard to put all the blame on the players... Either way, I appreciate the moments when players are welcoming and grateful after summoning me.

Some people even treat me like a panda in a zoo. They hear me talk and come from afar to check it out.

If I wave at someone, they immediately wave back. I've seen many go so far as to take a screenshot to post on the game's forum.

In the end, we GMs are treated like rare monsters. Well, it *is* true that we aren't in the public eye that often.

I used one of the GM-exclusive commands to bring back the admin interface. I let out a sigh and heard a voice from behind me.

"Thank you for your hard work, Toudou. Here, have a coffee."

It was my senpai, five years my senior. He was a really nice guy who often bought us juice or coffee while he was on break.

"Thank you very much. We didn't have to deal with any hard cases today, so that's great. Didn't run into *that* issue either," I said, looking up at him from my chair.

I drank a sip of my canned coffee and let out another sigh. I checked the admin interface but no one seemed to be requesting a GM, which meant I had some time to take it easy. I removed my glasses and adjusted myself into a more comfortable position.

"I see. Still..." he responded. "I don't really know what to do when I'm told someone disappeared while they were playing."

He was right. "*That* issue" referred to some kind of urban legend where, while playing MMOs, people would apparently disappear in an instant without leaving a trace. It was stupid.

"I know, right? They probably just ran away from home. It should be the police's job to look for them, not ours."

I had heard from some of my GM friends at other companies that this issue wasn't exclusive to our game but had reached several other MMOs as well as the few VRMMOs. It was nothing more than gossip, though.

"Ah. I almost forgot. May I take Sunday and Monday off in two weeks?"

"In two weeks, huh? There won't be any events on, so I don't see an issue. Taking a trip somewhere?"

"Yeah. I was invited to an offline gathering with members of my old guild and

I've been hoping to go." The invite came from the leader of the guild I used to be a part of back when I was a regular *Britalia Online* player.

I owed him so much. He was the one who had fostered my appreciation for online games. Back when I first started *Britalia* and didn't understand a thing, he helped me out, showed me the ropes, and taught me how fun it was to fight mobs with a party instead of solo.

After that, he allowed me to join his guild, "Round Table," and assisted me with countless quests and story missions. When new players joined us, I then took on that role, helping them out in turn. I had very fond memories of those days.

I was on friendly terms with pretty much all the members and even organized farewell parties whenever someone decided to leave.

All the fun I had playing *Britalia Online* led me to want to get involved on a deeper level. I decided to study the field, and when I was finally hired as a Game Master, everyone congratulated me warmly.

Even if it meant I would have to give up being a player and part with them.

Becoming a GM meant drawing a strict line between yourself and the rest of the player base.

When I started out at this job, I was about to create a new character to handle my tasks, but my senpai stopped me, telling me how much of a pity it would be to get rid of the character I had played for so long. He talked with the higher-ups on my behalf and, in the end, I was allowed to keep my character as long as I agreed to change my in-game name and appearance. I'm still extremely thankful to be surrounded by such understanding people.

My work included going incognito and mingling with players to gauge their current satisfaction level and hopes for the game, as well as checking the balance of the quests. I also sometimes used a GM-exclusive command to become invisible and patrol areas.

Although I wasn't in a position to enjoy the game with my old guildmates anymore, we stayed friends and I was invited to gatherings from time to time. Naturally, I never broke my NDA. Confidential matters stayed confidential.

Still, they'd told me they needed to ask me about something this time. I wondered what it was about.

"You've barely used any of your days off, so you're good to go. Bring me a souvenir, though!"

Once again, I couldn't help but be thankful for how understanding my senpai was. *Should I bring him some Sweet Potato Shochu?*

"Oh and, Toudou, you haven't eaten yet, right? I'll handle the rest, so go get some food."

Now that he mentioned it, I was feeling hungry. I was so focused on dealing with players that I had totally forgotten to eat... *Damn, I'm starving...*

"Thank you. I'll be off, then."

"Sure. See you."

I casually bowed to my senpai before fixing my glasses and stepping into the dimly lit hallway—to save energy, the lights were on the lowest setting.

What should I have today? Hmm... I'm kinda feeling ramen, I think.

Lost in thought, I started walking toward a nearby ramen place that was open late into the night, and... *What the hell?*

My legs won't move anymore. What's going on?!

I tried to speak, but my voice didn't come out either.

Sleep Paralysis? No, that doesn't make any sense; I would have fallen to the ground already... WAIT WAIT! What the...?! Everything is going dark... I'm gonna pass out... My...ramen...!

With my last thought dedicated to ramen, I lost consciousness.



"He's fine. His skills are..."

"Physical strength is...terrible... Magic...common... No, bad... Terrible results..."

My head felt fuzzy, but I could make out some sounds... Was that my senpai? No. They sounded like a pompous old man...

“Fine”...? I’m the furthest thing from “fine” at the moment! And what the heck does he mean by “terrible physical strength”? I work out regularly to avoid putting on weight. Also, the ground under me is so hard and cold... And I can’t move my damn body...

My sight was blurry, and I couldn’t see much besides the gray floor. Everything was so dark.

I could only barely make out what the voice was saying. “How regrettable... What a disappointment. Just put...slave collar and...doesn’t act up.”

“At once!”

What the hell? A disappointment? ...A SLAVE COLLAR?! Why are they bringing up slaves in this day and age? What year do you all think it is?! It’s not my kink either, so don’t you dare put this thing on me!

I still couldn’t see properly, but I could tell someone was approaching.

Don’t come this way! Damn...! My body still won’t move! Move... Move!!!

I tried to fight back, but my body just stayed limp while the man put the collar on me. That’s when something unexpected suddenly happened.

The collar broke apart...

“What?!”

My eyes had adjusted over time, and I could see that the surprised voices were coming from an old geezer and some bastard wearing a hooded cloak.

I looked around, trying to make out more of my surroundings. There wasn’t a single window, and the only sources of light within the room were candles hanging from a stone wall. Some sort of magic circle had been drawn on the floor.

There didn’t seem to be any way to escape. I could see the exit, but it was guarded.

The old man stood in front of me wearing the same kind of extravagant and

luxurious thick red cape that I had seen many times in games and anime. A crown rested upon his head and he held a scepter, complete with a jewel on top.

“Explain,” commanded the regal figure.

“The collar must have been defective. I’ll bring a spare at once!”

I had almost completely regained my senses by now. They seemed flustered. If I could make my limbs move, then maybe I could... *Damn. Still no good...*

While I tried and failed to get up, the hooded bastard came back with another collar in hand.

He tried to fasten it around my neck once again but... The second collar broke in the same way the first one had.

“Why can’t you enslave him?!”

“I’m afraid I do not know...” replied the hooded man. “He must possess some sort of abnormal ability...”

My hearing had returned to normal, and I tried to focus on their voices.

“An abnormal ability, you say? At any rate, if he can’t be enslaved, he won’t be of any use to us. But it’d be a waste to kill him before we can figure out that power of his. Throw him in a cell for the time being.”

“At once!”

They were talking about some frightening things. It seemed I would be able to escape death for now, but...why did I have to go to jail when I hadn’t done anything wrong? And why were they talking about an “abnormal ability”? *We’re not in a manga or a light novel!*

I was forcefully dragged to my feet, and although I still couldn’t move or utter any words, I glared at the old geezer. He did not seem to appreciate it and slammed his scepter into my skull.

“Argh!” I groaned.

“I’m giving you one week. If you can’t find a way to enslave him within that time, we’ll sacrifice him to summon another otherworldly being. Now get him

out of my sight. And fast!”

My head hurt. The last time I’d been hit, it was when my parents disciplined me as a kid. *It stiiiiiings...* I definitely wasn’t dreaming.

The scepter might have hit me in a bad spot because I felt my consciousness fading. *Why—and how—did things turn out like this?*

When I opened my eyes again, I found myself in another dimly lit room staring at a bunch of iron bars. They looked quite robust. I wasn’t tied up, but I had indeed been thrown in a cell.

If I were in a movie or a game, this would be one of the most exciting moments. Unfortunately, that was in no way the case. *Why the heck am I being treated this way when I haven’t done anything wrong?! What did I do?!*

I sighed. There was no point in getting pissed at the walls. I had to try to understand the situation.

I rubbed the new bump on my head. It seemed like I’d regained the ability to move while unconscious.

“It really hurts... Damn geezer, he really did put all of his strength into that blow...” I whined.

I stood up and looked around.

Stone walls, mold everywhere... Your typical cell.

I tried feeling around the walls, hoping they would just crumble with a push and free me, but neither the walls nor the bars moved one bit.

“The old man said something about an abnormal ability... What was that about?”

I looked down at my hand. There were a few moles, but besides that, it was a regular hand.

I couldn’t make it glow or do anything special. Yeah, it really was a normal hand.

I made use of my one and only point of contact with the outside world, a

barred window, to check out the surroundings. I kind of hoped the bars would fall out when I gripped them, but no dice. I took a glance outside.

The sight was dumbfounding. The scenery was nothing like the one I was used to. No high-rise buildings whatsoever. In fact, everything looked like it had come straight out of a classical fantasy story.

It was like watching a movie. There was even a strange, giant bird flying in the sky... I believe they were called griffins. It landed at the top of a tower and entered some sort of shed.

In the distance, I could see the sea and quite a few boats. They very much looked like the warships used during the Age of Discovery—frigates, they were called. Seeing so many of them at once did leave a strong impression.

Farther away were merchant vessels. But some looked more like pirate ships? *What the hell's going on?*

The scenery was as unreal as it was confusing. I rubbed my eyes when suddenly, I noticed that something was missing. If I wasn't wearing my glasses, then why was my eyesight so good now?

They were on the floor, right where I'd been lying down. I must have dropped them while I was moving about my cell. Luckily, the frame was made out of titanium, so they weren't broken.

"I'm glad that I can see properly, but... What am I supposed to do now?" I asked nobody in particular. "They said they would summon someone new in a week. I need to find a way to escape before that happens or I'll be used as a sacrifice or something... Being sacrificed means killing me, right? It'd be great if I could just figure out where I am first..."

I sat cross-legged on the hard floor and closed my eyes to think.

A particularly familiar-looking window suddenly popped up.



That's the interface window I always use for my GM work! Why's stuff from Britalia Online suddenly appearing? Is this that "abnormal ability" they mentioned? Or maybe I was made to log into a VR game while I was passed out? But that doesn't make any sense. Even if VRMMOs have been getting more realistic, they still can't simulate real pain.

Let's just try it out for now.

I tried to touch the window with my finger, and a bunch of categories appeared before me.

"Map... Equipment... Skills... Magic... Items... And here's the admin interface from my GM account! Invincibility... Stealth... Teleportation..." I gave that last one a tap. "Damn, I can't teleport! I can't log out either."

While the checkboxes on Invincibility and Stealth had been left blank, the Immune Status skill was ticked. Were they unable to use the collar because of this?

I didn't understand what was going on, but if this effect was activated, then maybe I could find a way out of this impossible situation.

The GM settings were not like those of regular players.

First of all, the way skills worked was completely different. GMs could use any of them. The system I was used to allowed ten skill slots, and it seemed to be the same here in this world. If I entered passive or active skills, I should be able to use them. Probably.

The second difference was magic. GMs were also supposed to be able to use any kind of magic but...for some reason, I couldn't at the moment. Every spell was grayed out, and I couldn't activate any of them. It didn't seem to be because I didn't have enough MP or anything, since I couldn't use beginner spells either.

Assuming I was inside a game, the most likely explanation was that this prison was an antimagic area. I decided to give up on spells for now and practice a little patience. Once I found a way out of this place, I could fulfill my dream of blasting cool spells all over the place as much as I liked.

Next, I focused my attention on the “Equipment” window. Thankfully, all the gear and items I had farmed back when I was a regular player were still in my inventory. I spotted the mithril sword I’d gotten from a monster drop and as soon as I thought about taking it out...it appeared out of thin air?!

I panicked and caught the sword before it hit the ground. That was close... If I made too much noise, the guards would surely come to check on me. I didn’t expect the sword to come out without having to actually click the window.

I observed the mithril sword in my hands and cold sweat ran down my back. I did have a fake sword at home, but the real deal was so much cooler! It felt incredible to hold.

I tried to swing it around. It might have been because the passive skill Close-Combat Mastery (High) was activated, but I was able to handle the blade effortlessly.

I usually wasn’t even able to swing my fake sword like this. *It’s kinda exhilarating!*

This would probably have been even more fun if I weren’t locked inside a cell.

I tried thinking about putting the mithril sword back into my inventory and it disappeared immediately. I wondered if it’d work with any of my belongings. I concentrated on the pair of glasses I had dropped on the floor earlier. They disappeared as well—they were now inside my item box.

Titanium alloy glasses: Excellent pair of glasses. Sturdy, light, noncorrosive, and heat resistant. The method of fabrication is unknown.

Rarity: R

Items were classified by rarity in the following order: C (Common), UC (Uncommon), R (Rare), HR (High Rare), UR (Ultra Rare), and SR (Secret Rare).

A simple pair of glasses was already a Rare item... The system seemed to value them quite a lot.

Actually, it wasn't all that surprising. Titanium was an unknown alloy in the game.

Next, I tried to store the bucket—to be used as a toilet—that had been left in a corner of the room. It didn't work.

I wasn't sure I understood all the rules yet, but it probably didn't work because it was not one of my belongings and— Ah! I suddenly heard footsteps closing in.

Is that one of the guards patrolling? Time to pretend I'm still out cold.

"Nothing out of the ordinary, huh...? Hey! You! Wake up! It's mealtime," the guard yelled, banging on the iron bars with his rod.

I sat up suddenly, pretending the noise had woken me.

"Wh...? Where am I?" I asked.

"You're in the prison of the Granfang Empire. Now eat."

He passed some food through a small opening. I had been given a piece of dark bread and a bowl of soup with vegetable scraps floating in it. The guard did not wait for me to eat and left as quickly as he had come.

I should take note of the time.

It was displayed on the admin screen, so I took a piece of paper and a pen out of my inventory and wrote it down.

The Granfang Empire... I'd never heard such a name in *Britalia*... *I should just eat. I'm too hungry.*

"Let's dig in... Damn, it's so hard!"

The bread was stale and the soup tasted of little more than salt... A far cry from the ramen I had been looking forward to earlier. As the sun set outside, I just ate and kept waiting all alone in my cell.

"Mornin'..." I yawned.

A thin ray of light entered through the barred window and roused me from my slumber.

I hadn't thought I'd ever manage to get to sleep on the uncomfortable hard stone floor of my cell, and I'd had no urge to use the dirty blanket they'd provided, so I used a sheep pelt from my inventory as a futon and my jacket as a blanket. The pelt may have been a bit stinky, but it was soft and far more comfortable than the horrendous blanket. Thanks to my new bedding, I was finally able to get some sleep.

In spite of my makeshift bedding, my body hurt and I felt stiff all over. I had not activated Invincibility—I reckoned that if the guards had decided to beat me while I slept, it would've given away my cheat skill. But still, I kind of wondered if it could have prevented soreness from a bad night of sleep.

GM-exclusive skill: Invincibility.

As the name suggests, activating this skill allows the user to become invincible. No damage can be dealt to the user.

Surprisingly enough, this skill wasn't a thing when the game first went live. I'd heard from my senpai that, once, a GM went to help a player stuck in a wall and got killed because he got caught up in a boss monster's AOE attack. The staff then decided to add the skill to make sure it didn't happen again.

Honestly, I had no idea whether that story was true or not.

"If the people here find out about that skill, I don't think I'll have a happily ever after."

Anyway, that was why—in spite of my body aching all over—I had decided not to turn on the Invincibility skill for the time being. If my life was threatened, I'd have no choice, but I should be okay for a while longer. The king had ordered for me to be kept alive, and going against his orders was probably a death sentence.

I had found an interesting skill after dinner yesterday, so I wanted to give it a try. I had plenty of items and equipment, but I was missing one thing before I could activate it.

“Not having any food in my storage sucks...”

I had gotten hungry during the night, but I couldn't find anything edible in my inventory. Last time I'd fought mobs, I'd gone through all of my consumables. I usually walked around with curry or meat dishes, but the rest of my stock was in my Room's storage.

It wasn't good to lie down the whole time, so I decided to get up and do some exercise. My stomach was growling, but I still needed to move my body a little.

I was working out alone in my cell, stretching and doing push-ups, when I heard footsteps.

“Hey, time to ea— You! What the hell are you doing?!”

“My daily routine. If I don't do it, I'll put on weight easily.”

“Damn, my belly's been getting worse and worse too... D'ya have any tips?”

“You should try waking up a little earlier and going for a walk. Even a short one is enough. Try to do half an hour. That's usually enough to lose quite a bit of weight.”

“I see. Might try that. Anyway, here's some grub.”

So breakfast is served around this time, huh? I need to remember that.

I finished up my training and set the food in front of me, joining my hands together.

“Time to dig in,” I said.

But before that, I had something to do. I opened the map and put a mark on the guard.

Putting a mark on him allowed me to see his movements reflected onto the map. I'd know exactly where he was at all times. The guards were wearing iron masks and I couldn't see their faces, but I was pretty sure this guy wasn't the same as the one I had seen the previous day.

I zoomed the map out and was able to see the layout of the whole castle. This was another trick I'd noticed overnight.

A GM's map was also different from a player's. Players could only see places

they had visited before, but GMs were automatically able to access the full map. We could also check out the locations of everyone around us.

I drank a sip of water and, after seeing that the guard was on standby—not moving from a specific room—I decided to test my skill.

This was a Production Skill called Upgrade. It was an advanced skill that allowed the user to upgrade an item's quality. While it could only be used once per item, it made for a tremendous improvement.

The soup was classified as a meal item, so I planned to use another skill on it. As for the bread, I applied Upgrade and a faint light surrounded it. The light dimmed down and what was left was a familiar slice of white bread.

White bread: A soft bread right out of the oven. Its sweet aroma will awaken your appetite.

“Whoa... It worked.” Even if magic spells didn't work here, I could still use my skills.

Next up was the soup. I decided to use another Production Skill, the cooking ability, King of Flavor (Secret Technique).

The name might make you think some old chef would appear ready to blast a laser beam from his mouth, but it didn't quite work like that. It just allowed players to greatly upgrade a meal item of lower quality.

Once upon a time, I thought it an utterly useless skill, but it ended up having an unforeseen use. I activated “King of Flavor” on the salty vegetable soup and it turned into a golden-colored liquid.

Golden consommé broth: A broth made from simmering chicken, beef, fish, and plenty of vegetables. Chunks of vegetables add a little texture.

All right, good to go. The smell may reach the guards, so I'd better eat it fast.

My right-out-of-the-oven white bread was so soft and chewy that it was hard to imagine it used to be some stale dark bread.

The soup was also... *Aaah, how warm. Tasty. If only I had thought up this method earlier, I could have had a nice dinner yesterday too... Well, no point in having regrets. I should just focus on enjoying my new meal!*

I finished it all up in a matter of minutes. I did try to hurry so that I wouldn't be caught, but I'd also been famished since last night.

Luckily, my skill hadn't transformed the bowl. I would have been in quite the pickle if it had. At the very least, my meals wouldn't be so terrible—even in jail.

I hadn't been able to pay much attention to my surroundings yesterday but, now that I thought about it, there was another cell next to mine. I was wondering whether the person next door had been able to smell my food. I tried calling out to them, but I didn't get an answer. It must have been empty.

Great! Then I can use my skills as much as I want.

Once I'd finished eating, I decided to take a look at the...imperial capital? It was probably okay to call it that, right? After all, I was in an empire. Anyway, that aside, the scenery was full of life.

I hadn't been able to see it all that clearly since it was already quite late yesterday, but the area in which I had spotted frigates seemed to be a military port. The merchant ships were all rather far from it.

Yesterday, there had been around a dozen frigates, but today, there were over a hundred. It seemed the capital was surrounded by the sea.

I assumed they were coming back after fighting in a battle somewhere as they were transporting hundreds of prisoners of war. All had their hands tied tightly with ropes and, after a few more moments of observation, I noticed that, among the regular humans, there were also wolfmen as well as girls with dog or bunny ears. *It was outrageous.*

Watching so many prisoners being dragged around made me feel sick to my stomach. *I should stop looking at them. Might as well sit down and think about my own situation.*

I had just confirmed that Beast People existed in this world. *I mean...cat ears and bunny ears are a pretty good choice... Hang on! I don't have time to waste joking around.*

“So the Empire seems to be at war, huh? Considering the sheer number of prisoners they caught, they must be fighting a fairly big country. They said they intended to sacrifice me and summon another otherworldly being. And there was also talk of some abnormal ability... I'm guessing these abilities must refer to gamelike powers like the ones I have.”

If they end up putting these prisoners of war in the cell next to mine, I might be able to learn more about what's going on.

I still knew too little about this world to make a move. I decided to wait until the last minute. *If worse comes to worst... Well, that's a problem for future me.*

I waited for someone to be thrown into the cell next to mine but...nothing happened. I wanted someone to talk to. *Turns out being alone really sucks...*

I spent my second day in this new world grappling with loneliness.

The same guard as yesterday night—he seemed to be on night duty—came in the evening to bring me dinner. After putting a mark on him too, I used my skills on the stale bread and soup once again. This time, I ended up with multigrain bread and chicken broth. I didn't quite get how the skills worked.

Night fell and it suddenly became noisy outside. I sneakily took a peek from between the bars of the windows and noticed the guards happily chatting. They seemed to have made quite a profit thanks to the ongoing war. I was a bit shocked that they could celebrate the money they earned from killing or enslaving people so much, but, in the end, I assumed that was how most wars looked.

My home world had been peaceful for decades, so even if I understood the concept of war, I had never experienced it myself.

Nonetheless, I had heard plenty of horrible stories about the wars of the past, even in my world.

Either way, I didn't really have the headspace to worry about their conflicts all

that much. I fell asleep, exhausted, to the sound of their cheering.

I was woken by the guard calling out to me.

“I got up earlier today and the morning air was so refreshing. I feel great now. Here’s your food, by the way.”

“Well, the more people start walking around, the most dust and stuff you get flying everywhere.”

I enjoyed the few moments of conversation I could get and—as soon as the guard left—I activated my skills. I enjoyed some white bread and another upgraded version of my vegetable soup.

The original shitty broth that barely tasted of anything and the flavorful vegetable soup I had today were as different as night and day.

After finishing my meal, I perused through my GM interface to figure out what skills and items I could make use of to get out of here, when suddenly, I heard several people approaching.

I immediately crammed all the items I had taken out back into my inventory and spread some dirt from the walls onto my face and body to avoid appearing too healthy. Might as well make use of every diversion tactic I could.

The guard on night duty had commented on my healthy complexion yesterday, so I had to be careful. Thankfully, it had been dark, so he’d put it down to his imagination acting up, but it was too bright now. I had to do everything I could to avoid suspicion.

“Hey! I’m going to open the door now, but don’t try anything funny. You’re dead if I catch you acting up.”

I nodded meekly in response to the oppressive command and looked on as the door was unlocked, creaking incessantly as it slowly opened. I tried to make it seem like I had no energy to resist anyway and looked at the soldier who had just come in with a hollow expression on my face.

He wore lavish armor, unlike the guards I usually saw. I was also impressed by his cool sword, but I was afraid I’d get beaten up again if I stared too much. I

still hadn't activated Invincibility, so I hoped to avoid getting hit as much as possible.

The soldier took a brand-new collar from the hands of the robed guy standing behind him and tried to put it on me.

Oh my, a new collar... And... CRACK! It broke apart immediately.

The soldier clicked his tongue. "This one doesn't work either! Are you even trying?!"

"Of course! I assure you I am trying my hardest to produce an effective collar. Perhaps the quality of the material wasn't good enough..."

I don't quite think that's the issue, buddy. I had no intention of letting him know, though. The soldier looked at me like I was trash and slammed my body against the wall before stepping out of the cell.

"Argh...!" I whined.

"Why do I have to do this kind of shit work?! That guy's useless. I should just finish him off and forget about it!" yelled the soldier from outside.

"Well... Such a thing has never happened before and...His Majesty ordered us not to kill him yet. Without you present, I may not be able to handle him if he suddenly lashes out, so..."

"All the more reason for you to hurry up and find a way to enslave him! Did you hear me?! Hurry up!" the soldier kept screaming at the robed man.

I guess workplace bullying is a thing everywhere, huh?

I kinda felt bad for these guys, trying so hard to achieve something impossible.

Slouched against the wall from the force of the impact, I stayed put and waited for the men to leave. Naturally, I marked them both on my map. I was especially curious about the soldier, so I decided to change the color of the mark to more easily differentiate him from the others.

Once I was done, I opened my menu, activated the passive skill HP & MP

Recovery, and waited for my stamina to recover.

“Damn... He really didn’t hold back. Still, even in broad daylight, they didn’t notice I was doing fine.”

My diversion seemed to have paid off. I had been using my skills pretty casually because I was done with the terrible food here, but I didn’t expect it could end up working against me.

To be honest, I also wanted to take a bath. If only I could use my magic spells, then I’d be able to access my Room...

There was plenty of furniture inside my in-game Room, including a sofa and a bathtub. Since I was able to access it from the game, I assumed I should also be able to access it from this world too. This being said, if I suddenly became clean, it would be extremely suspicious.

I wiped the dirt off my face with my sleeve and, in the process, noticed the collar had been left on the floor. It had been neatly torn off and couldn’t be closed anymore, but the material appeared to be quite sturdy.

Maybe I could use it as a fake if I managed to stitch it up a little. I decided to keep it just in case.

Torn collar: An enchantment had been cast on this collar but it was torn off due to a high magic resistance. The enchantment has been canceled and it cannot be used any longer.

Rarity: C-

So this thing also has a rarity rank, huh? Bread and soup didn’t. It most likely has a minus mark because it’s broken.

I stored the necklace and used a GM-exclusive command I hadn’t activated until now: Stealth.

I concentrated on activating the skill and my body became semitransparent.

It worked!

GM-exclusive skill: Stealth.

Allows the user to hide themselves. Can be used for reconnaissance missions.

It was the skill I used the most as a GM. It was not possible to sense the presence of someone using this skill, nor was it possible to smell, feel, or hear them in any way or shape. Not even Snake could come close, and I didn't even need to use a cardboard box.

I tried to feel the walls and the bars once again, but I didn't manage to find a way to slip out.

I gave up and was on the verge of turning off my skill when I noticed a little thing moving in the corner of my cell.

SQUEAK! SQUEAK!

A rat, huh? This place was the furthest thing from clean, so seeing a rat wasn't so strange, and... Hang on!

I had an idea. Could I share my Stealth ability with the rat?

The fact that it showed up right after I activated the skill probably meant that it had been hiding from me. Right now, it couldn't feel my presence.

I took a few steps in its direction, but it didn't move one bit. I really did not exist as far as it was concerned. I slowly extended my hand toward it and picked the rat up. As soon as I touched it, my skill disabled itself.

Attacking or interacting with something automatically canceled the skill. I moved my focus away from the rat, which was now struggling in my hand, and activated Stealth once more. This time, the rat became semitransparent along with me.

I tried to jump. Even after landing back on my feet, Stealth hadn't ended. I then pushed the rat out of the cell.

The Stealth effect on the rat disabled and it looked a bit confused for a few moments, looking around as though it didn't quite understand what had just

happened, before running away.

“Stealth is going to be pretty useful. It seems like I can share my power with anything I hold, but I’m not sure it’d work on bigger things.”

A vehicle driving around while being invisible would be so scary! I guess I’d be the one scaring people off though, so whatever.

“Today’s the third day... It means I still have four days left...”

I should pick out the active and passive skills I’ll be needing to make my escape.

I still had a lot of time, but I decided it was probably better to plan and think things through well in advance. After all, why put off until tomorrow what you can do today?

Passive skills: Speed Boost, Physical Reinforcement (Extra High), Close-Combat Mastery (High), Sneak Boost (High), MP Recovery (Medium), HP & MP Recovery (Medium).

Active skills: Silent Blow, Swift Wind, Oversword, Time Bomb.

I ended up with these ten skills. It was a bit of a pity that I only had access to the medium version of HP & MP Recovery. The next tier was supposed to be implemented in the next update, but there was no point complaining about things I couldn’t do anything about.

I had put a big focus on speed and discretion. *I’m basically a ninja at this point.*

As its name suggested, Time Bomb basically produced an explosion. This being said, it wasn’t your regular bomb; it was a monster that could be summoned and then would blow up. You could use them to confuse the enemy or divert their attention, and it was possible to set up several bombs as long as you had enough MP. All in all, an extremely versatile and useful skill.

As someone who held GM-exclusive privileges, I had plenty of means to

regain my MP.

Silent Blow was a barehanded attack that dealt damage regardless of the opponent's armor. It didn't make any noise whatsoever, so it was pretty good at taking down enemies without being noticed.

Swift Wind was an active skill that boosted movement speed even more. It was often used by players trying to speedrun quests.

As for Oversword, the skill's name was technically Hadouken—reminiscent of a certain energy-punch technique despite its Japanese kanji reading referring to a blade—but was read in English as Oversword. An aura surrounded the sword, extending its range and increasing its attack power. It was an active skill right out of the Knight class's skill tree. To be fair, a lot of people also used it because it looked freaking cool. I was guilty of that too.

I was having a little staring contest with my interface as I picked out my skills when I heard footsteps. I checked and noticed it was time for dinner.

"Don't move. It's mealtime."

As always, this guard wasn't very friendly. He usually went back immediately after handing me my food, but today, he stayed put and stared at me in silence.

"What is it?" I finally asked after a while had passed.

If he kept staring, then I couldn't use my skills. And if I couldn't use my skills, then I couldn't eat!

"It's in two days."

"What?"

What was supposed to happen in two days?

"If they can't figure out how to enslave you in those two days, then you'll be executed. Pray as hard as you can for the collar to finally stay on your neck."

What the heck?! Why did it get moved up so close? I'm supposed to have four more days!!!

The night guard didn't seem to care about my shocked expression, and left after informing me of my fate.

Tonight, my dinner consisted of a sandwich filled with pickled radish and a Japanese-style vegetable soup.

How does the system make these decisions?! These don't even go together!

Shit! Shit! Shit!

I thought I still had plenty of time, but I ended up being too careless!!!

I asked the guard about it the following morning and learned something unbelievable. There were only five days in a week in this world!

After he'd dropped that bomb on me the previous night, I had barely been able to sleep a wink and felt dead tired. However, I didn't have time to worry about that.

"This sucks... It should have been obvious... I'm in a different world! Why did I just assume a week would last the same amount of time?!"

Even my irritation couldn't make me forget my hunger. I used my skill and the meal turned into a loaf of white bread and a consommé broth.

With my stomach filled, I calmed down somewhat.

"Luckily, I've already picked out my skills... But still, I should have tried to gather some more information from the morning guard... Even if it made me seem suspicious."

The morning guard had already moved to a different floor and seemed to be doing his round. On the other hand, the guy who came at night never moved from a specific spot. I assumed it was the position of the break room. As for the soldier and the robed man, they were quite far away. Not that I wanted to see them.

I looked out the window, hoping to get at least a little piece of information. As always, I could see plenty of warships. Farther away were the merchant vessels. *Considering their size, they should be...caravels? There are quite a few too.*

I was on the verge of giving up—it didn't look like I would be able to learn anything new by staring at the horizon—but my eyes stopped on a middle-aged man surrounded by soldiers. He had a rough appearance—one you would expect from a pirate—and was badly injured. *I guess the soldiers ganged up on*

him after they arrested him.

I was still using Sneak Boost so no one should be able to notice my gaze. That being said, I was so far away that I doubted anyone would have picked up on it in the first place.

Either way, I stopped watching them and focused on planning out my escape. I already had a few ideas, but it couldn't hurt to have as many backup plans as possible.

If I put my mind to it, I could probably cut through the iron bars. It was bound to make a lot of noise, though. And even if I managed to escape the prison, running around this unknown place with no clue where to go was too dangerous. *I really need more information.*

I didn't have anything I could use to pick locks.

If I don't have the tools, I can just make them, I thought as I looked inside my inventory. But I only had recovery items such as High Potions and High Elixirs, and I didn't have any useful monster drops—just stuff like horns, feathers, and pelts.

I usually kept most materials in my Room's storage so I wasn't too surprised. Still, I would have killed for iron or bronze ingots—anything that I could turn into a key.

If only I could use magic!

I kept looking, hoping to find at least one useful item, and something finally caught my attention.

Titanium alloy glasses

The only item I had on my person when I woke up. Somehow my wallet, keys, and cellphone had disappeared—most likely stolen by someone—and I had been left with nothing but my glasses.

If I take them apart, I might be able to make some useful tools, I thought.

There was a Metalworking skill in the game. If I made use of it, I would be able

to make lock-picking tools from scratch with my bare hands, but I needed some thin metal wire to use as material. While the frame of my glasses was thin enough to replace the wires, my only issue was that it was made out of titanium alloy.

If my plan went well, it would become much easier to escape. If it didn't...well, my glasses would have been turned into useless metal scrap for no reason.

I didn't really care all that much about the cost, but I'd been using them for so long that they had emotional value.

After pondering about it for a while, I decided to take them apart with my skill.

Nothing is as important as my life...

I was left with the lenses and the titanium alloy frame neatly separated. I put the lenses in my inventory and then activated Metalworking. I pressed "lock-picking tool" on the window that popped up and prayed. I always hoped for the best when transforming my bread and soup, but this time I prayed with all my heart.

Please, please, please...

The frame shone in my hand. I was holding it so tightly that it took me quite some time to notice the light had dimmed down.

My heart hammered in my chest as I slowly relaxed my fingers...

Pick of the Bandit King: A pick made from a mysterious alloy. Robust, heat resistant, and easy to bend—it's the perfect lock-picking tool. It will work on almost every lock.

Rarity: SR

Yes!!!

It fit in my hand as though it belonged there. I had barely raised my Thief job

level, but I still felt like no lock could resist me.

I checked that none of the guards were on this floor before looping my arm around the iron bars and inserting the pick inside the lock of my cell.

Thanks to the knight's visit, I knew that unlocking it would make some noise. I carefully moved the pick around and I felt it bend on its own. I might have just imagined it. I took my time and slowly...slowly...slooowly turned the pick inside the lock.

Ker-chack.

It wasn't as loud as I thought it would be. Still, when I pushed the door, it silently opened. *YES! It worked! All right, time to put everything back in place.*

I couldn't leave just like that. I tried to control my joy and hastily closed the door before locking it. I took a look at the pick. A smile plastered on my face—it was now shaped like a key.

What the...? That's so cool.

While I was busy admiring my Pick of the Bandit King, I noticed that the three marks I had put on my map to represent the guards and the soldier were moving, clearly headed to this floor. I immediately stored my new item in my inventory and let myself slouch against the wall.

Along with the sound of footsteps on the stone paving, I heard a strange noise. It sounded like they were dragging something along.

They came to a halt in front of the cell next to mine and I heard a loud thud.

"For a lowly pirate, you sure have guts! Letting yourself get caught so your crewmates could escape... It's no use, though. They'll be caught before long, and I'll be more than happy to bring you their severed heads."

I recognized the voice of the pompous soldier. He sounded as annoying as usual.

He moved a few steps, turning his attention toward my cell. "The new collar will be completed by tomorrow. If it doesn't work, your head will roll. Either way, I'm glad I won't have to see your disgusting face anymore. One less fucking otherworlder."

If you guys hate people from other worlds so much, then don't summon them!

While the night guard didn't seem to care much, the morning shift guy looked at me with an apologetic look on his face.

I closed my eyes, trying to appear as depressed and pitiful as possible, and the soldier chuckled before walking away with the guards.

Before he left, I'd opened my eyes slightly to take a look at his smug expression. *Disgusting. And he probably thinks he's all that. Dude, even the two guards seemed to think you were ridiculous.*

If the collar didn't work on me, then tomorrow would be the date of my execution... I had to make a move fast. I still didn't know where to go, though. I didn't know anything about this country and had no money or allies.

Even if I kept using Stealth and Invincibility, it would be tough to escape without knowing anything or having anyone to ask for help. If I picked a direction at random, I could very well end up in another place fully under the empire's control.

I heard whines coming from the cell next to mine. They seemed to have done a number on the poor guy.

"Hey, are you okay?" I asked.

I was stressed, but I had to take the opportunity to start a conversation with my long-awaited neighbor.

"How could I be?!" a mature-sounding voice answered. "Arrrr! I hope me crew managed to get away..."

It sounded almost like a prayer. I had heard an important piece of information earlier when the soldier spoke to him.

"Hey, old man! You're a pirate, right?"

"What in Davy Jones's locker do ye want? So what if I be?"

A pirate means...A SHIP! I can use this guy!!!

I took something out of my inventory. It was a thin tube—it looked pretty much the same as a test tube—filled with a light-blue liquid.

High Potion: A superior potion. Heals a large amount of HP. Its effect is strong enough to regenerate severed limbs.

“Don’t ask questions, and drink this,” I said, letting it roll inside his cell through the gap between the bars. “It’s a potion.”

“What?”

“Just drink it! No one’s watching us at this hour.”

“A-All right. Ye... SHIVER ME TIMBERS?! Me finger be back?!”

He seemed to have drunk it all and was shocked by the results.

Old man... You shouldn’t trust people so easily... What were you gonna do if I had offered you poison instead?

“I be feeling much better, thanks. How did ye even get ye hands on that kinda booty from the brig?! That be a High Potion, right?! Even veteran adventurers struggle to get their mitts on them!”

“I just have it for...reasons. Anyway, now that you’re all fixed, there are some things I wanna ask you.”

“Ask away. Ye saved me, and I won’t be forgetting me debt. If there’s anything I can be doing for ye, say it.”

What a responsible guy. I was a bit hesitant since he’s a pirate, but I’ll put my trust in him for now.

“Do you know of any country that has a bad relationship with this empire?”

“Too many to count. Most of the countries along the southern coastline have already been thrashed, though. Don’t really know how things are farther south, but I hear the empire’s currently attacking a port city right across the mountain range. They also be fighting the Sentdrag Kingdom up north.”

So they were fighting on two fronts at the same time. They were probably using all the war prisoners I had seen to man their frigates and attack from the sea. With so many prisoners at their disposal, they could just use them until they dropped and then replace them.

I'd also seen griffin-like monsters, so I assumed aerial warfare was also an option.

"Next question. Are your crewmates and your ship safe?" I asked.

"For now. I acted as a decoy so that me crew could scurry to our hideout. I guess it be only a matter of time until they get found too. They'll most likely only be able to run from the warships for another two or three days at most..."

"Should be doable then..."

"What be doable?"

He sounded confused. I couldn't see his face, but I was sure he looked equally lost, wondering what stupid thing I was going to say next.

"Old man," I called.

"What? More questions?"

"Any interest in getting out of here?"

I had finally made up my mind. Now was the time to escape. If I didn't take this chance, my fellow inmate and his crew would die a miserable death, and I would be in a pretty bad situation myself. I could probably make a run for it by using Invincibility and Stealth, but since I had no clue where the borders of this damn country were, I needed his help.

"I mean, if I could get out, I would, but there be no way we—"

"We can," I interrupted him.

"What?!"

"I'll make sure you get back to your ship and to your men safely. In exchange, help me out. Please!"

I took the Pick of the Bandit King out of my inventory but held off on opening the cells. If I intended to bring him with me when I escaped, I needed to reorganize my skills. I removed Oversword and replaced it with a passive skill called Heightened Senses (High). Immediately, countless marks appeared on my map, showing me everything around me—not just people. I even noticed a few eagles and dogs on my map.

I'd best be careful not to run into wild animals.

"If I stay here, me hearties and I will die no matter what... All right. I'm sold!" He agreed before asking his questions. "How are we supposed to open our cells, though? Do ye have an escape plan?"

"Explaining everything would be too complicated... To put it in a nutshell, I'll be using what the people here called an 'abnormal ability,'" I replied.

I used the Pick of the Bandit King to open the door as quietly as possible. It was best to avoid making a racket at this stage. This floor wasn't heavily guarded, but we'd still need to pass the guardroom on our way if we wanted to make it outside.

On top of that, there were quite a few soldier marks on the floor below us. That bastard from earlier also seemed to be there.

"Hey. Good to finally see your face. I'll use that to open your cell, hang on," I said.

"How did ye even manage to get ye hands on this thing without the guards being awares?!"

"Trade secret," I joked before telling him that an explanation would take too much time.

I inserted the pick inside the lock as carefully as I could before pushing the door open. It creaked, the sound filling the hallway. For a second, I freaked out. Thankfully, it didn't seem like the guards were moving.

"Ye lock pick be amazing... I hear these cells be protected by some sort of barrier that prevents magic use."

"So that's why I couldn't get any of the spells to work..."

As expected, the issue lay with the place I was in, not with me. *I should think of ways to prevent that from happening again once I'm in a safe place.*

"What be our next step?" asked the pirate.

"Get on my back, old man. I'll use my powers."

"Ye sure ye won't topple down if I try to climb on ye back, lad? Ye look so

frail.”

“Of course not! I work out. And by the way, you should try it too. If you don’t at least get rid of all that belly fat, you won’t be popular with the ladies,” I shot back.

“Ye scurvy dog!” he snapped. “Ye sure know how to hit where it hurts, eh? Aye, aye. I got it. I be following ye orders for now,” he continued, before climbing on my back.

I had considered holding hands with him the whole time but it reminded me too much of that old game where you had to keep holding a girl’s hand as you explored. Doing it with another dude would leave too much of a mental scar on my psyche. All in all, carrying him was a much better option.

Thanks to Physical Reinforcement and Close-Combat Mastery, I had no trouble lifting him. I had already tried out my passive skills to see how they affected my movements while I was stuck in my cell. I had been surprised by how fast I could move and how high I could jump. I even jumped so high that I slammed my head into the ceiling—I would’ve died if not for Invincibility. Either way, I had already gotten used to my new physical condition while doing my daily exercise, and I could move without any issues now.

Had I been holding hands with the pirate, I would also have worried about dragging him along too forcefully due to my speed and strength. Now that I had seen for myself the kind of powers MMO characters could muster, I understood why they were able to slay dragons.

All right, let’s stop thinking about random stuff.

I used Stealth and we both became transparent—no one would be able to sense our presence or hear us anymore. To our own eyes, though, we only seemed to be semitransparent.

“Off we go,” I said. We could still speak to each other, but nobody else would hear. “Hold on tight so you don’t fall off.”

“We really be transparent, eh? It’s not just in me head, right? I mean...I be hearing rumors, but it be me first time seeing something like that in real life. We gonna be okay?”

“We are. No one can notice us while my ability is active. By the way, I’d love to hear about those ‘rumors’ later. For now...let’s go!”

I decided to activate Invincibility as well, just in case Stealth got disabled for whatever reason. Neither the emperor nor even a dragon would be able to do anything to us.

My passive skills allowed me to dash at an incredible speed. I could probably run on the walls if I tried... *Nah, that could hurt the old man.*

“ARRRRRRRRR!!!” he screamed. “Fast! Too fast!!!”

“I’m not slowing down,” I answered simply. “But please try not to puke on my back.”

“Don’t underestimate a pira— Arrr! TOO FAST!”

I hadn’t noticed when I had first been brought here since I was unconscious, but this prison was rather narrow.

I followed right along my planned escape route using my map. There was a guardroom right at the entrance, but since we were concealed by Stealth, it didn’t mean anything to us. I went through the door and no one batted an eye.

“Blimey!” the old man exclaimed. “They really didn’t notice a thing!”

“I’m gonna jump, so keep your mouth closed. Don’t bite your tongue,” I warned.

“What...? ARRRRRRRRR!!!”

I could see a tall wall from the balcony of the guard room. I activated Swift Wind and...I jumped with all of my power!

I figured that with my current speed and physical prowess, I could reach the top of the wall, but I unexpectedly went right over it!

I somehow had easily hurdled an eight-meter wall, and we were now free-falling toward the city.

“We’re gonna die! We be heading straight for Davy Jones’s locker!!!” the old man yelled into my ear.

So noisy. Well, I guess I’ll be fine since I’m protected by Invincibility, but it may

end up being a bit dangerous for him.

I opened the interface window midair and conjured a spell from my list. Since we were out of the barrier's range, I was finally able to use them.

I immediately used a spell called Wing. It allowed the user to fly in exchange for a large amount of MP.

As long as I still had MP left, we wouldn't fall.

It was mainly used to reach high places, but it wasn't like you could reach high altitudes and attack from the air like an aircraft. After all, there was always a large risk of exhausting your MP after one large-scale magic attack. Falling to the ground after that meant certain death.

I once heard a funny story about a group of players messing around with that skill and all falling down to their deaths at once. Wing burned through so much MP that even I could only barely recover it at a suitable rate with all of my MP Recovery skills.

Being able to fly nonstop was too broken an ability, so regular mages were only able to use lower-level MP Recovery skills to prevent that from happening. But since we were Game Masters, it didn't matter if we were too strong or flew around.

It seemed that Wing was considered an enhancement ability, not an attack, so it hadn't disabled Stealth's effects. It may be the case that it would only be disabled if I actually attacked something, regardless of the skill I activated. Either way, it worked out in our favor, and I decided to immediately head toward the pirates' hideout.

"We be flyin'?!"

"Yeah, I used a magic spell."

"Ye can even use this kind of spell?!"

"Can you tell me where your hideout is?" I asked.

"A-Aye. It be this way," he said pointing in a direction. "There be a cave hidden in this forest."

"Got it. I'm gonna speed up again, so hang on tight. If you fall, you're dead

meat,” I warned.

“Like hell I would let go of ye so high up!!!”

Makes sense, I thought to myself.

I checked my map regularly to make sure, but it seemed like the griffins hadn’t noticed us either. I’d assumed that both magic users and magical beings might be able to spot us, but it appeared Stealth stopped that as well.

I continued my way toward the pirates’ hideout, feeling on the top of the world after having used magic for the first time.

With my pirate buddy still safely on my back, I reached the forest and opened my map once again. The lay of the forest was incredibly intricate. *A good hiding spot, indeed.*

It wasn’t all that far away from the imperial capital, though. There was also a road rather close by, so we might have a shot of going unnoticed if we prepared some fake goods and pretended to be merchants.

I focused on my map and spotted eight people standing in an area close to the sea at the edge of the forest. *Must be these guys.* A large bat-shaped mark was also moving about in the cave. I assumed it was a monster.

I let the old man off my back and he immediately collapsed. I also disabled Stealth as, if I hadn’t, he wouldn’t have been able to see me anymore.

“Sorry...me strength be sapped.”

“Are you okay?”

“Do ye really think anyone would be shipshape after going through that?!”

He had a point. I had been running around at the speed of a car before jumping over an eight-meter-tall wall and flying through the sky. I might have reacted the same way if I was in his place.

He took a few minutes to calm himself and regain control over his legs. We didn’t have to worry about the guards coming after us, so it didn’t really matter. We had escaped so swiftly that I wasn’t even sure they had noticed we were missing yet. We still had two hours until one of the guards would bring us food,

see the empty cells, and alert everyone.

“Phew...” he sighed. “Follow me, I’ll lead you to our hideout. Now that I think about it, I still haven’t heard ye name. I be Barbarossa, by the way.”

“My name is Toudou Masaki. Toudou’s my family name, so you can just call me Masaki,” I offered.

“Masaki, huh? Ye be me sa... No, I should say *our* savior. I’ll help ye out however I can.”

“Thanks. Just to be clear, though. Don’t expect me to make your whole ship transparent, all right? I still have no clue how effective my powers are.”

“No worries,” said Barbarossa. “Let’s go. It be this way.”

We arrived in front of the cave, and Barbarossa moved a large boulder, revealing some sort of switch. He pressed on it with his foot, and part of the stone wall rotated with a loud noise.

I zoomed in on my map to try and find out what kind of system it was, and I noticed a passage. The switch and the door hidden within the stone wall couldn’t be seen, though.

Barbarossa led the way. It seemed we wouldn’t run into any monsters here.

Was this built so that the only way to avoid monsters was by going through this specific path?

While we walked, I thought of what to do next, but Barbarossa suddenly interrupted my thoughts.

“So, Mister Masaki, how come ye don’t work for the empire when ye have all these useful powers? It might be a bit strange coming from me, but ye could probably become a general.”

“Oh, that? Well...”

I told him my story from when I was summoned—how they had tried to force a slave collar on me and how they’d thrown me into a cell when it didn’t work.

“I would never serve their country. They forced me to come here against my will and tried to enslave me,” I finally added.

“I get ye,” he agreed. “So ye be an otherworlder, eh? To be frank, me crew and I were fighting alongside the empire’s forces, but they used and betrayed us and... Well, ye know how that ended. There aren’t many pirates not under the control of the empire anymore.”

“Makes sense considering the number of warships I saw...”

“Until a few years ago, the empire was pretty quiet. But they suddenly bolstered their army, built hundreds of ships, and started wars left and right. They recently scuttled a country populated by beastmen and demon tribes... I guess I did me part there as well...”

“So demons are a thing here! I still don’t know much about this world, but I’m sure demons must be strong, right?”

“Aye. As ye would expect, most demons be excelling at magic. They also be good with swords and axes. Numbers made the difference, though. If the Demon King had been there, things mighta turned out differently, but he be on another continent...” he trailed off. “Here we are, mister.”

For some reason, he had taken to calling me “mister.” I didn’t mind it, so I decided not to stop him.

There was a half-rotten wooden door at the end of the passage, and a faint smell of salt reached us through the gaps. We were close to the sea.

“I’m back, me hearties!!!” Barbarossa yelled as he flung the door open.

“...Boss?!”

“You’re alive?! We were so sure you’d walked the plank already!”

“It’s really you, Boss!!! You’re alive!”

His men ran up to him, crying and screaming. He sure had been missed.

It was worth saving him if only to witness this.

I walked through the door into a large hall and finally saw their boat—an imposing pirate ship.

“Brother! You’re all right! Did you manage to escape from the empire’s prison?! I heard that it was impossible! And who is that person behind you?” a

young man—I assumed he was Barbarossa’s younger brother—walked off the ship and asked with a mild tone. He was wearing an apron which made the scene a little surreal.

“I’ll introduce him. That’s Mister Masaki, me savior! Crew! Go say ahoy.”

“AYE, AYE! Mister Masaki! Thank you so much for helping the boss!” they yelled in unison, bowing to me.

I wasn’t used to this kind of thing. Obviously, I was happy to receive their thanks, but it wasn’t the time to get carried away. We still weren’t in the clear.

“I saved Barbarossa because I also needed something from him. I want to get out of this empire as soon as possible. Please help me!”

“Of course! It goes without saying that we’ll help you however we can, but...what are we going to do about their warships?” Barbarossa’s brother asked.

He was right. Those frigates were an issue. We might have been able to outrun a few ships, but there was no escaping an entire fleet. If they all opened fire at the same time, the pirate’s ship would never withstand it.

We needed to make a move first, and it so happened that I had the means to do so.

“I’ve already thought about it. I’m sorry to hurry you, but would it be possible to set sail immediately?”

“No problem. The supplies, food, and water we bought at the last town we visited are almost untouched.”

“Great. Then get ready to depart. I’ll go handle the warships,” I said before activating Wing again and leaping into the air.

The pirates looked at me, flabbergasted. *I guess flying isn’t really a thing in this world. Might be one of the perks of being an otherworlder.*

“You... You’re flying!!!”

“Mister Masaki! You can fly?!”

“Damn, I so wanna learn that spell...”

It seemed like some of them could use magic. *Too bad for him, though. Even if he were to learn that spell, he probably wouldn't have enough MP to maintain it.*

"I'm off, then!" I said.

I increased my flying speed and activated Stealth and Invincibility. Now that I was pretty much a stealth fighter jet, I exited the cave and flew over the sea in the direction of the frigates. I wasn't carrying Barbarossa anymore so I was free to move at full speed.

In the blink of an eye—and completely unnoticed—I had arrived at my destination. I checked my map to find a discreet location at the edge of the military port and landed before opening my skill list again.

I had no intention to get too close to the enemy, so I removed Silent Blow and Close-Combat Mastery (High). I picked Underwater Breathing and Swimming Master—two passive skills—to replace them.

Still invisible, I walked around the port and saw plenty of frigates and caravels. I decided to stay on my guard and found a quiet corner to get into the water where no one might notice. Thanks to Underwater Breathing, I wouldn't have to worry about coming up to breathe. I also learned that Stealth wouldn't deactivate even if I dived underwater.

With my newfound swimming abilities, I reached a boat in no time. I conjured a Time Bomb and attached it to the bottom of the hull. I set the timer for two hours. That would give me ample time to go around and plant bombs on as many vessels as possible.

The second I let go of the Time Bomb, Stealth deactivated. *So this counts as an attack...* I went from one ship to the next using Stealth and was careful to be as quiet as possible when it switched off after I planted the bombs. Moving around took quite some time and the clock was ticking.

I had already been underwater for more than an hour at this point, but thanks to my abilities, I hadn't even broken a sweat. Everything was going smoothly, but I had to hurry up. I would run out of time soon.

I kept planting bombs for another twenty minutes. Time Bombs were quite useful as they dealt a large amount of damage upon explosion—but they had a fatal flaw. The bombs were monsters and, as such, had a set HP—a rather small amount, at that. If someone killed them before the set time, they would not explode. Still, they were perfect for taking care of vehicles and buildings. For instance, while breaking down a wall with regular attacks would take a long time, these bombs would make it crumble down in one blow. That’s why I was sure they’d open up large holes in these boats’ hulls. They might even sink them altogether.

I had made sure to stick the bombs right on the keel of each ship. Once that part blew up, the vessels should be beyond saving. I expected even magic would have a hard time fixing sinking ships.

I made sure Stealth was activated again and leaped out of the sea. I made my way back to the pirate ship. I felt like a super cool spy.

As soon as I entered the cave, I noticed that the pirates had completed their preparations, and the ship was ready to sail.

I’m glad to see they’re fast workers.

I hovered over the ship’s deck and disabled Stealth.

“Welcome back, Cap’n!” all of the men yelled as soon as they saw me.

What the...? When did I become their captain?

“Hey! Barbarossa! What’s up with them?!”

“Ye saved our lives. We made this decision on our own. After seeing ye escape the castle with those amazing abilities of yours, we had to make you our leader.”

I see no one thought of asking me my opinion. Even Barbarossa was acting like my underling now.

Going from a prisoner to the captain of a pirate crew in a day... I sure made it big.

“I don’t know much about life on the sea, you know? Actually, I don’t know the first thing about it! Why should a total novice become the leader of a bunch

of seasoned pirates?!”

“Who cares about that? Ye can leave the seafaring to us. Just use us to your heart’s content.” Barbarossa paused, his expression turning grim “I’ll give it to ye straight... We were already stuck, and we couldn’t help but rely on others. We’ve lost many of our crewmates after getting dragged into the empire’s wars...”

I had witnessed how much Barbarossa’s men cared about him. It was obvious that the feeling was mutual.

Anyway! There’s no time to lose! We have barely ten minutes left.

“I see... Still, let’s put this conversation on the back burner for now. We have to leave. Is everyone fully equipped and ready to go?”

I decided to make use of the last few minutes to fix my own equipment. I couldn’t keep running around in my dirty suit.

I picked some GM-exclusive garments.

Head: Soul of the Valkyrie (MP consumption -33%; INT +40)

Torso: Pride of Surt (HP +10%; STR +50)

Arms: Loki’s Scheme (Attack Speed Boost; Spell Casting Speed Boost; DEX +40)

Legs: Gleipnir’s Shoes (AGI +40; Speed Boost)

I saw my stats go up like crazy as soon as I was done changing. I looked extra fancy too. Maybe a little too fancy...

Hang on, is my gear glowing?! I’m standing out way too much! I should add something to make me more inconspicuous.

Camouflage: Cloak of the Azure Dragon (Magic Attack Boost (Small))

Cloak of the Azure Dragon: A valuable cloak made from the

precious scales of an azure dragon. It allows the user to hide his equipment while providing a magic attack boost.

Rarity: SR

The blue of this cloak, as well as the visible scales, made it a little eye-catching, but it was still much better than my GM gear. If I lowered the hood and showed my hair, you could see the Soul of the Valkyrie, but at least it didn't appear shiny anymore.

"Cap'n, weren't you glowing a minute ago?"

"No. It's just your imagination. That aside, is everyone's equipment in good condition?" I asked, changing the topic. "I can give you some spares if you don't mind using hand-me-downs."

I didn't want them paying too much attention to me.

"Hmm... Actually, my sword is pretty battered..."

"My bow also looks like it may break at any point..."

"Swords and bows, huh? Hang on."

I only had one mithril sword and a few rare weapons that only I could handle on me. *That won't do... I'll swing by my Room.*

I focused my mind and a large door appeared in front of my eyes. The pirates stared at me in awe.

I tried not to mind their stares and entered my Room. It was just as I remembered it.

The few pieces of furniture I had obtained during collaboration campaigns—such as a sofa, a stove, and a faucet—were arranged neatly.

I reached out to touch the sofa. *How soft and cushiony.* Water actually came out of the tap, and I could hear some music thanks to the speakers installed in a corner of the room. Even the coffee maker seemed to work.

I was overcome by the need to drink some coffee, but I managed to stop myself. I had no time for that now. I needed to find some weapons. I regretfully

turned my back to the godsent appliances and rummaged through the inventory instead.

I took out some stuff that could come in handy. The pirates' recovery rates seemed pretty low, and I assumed they didn't have many potions at hand either. *I should stock up, then.*

When I came out of the room, everyone was still staring at me in awe.

"Cap'n...what was that?"

"Don't worry, I'll let you guys use that space when we have time. For now, we really have to get a move on," I said, noticing that we only had five minutes left. "Are these okay with you?"

I set down a bunch of items on the floor. Besides the weapons that I used back when I was trying to level up my character—such as a Hundred Sword, a mithril knife, an Elder Wyvern Bow, and a White Birch Staff—I had also brought some recovery items and protective gear. My main goal was to prevent them from getting hurt.

"Can we really use such precious equipment? Wait... Is this knife made out of mithril?!"

"And that's a Wyvern Bow!!! Even the most experienced adventurers struggle to get their hands on these!"

They seemed to be getting more and more surprised by the minute, but they still followed my instructions and picked up the weapons and equipment they thought they could handle. *Upping our fighting power is important too.*

I had no idea how many of them could use magic, so I had randomly brought three staves with me. Two had been claimed, which meant there were two magicians on board. Five people picked close-range weapons and, finally, one took a bow. The group was pretty balanced in the end.

Now that they donned their protective gear and held their new weapons, they didn't look like a bunch of pirates anymore. I just felt like I was looking at a party of players—the kind I came across every day on the job.

Right as I was thinking of hurrying everyone along, Barbarossa's brother—

who was now holding a blazing sword—came up to me. He seemed to have taken a liking to this sword and was really excited to see flames coming out of it whenever he willed it.

“Cap’n,” he started. “We’re done with the preparations! We can set sail immediately.”

I noticed he was still wearing his apron. Did he intend to leave like that? He was wearing chain mail under it, and I supposed it wasn’t impossible that the apron itself gave him some sort of stat boost, so I decided to ignore it for now.

“What’s your name?” I asked instead.

“My name is Lohas! I’m Barbarossa’s brother!”

He was so much more polite than his brother. I couldn’t help but think highly of him.

“All right! I’ll give you guys my first order! Weigh anchor! We’re heading north! No matter what, keep sailing as fast as this ship can go!”

“Aye, aye, Cap’n!!!” they answered in unison as the ship departed.

At the same time, the deafening sound of an explosion reached us. Dozens of blasts followed. The Time Bombs I had planted seemed to have gone off perfectly.

I had seen oil containers when I was walking around the port. I wondered if those had caught fire too. Regular people were forbidden from stepping foot in the military port, so I assumed no one but soldiers had been hurt by the explosions. At least, I hoped so.

Some soldiers may have lost their lives, but that’s war. This was a battle between my pirate crew and the empire.

The empire didn’t hesitate before invading foreign countries and murdering their people. So I wouldn’t let them pretend they weren’t prepared to face the consequences.

I... I had already braced myself. I would play a part in this. If necessary, I would kill to protect myself.

My newfound subordinates were also intrigued by all the noise, and despite

being busy maneuvering the ship, they couldn't stop themselves from looking in the direction of the explosions.

What is that guy doing? There was a pirate wagging his staff around, and I finally noticed that he was controlling the wind.

He's probably moving the sail with wind magic...

We picked up speed and got farther and farther away from the empire.

The military port must have been a mess. And it just so happened that it was time for food to be served at the prison. They would finally notice our escape.

With uproars at both the port and at the castle's prison, I assumed no one would notice a single ship sailing away. We left the empire and its explosions behind and made our way north without anyone realizing what had happened.

Chapter 2

The south was almost entirely under the empire's control. If we tried to head there, we'd be caught or sunk to the bottom of the sea in a matter of days. I had ways to protect myself, but I couldn't let these people who had made me their leader so wholeheartedly meet their demise so quickly.

On the other hand, up north was a country that still hadn't fallen to the empire—the Kingdom of Sentdrag.

I tried my best to recall every little piece of lore from the game, but that name still didn't ring a bell. I was pretty sure I was able to use my magic and skills thanks to a special ability that let me access my GM powers. But if I learned about the principles that controlled magic in this world, I might even be able to expand my skill set and learn spells that only existed here.

Either way, the first step was to sail north.

I didn't have anything to do on the boat, so I asked around and tried to learn a bit more about this world.

From what the pirates told me, those who could use skills were adventurers, soldiers, and the like. Barbarossa and his brother Lohas had both reached level 50 in Sword Mastery which put them pretty much on par with intermediate adventurers.

Only skills were defined by level, and they'd get upgraded after training or fighting actual battles. However, most people couldn't simply check their skill level on their own. Instead, they had to reach out to the Adventurer Guild and ask to be appraised.

As a general rule, the Adventurer Guild welcomed everyone—including pirates or bandits—as long as they weren't currently wanted criminals. Just don't openly state what shady business you handle in front of them and they wouldn't push either.

The magic spells you could use also changed depending on the level of your

skills, but being able to cast spells at all was already a rare ability even within the army. The fact that this crew had managed to snatch two magicians was amazing.

I also took the chance to ask about abnormal abilities and otherworlders.

“You’re the first I’ve actually met, but I heard that otherworlders wield incredible powers. Some are able to summon iron monsters while others can kill a hundred people with one strike.”

So there are a bunch of different abilities, huh? Since I could use my GM powers, the most likely possibility was that these other people could also use some sort of in-game skills. It would make sense for them to be able to summon iron monsters or be strong enough to fight unparalleled in this world. Could these otherworlders be the gamers who had suddenly disappeared? This was too crazy to be true... But then again, it *had* happened to me. *Guess I’ll need to talk to them if I want to get to the bottom of this.*

Even after all that talking, I still had plenty of time to kill, so I had the resident magician twins, Paddle and Peddle, teach me the rules of magic.

Natural aptitude was paramount, and only after opening the door to another realm dubbed the “Material World” with their inner mana—or raw magical energy—would one be recognized as a magician. They would then draw their powers from the Material World. They also told me that having a clear image in mind when conjuring a spell was crucial.

As they spoke, Paddle and Peddle continued to stir the boat toward the north with their wind abilities. I decided to try to imitate them as practice, but it ended up backfiring quite a bit.

“AAAAH!!! Cap’n, stop! PLEASE STOP!”

“Oh... Sorry...”

I didn’t expect that much wind to suddenly appear. Storm, the spell I used, had made the mast creak, pushing the boat forward so fast it had almost capsized.

Training was key when it came to magic. I spent the next hour focusing and imagining the ship sailing slowly ahead before I finally succeeded.

Paddle and Peddle looked at me in awe.

“Cap’n, your magic is so cool! You’re like the heroes from the old tales.”

“Heroes are only known as such by some people after the fact. Others may have considered them monsters, you know?” I had no intention of getting carried away.

Even in my world, it had been proven time and time again that history was written by the victors. They were the ones who decided who were the righteous heroes and who were the wicked villains. This was even more likely to happen when religion was involved.

“You’re not wrong. The empire must think of you as some kind of monster...”

“What matters is protecting what is dear to you, whether it’s your country, your girl, or your family,” I said. “Even if you’re called a monster for it. If you fail, there’s no point in surviving. Your soul will have perished anyway.”

“True... Oh! Careful! Wrong direction. A little more to the west.”

“Got it.” I had become able to control the direction of the wind at will. As I continued to practice wind magic with Paddle and Peddle, I suddenly noticed five boat marks on the edge of my map.

At the same moment, the lookout called out from the crow’s nest.

“Cap’n! Boss! Sail ho! Imperial ships ahead!” he yelled.

“We be running into some returning ships... Cap’n! Orders?”

We could just outrun them, but if we got rid of them here, it’d land a blow to the empire. That’d help us in the long run too.

“What kind of size are we talking?” I asked.

“Big! All five of them are large warships!” called the lookout. “I can see dozens of prisoners aboard one of them too!”

“Do you think they’re heading home to replenish their supplies and unload prisoners?”

“Very likely! Considering their condition, these vessels must be on their way back from a battle.”

Since the prisoners seemed to have been all thrown together on one single ship, we could take advantage of the situation.

I gestured for Paddle and Peddle to come closer.

“Can you two evade shells coming from five large warships?”

“Our ship is small enough that I could handle that on my own,” Peddle said. “Paddle can use defensive magic, so he can block a few hits if needed.”

“I can use even stronger defensive spells thanks to the MP potions and equipment you gave us!” Paddle added.

I shouldn't need to worry about our ship staying in one piece.

I nodded before turning to face everyone else.

“Guys! I'm about to go attack that boat! I can only transport two more people. ARE YOU READY TO JOIN ME?” I asked at the top of my lungs.

Barbarossa and Lohas stepped forward.

“I be going! They caught me once, but I still have some bilge rats to sink!” Barbarossa exclaimed.

“I'll worry if I send my brother off alone again,” Lohas said. “Please allow me to go as well!”

“All right. Then it's time to battle!” I screamed. “FULL SPEED AHEAD!!!”

“AYE, AYE, CAP'N!!!” the pirates responded in unison.

After our exchange of war cries, the pirate ship sped up in the direction of the frigates.

I had checked the range of my magic during our trip, and, while we were still too far, I decided to take some time to switch out my skills.

Passive skills: MP Recovery (Medium), HP & MP Recovery (Medium), Physical Reinforcement (Extra High), Close-Combat Mastery (High), Heightened Senses (High), Leadership (Medium), Magic Attack Boost (Medium).

Active skills: Oversword, Sonic Blade, Nonlethal Attack.

Leadership allowed me to boost the strength of anyone I deemed to be an ally.

Some active skills were often used together, known as combos among the players. Sonic Blade followed by Oversword was the most famous combo in *Britalia Online*.

Sonic Blade allowed the user to project shock waves that flew at the enemy. When used alongside Oversword, the reach and strength of the sword would increase which meant that, in turn, stronger shock waves—with an extended range—would hit the enemy.

The only drawback was the HP cost that came with using Sonic Blade. Usually, high-level players overcame that issue by having a rear guard heal the melee fighters continuously while they blasted shock waves all around.

I had also seen my fair share of players getting too into it and losing too much HP because of the skill. They would then drop dead after the first attack.

All in all, it was necessary to pay attention to your timing and wait for your HP to recover before launching the next wave of attacks, but, when the combo was well executed, it was incredibly powerful.

Nonlethal Attack, as its name suggested, was a skill that never killed the enemy. It was fairly useful for targets that needed to be captured alive for whatever reason.

After doing it a few times, I had become much faster at picking out skills. I was done in less than a minute and was prepared to strike the second the warships entered my range.

They were still too far for my reach...under normal circumstances. My equipment and skills had tremendously increased my attack range. I had already confirmed the distance, and so I lifted my arm to start casting my spell.

Having a clear image of the desired results was important. I was currently picturing a spear. My goal was to send it flying right through their sail, and I focused on imagining that scene over and over again.

Flame Javelin

If I could open a hole in the sail, that would be good enough. After a while...a huge spear appeared in my hands!

Hang on, isn't that way too big?! It's pretty much the size of a telephone pole! What the hell?!

I looked around me and, as expected, my subordinates were all staring at me, astonished. *I can't blame them, can I?*

If I could stop the ship from moving altogether, that would be even more convenient. I aimed my gigantic blazing spear at the center of the warship and launched it.

BOOM. It flew over the surface of the sea like a missile, pierced the sail, and continued its way onward, destroying half of the mast.

Uh-oh... Maybe a bit too powerful.

The spear still hadn't stopped, and it hit the next two boats in full force, going through another mast and setting the last ship on fire. *Good thing I didn't aim at the ship carrying the prisoners...*

"Cap'n...your magic is really out of this world. I mean... You could destroy a whole town in one go with this."

"I'll keep my powers in check when we reach a town just so that doesn't happen. I tried to go all out to stop that warship from moving, and it got a bit out of hand. Anyway, Barbarossa, Lohas, we're getting on the enemy ship. Now!"

"Ye... Yes!"

"AYE, AYE, CAP'N!!!"

Considering the situation, I might as well go all out now. I activated Wing and picked up Barbarossa and Lohas, holding them each with one hand.

"The rest of you focus on shooting bullets, arrows, magic—whatever you can! Sink them! But make sure to leave two ships unscathed, all right?"

“AYE, AYE, CAP’N!!!”

The moment they answered, I took off with Barbarossa and Lohas, activating Invincibility.



“What was that thing?! The mast exploded!”

“Does it matter? Help me put out the fire!!!”

“Captain! It can’t be salvaged! The ship behind us is burning! We need to help them!!!”

The men of the empire’s fleet, who had just been hit by a sudden magic attack, were at a loss.

Their reaction made sense. After all, these men were reveling in their prior victory with food and drinks when a spear flew at them out of nowhere.

“Where did the attack come from? I want a damage report immediately!!!” the captain screamed, running up to the bridge in a hurry with a bottle still in hand.

Prisoners must have been doing all the work below deck considering how carefree he seemed to have been until now.

“The attack came from the south. We spotted a pirate ship in that direction!”

“Reporting! The masts of the second and third ships have been destroyed! The fourth ship in the rear is damaged beyond repair. It’s sinking!”

“Fuck!!!” the captain flew into a rage. “I don’t know how they managed to launch something like that, but it’s definitely those pirates! Crush them! Kill them! Take everything they have!!!”

He threw the porcelain bottle he had been holding to the floor and it exploded with a loud crash.

“But...” One of the soldiers dared to speak up, trembling. “Shouldn’t we help the men of the fourth ship...?”

“Useless idiot! Let them sink! Go slaughter those pirates instead!!! I want the head of every single one of these fuckers! NOW!” he yelled, kicking any man in

reach to blow off some steam.

His orders were incredibly unclear, and he gave no specific indications to his troops. The soldiers' faces turned sour, but he hadn't left any room for argument. The rules of the empire were strict—the words of your superiors are absolute. If you were ordered to die, you died.

Now that they had been ordered to leave their comrades to die and attack the pirates, there was no choice.

They couldn't help but cower at the thought of fighting an enemy capable of such feats, but they had to head into battle nonetheless. Some still hoped that, if the fight ended quickly enough, they might be able to save a few of their comrades. Thus, they sailed at full speed toward the pirates and suddenly came face-to-face with something unbelievable.

People. Were. Flying. On top of that, one man was carrying two grown adults.

A few soldiers still managed to react immediately, blasting arrows, magic spells, and iron bullets infused with magical energy at the intruders. The flying man moved at an incredible speed considering the weight he was carrying, effortlessly avoiding each projectile. He almost looked as if he were dancing, spinning around as he went. It was impossible to read where he would be the next second.

If predicting his trajectory is impossible, a wide attack might prove more effective, the soldiers thought. The air around the intruder was lit ablaze, successfully engulfing him.

"I DID IT!!!"

The soldiers yelled, congratulating each other, when suddenly...their hopes were mercilessly crushed.

Three silhouettes emerged from the flames. They hadn't suffered any burns, and even their clothes were in perfect condition.

Death itself had come for the soldiers in the form of these three men, surrounded by sparks.

They set foot on the deck of the first ship.



As soon as I took off, I flew toward the ship on which I could see the most soldiers.

“Brother!!! I can’t believe it! We’re flying!” Lohas exclaimed, elated.

“How are ye enjoying this? I be so scared I want to find shelter in Davy Jones’s locker.”

I learned much later that Lohas had always dreamed about flying. In retrospect, it was plain to see how much he enjoyed it.

Barbarossa, on the other hand, was *very* afraid of heights. I could feel him shivering the whole time. I was holding their collars tightly and had no intention of letting them fall so there was no need to worry that much.

“Cap’n!!! ARROWS! MAGIC! SHELLS!!!” Barbarossa cried out.

I didn’t need him to scream in my ears to notice. Thanks to Physical Reinforcement, these attacks appeared to be so slow that I could easily evade them.

I flew around, doing acrobatics for the sake of it, and Barbarossa’s screams got even louder while Lohas cheered.

The both of you are so loud...

“Cap’n! Fire magic ahead!!!” Lohas warned.

“What are ye doing?! DODGE, LAD!!!” Barbarossa yelled.

“I’m charging forward!” I answered, ignoring him.

Instead, I cast a spell called Gravity Wall. Winds from all directions surrounded us and rendered every ranged attack useless for ten seconds. Even the insanely strong Dragon Breath wouldn’t work when Gravity Wall was active. Its cooldown was rather long, though. It could only be used once every ten minutes.

The good part was that this spell did not only protect the user but also his surroundings which made it the perfect fit for my current situation.

A blast of fire—somewhat similar to Dragon Breath—enveloped us. But it

couldn't break through the defenses of my Gravity Wall. The flames were repelled—not even their heat reached us.

As I pushed through the blaze, I finally caught sight of the imperial soldiers. They all looked absolutely aghast. *I guess this place is as good as any to land.*

“Guys! I’m landing! Time to fight!!!” I shouted at my companions.

“Okaay! Leave it to us!” Lohas said.

“Pheeeeew!” Barbarossa sighed. He looked relieved. “Finally! I’ll crush their barnacles!!!”

He was holding his Lightning Sword so tight that sparks were flying around it. *He’s pumped up, huh?*

Lohas still looked like he was having a blast, but he was focused nonetheless, with his Flame Blade at the ready. *I can see he’s not the type to mess around when it matters.*

I let my speed drop and cast a few buff spells on both of them. *Protection. Quick Bite. Powered.* These would boost their defense, attack speed, and attack power.

As soon as I was done with my buffs, I slowly set foot on the deck and let go of Barbarossa and Lohas.

Neither magic attacks, nor arrows, nor bullets had been able to stop us, and the soldiers looked downright terrified. They didn’t dare attack and just stood there, clutching their weapons.

“Worthless trash! What are you doing? Kill them!!! I want to see them bleed! Get me their heads so I can shove them up their own asses!”

I looked in the direction of the voice spouting profanities and spotted a pig. *No, wait. I’m being disrespectful toward pigs.* It was a fat man with a protruding belly. His face was all red, and he looked every bit as corrupt as he obviously was.

His belly is even larger than Barbarossa’s...

Regardless, the captain’s voice had snapped the soldiers back to their senses, and they moved to surround us.

“Let’s show them what we can do,” I said, before adding. “Try not to die, okay?”

“We’ve been through hundreds of battles. We’re not about to lose to a few empire dogs.”

“I’ll give it to ye straight, lad. Flying be a hundred times scarier than these swabs!”

“I’m happy to hear that. Then let’s go!”

At my signal, they both cheered and lunged together at the enemy. I ran forward on my own.

The soldiers readied their swords and spears and charged back at us.

I was currently wielding Seven Arthur. It was my favorite sword, and back when I was a regular player, I always carried it with me. It was a bit peculiar in that the initial strike was rather weak. However, once an enemy had been hit once, they would continuously suffer damage over time. This sword was beyond rare, and getting my hands on it had required over a year of grinding.

I wanted to check if its effects would properly activate in this world. The perfect occasion presented itself when a soldier came at me waving his sword around. I started slashing at him horizontally.

I’d already managed to lacerate his torso, arms, and legs before he started blocking my attacks. Thanks to my passive skills, my sword had split through his robust armor like a knife through butter, leaving bone-deep slits in its wake.

With his arm nearly severed and his torso slashed open, the soldier fell to the ground, only to be replaced by another one.

I turned my body to evade the spear that came flying at me and made use of the momentum to deliver a spinning slash. I sliced his throat with perfect precision, and his head fell right off. I finished my move anyways, making two more rotations and digging my sword into his corpse a few more times before his body came crashing down.

Seeing the gruesome deaths of two of their crewmates, the other soldiers stopped at once. I used this chance to open my map and check the positions of

the archers. I turned my attention to the second floor of the deck just in time to see one of them shoot an arrow.

Thanks to my heightened abilities, I could watch it make its way toward me in slow motion. I struck it down with my sword and returned the favor using my combo: Sonic Blade and Oversword.

My sword's aura was projected toward the archer, slashing through him and killing him on the spot. Apparently, my attack had reached a large area, and the three other archers surrounding him were also hit. Two of them died along with him, while one lost his arm. He wouldn't be a threat regardless—I doubted he could shoot an arrow with one arm.

I decided to use Sonic Blade on the magicians next, but when I looked their way, I saw a large blazing path instead. At the end of the path, their spellcasters were going up in flames.

I cut through a few soldiers with my long-reaching Oversword to clear my view and was finally able to spot Lohas brandishing his burning Flame Blade. Barbarossa wasn't far away, and he plunged his sword into the flooring, spreading electricity through it to deliver a ranged attack.

The soldiers were all wearing complete sets of iron armor which meant the electricity ran through their bodies. They fell down like flies, one after the other.

They sure are making good use of their weapons. I did give them a little boost with my buffs, but the fact that they were able to adapt so fast must mean they've been really strong all along.

I was surprised to see them fight so well. Now that I had confirmed with my own eyes that they were both all right, I refocused my attention on the soldiers in front of me.

Hitting them with my combo seven times was more than effective, and their bodies were shredded beyond recognition.

While we were running havoc on this ship, we could hear a commotion coming from the ship next to us. It was sinking. The rest of the pirate crew must have been bombarding it pretty thoroughly.

I checked my map and saw that none of them had been harmed. I also noticed that dozens of soldiers had been captured and confined to the deck of the pirate ship.

Before flying off, I had given one specific order to my men: “Don’t kill anyone who isn’t resisting.”

There was no need to take the lives of those who threw down their weapons. Murdering someone who had already surrendered would be acting like a complete lowlife. And it just so happened that the pirates had nodded happily. *I guess they’d been following this rule in the first place.*

The three of us were now surrounded by a sea of blood as the bodies piled up. I felt like closing my eyes. This was a lot for me to stomach, but if I faltered now, the morale of my troops would take a blow.

I steadied my legs to prevent them from trembling and tried to chase away the guilt I was feeling. I felt like a monster, but I tried not to dwell on that thought. I had to focus on the foes in front of me for now.

After a while, most of the soldiers stopped attacking altogether. They surrounded us without daring to approach.

They understood that making a move meant joining the ever-growing pile of corpses.

I could see how badly they wanted to surrender even though they could not. Some were noticeably shaken.

All of this was the fault of that rotten bastard hiding out on the upper deck. As long as I got rid of him, the rest would be mollified. *Let’s settle this.*

I took off and landed in front of that disgusting lump of flesh, driving down my sword.

A shrill cry sounded...followed by the sharp sound of metal hitting metal.

“What?!”

A blue-haired young girl wearing a school uniform had suddenly appeared and blocked my Seven Arthur blade. Her face showed no expression whatsoever. I was even more shocked when I noticed she had stopped it with her bare hands.

Somehow she also managed to block the sword's damage-over-time effect.



“Defense...successful. The barrier has been broken by the succession of attacks. Please repair it, my lord,” she said.

“Ho ho, that was a close call. What a dangerous attack you have here,” a man spoke with a light tone. “Dang. We were just supposed to go home, why did we have to run into dangerous bastards like you?”

With my sword still stuck in the young girl’s grip, I turned my head in the direction of the voice. It belonged to a man with stubble and longish red hair. He was laughing without a care in the world and in general, looked to be incredibly carefree. He seemed to be a little older than me. He was wearing a simple black-and-blue robe, and two long swords were dangling at his hips along with a strange square box. He was riding a giant eagle that looked more machine than animal, his smile never faltering for a second.

He took out a piece of paper from the box hanging at his hips—it looked like a card—and held it up in the direction of the girl. It started glowing.

“Shield Barrier.”

As he said the name of the skill out loud—or at least, I assumed it was some sort of skill—a dim light erupted from the card, enveloping the young girl entirely. *It must be a defensive skill!*

I was still looking at the man when, suddenly, the blue-haired girl tried to land a knifehand strike on me with no warning. Thanks to my skills and equipment, my stats were incredibly high, and I managed to dodge by jumping back instantly.

I was protected by Invincibility so I would have been fine either way, but somehow I felt threatened. My quick reflexes also helped me keep my ability hidden. They shouldn’t have noticed that something was up.

That wasn’t enough to discourage her, though, and she lunged at me at full speed, trying all kinds of attack patterns. She went from knifehand strikes to punches before trying a foot sweep and tornado kick.

Each of her blows was so fast and powerful that I could hear them cutting through the wind.

I kept dodging, but she was too fast! I wouldn't be able to dodge her next hit! I raised my sword to block and...was sent flying. I crashed into the mast. The damage I should have taken was nullified by Invincibility so I didn't feel any pain, but I could feel my insides shaking from the force of the hit. *I wanna puke...* Apparently, I still had to suffer through any side effect that wasn't considered "damage."

I should probably pretend to be in pain for a bit.

I did not stand up immediately. Instead, I leaned on my sword as if I were wounded and looked up at the upper deck. The girl was now extending her arms toward me. *What is she trying to do?*

My question was answered in a matter of seconds.

PEW PEW PEW PEW.

Dozens of bullets rained down upon me. They were coming out from the tips of her fingers.

She's a robot?! Maybe an android, actually... Not that it matters.

I jumped to the side to get out of the way. The spot I was standing a few moments ago was now full of holes.

"Hey! What do you think you're doing?! I'm taking the repair fees out of your pay!" the pig yelled.

"Yeah, yeah," the red-haired man answered half-heartedly before addressing the girl. "Colonaaaa! No more firing bullets around, okay? Play with this instead. Plasma Twinblade!"

He took another card from his box and threw it at the girl named Colona. The card shone, just like it had earlier, but this time, it transformed into a weapon with blades on each side of the hilt before falling slowly into her hand.

"Plasma Twinblade. Equipped."

"Let's add to the fun while I'm at it!" he said. "You deserve praise for managing to hold out against Colona for so long. Let's see how you fare against this," he said as he reached for his box once more.

I wasn't about to let him complicate the situation even further. I used Wing to

fly toward him at full speed. I immediately activated Oversword and swung my glowing blade.

A metallic noise resounded once more. Colona had closed the distance between us in a split second and stopped my attack with her Plasma Twinblade. Our swords locked and neither of us relented. Sparks flew around us.

Despite my close-combat abilities being boosted, Colona was still able to stop each of my blows with her frail arms. *Where is she even hiding her muscles?! Wait...she's a robot, she doesn't need muscles, does she?*

With Colona standing in my way, the man had ample time to take out yet another card.

"Nice, Colona! I'll make sure to reward you later...with my love!"

"I don't need it, my lord."

"Ha ha ha! How cold of you," he joked. "All right, let's get things going! O iron beast, let your roar resonate and bring destruction. Send ruin to my enemy with your fangs of steel! Beast Invocation: Buster Megalo Chimera!"

He threw the card at me, and a gigantic magic circle appeared midair.

A strange robotic beast emerged. It had dull gray claws, a golden lion head, a torso similar to that of a goat, a tail that looked like a snake's, and marbled eyes that glowed red like those of a crow.

"GRRRRRRRRRR!!!"

The fierce growl of the chimera made the air around us tremble.

I had definitely seen this monster before. If memory served me right, it was in the TV commercial for an online card game called *Metallic Monsters*.

In that game, you could use cards to summon weapons, defensive walls, and...iron monsters. Yes, exactly what Barbarossa had told me about earlier.

That guy has to be an otherworlder. I didn't know if I had been lucky or unlucky to run into one so early on.

Since he's a *Metallic Monsters* player, that robot girl must be...

"Goddess of Machines: Colona..."

One of my friends played that game, and he would have died to get his hands on her. Colona sometimes appeared in the ads, helping the main character.

“How do you know the name of Colona’s card?! I see...so you’re a fellow otherworlder, huh?”

“Exactly. I didn’t think I’d manage to meet another one so quickly. Now that we know that, can I ask you to withdraw?” I asked

This world seemed to be quite large, and he was the first person from my world I had encountered. If possible, I didn’t want to fight with him.

“Sorry, but no can do. I have obligations, you know? How about you stop resisting? I’m nice, so I’ll let you give me your name before I kill you.”

Hmm, it doesn’t look like I’ll be able to avoid this fight. He sounded sure of himself, but he still kept his hand on his card box, ready to reach for another one at any moment.

“If you want my name, you should introduce yourself first.”

“Oh my, you’re right! How rude of me. My name is Shou, Sakakiyama Shou. I’m a Machine Beasts Tamer,” he said, bowing casually with a little laugh.

He’s the kind of guy who tries to look smooth in every situation, huh?

“I’m Toudou Masaki. As for my class...I’m not telling you.”

“What?! Come on! Tell me!”

I had no reason to give him any information. He was the one who’d suddenly decided we should introduce ourselves, so I didn’t owe him anything. *Like I could blurt out I’m a Game Master.*

“Whatever,” he continued. “You told me what I needed to know. Now that I have a name to engrave on your tombstone...die.” He pointed his finger at me.

His tone was casual, but his eyes were dead serious.

I assume the pointing thing was a signal because Colona and the chimera both lunged at me in unison. Colona was much faster and reached me first.

She closed in on me, spinning her Twinblade as though it were an electric fan. I raised my sword to block her attack. *CLANG*. Seven Arthur was repelled. *Fuck!*

With the spin, her blow had more power than ever. That Plasma Twinblade must have been a rare weapon as well.

Colona didn't miss the chance to strike. Her blade immediately came at me from the side.

I jumped back to avoid it. Her attack had somehow struck my Cloak of the Azure Dragon—it had been ripped apart. The handrail of the deck had also been neatly cut in half.

Phew. Getting hit by that would be a one-way ticket to heaven.

I created some distance between the two of us when suddenly, missiles came flying at me from each side. *The hell did they come from?!*

It was the same spell I had seen those magicians use earlier. I conjured flames to engulf the missiles. I used it in a wide area to make it work like a makeshift shield.

Explosions sounded, and I saw Colona jumping at me, smoke and sparks following in her wake. *Too fast!* She didn't relent, attacking me continuously while the chimera supported her with missiles, laser beams, and Gatling-gun shots.

I needed to stop one of them. One second would be enough.

“Cap'n!!! I'm gonna save ye!” Barbarossa screamed, waving his Lightning Sword in the direction of the chimera.

In normal circumstances, it would have been a reckless move. However, I had given special items to the two brothers.

I saw the snake tail of the chimera flying at Barbarossa. It was about to hit him in the back of his head.

“I won't let you get in my brother's way” Lohas exclaimed, cutting off the chimera's tail in one blow with his now glowing red sword.

Shou watched the tail turn into small particles of light and disappear, utterly shocked.

“What the hell?! Even the strongest steel shouldn't be able to cut through my chimera!”

If it had been a regular sword, I supposed it wouldn't have been. *Too bad Barbarossa and Lohas are wielding magic swords.*

The weapons I had given them weren't even anything rare. Players used those to hunt monsters on a regular basis. Still, they were sturdy enough to get through dragon scales. There was no way a monster made of steel could stop them.

Shou was shaken, but Colona didn't appear to care about this at all. She only focused on defeating the foe in front of her.

She's studying me as we go and adding new attack patterns to the mix...

She combined foot techniques with rotating slashes, and would shoot bullets at me if I tried to pull back. Thankfully, the chimera's movements had come to a halt. *Time to wrap things up.*

My plan was a bit rash, but I didn't have much time. If I kept dragging this out, Barbarossa and Lohas would be in danger. There were still some soldiers left too.

Colona was still spinning around, expressionless as always. She cut through the wind with her Plasma Twinblade, slashing at me horizontally when suddenly... She struck vertically! *Shit, she baited me! That was dangerous!*

As a robot, she could do all kinds of crazy moves. In that stance, she wouldn't be able to dodge, though.

She brought her sword up and, as if the rules of inertia didn't apply to her at all, she struck again immediately. If I were hit by that without Invincibility to protect me, I would die instantly. Still, I didn't pay much attention to her blade. My goal was her arm itself. I took one step forward, closing in until I could almost touch her, and dumped Seven Arthur into my inventory before grabbing her arm.

For the first time since I had met her, Colona's expression changed. I had managed to surprise her. *She can be cute, huh?*

She tried to put her weight on me to make me fall, but I steadied myself and stopped her before she could manage to gain any momentum. Her weight alone was far from enough to topple me.

At the same time, I pushed my free hand against her abdomen and activated Oversword at point-blank range.

“Argh!”

She was sent flying back by the large glowing sword that had just appeared in my palm. However, I was far from finished.

With the hand that had been holding her just before, I concentrated my magic and sent a Flame Javelin at Colona while she was still in midair. It flew like a ballistic missile.

“In your dreams!” Shou screamed. “Adamas Shield!”

My spear was stopped by a golden shield. *Another defensive card...* But that shield of his seemed to only be able to withstand one blow before it crumbled down immediately. Shou stood by Colona’s side, holding her steady so she didn’t fall. He still looked as carefree as ever. *He still has some cards to play, huh?*

I heard a loud noise and felt the ship shake. I turned to look at the source of the noise and saw the chimera on the floor, twitching. The light in its eyes was blinking before finally disappearing with a little clicking sound—similar to the one a monitor made when it was being turned off.

“Finally scuttled,” Barbarossa sighed. “Don’t ye be getting up again, ye bilge-sucking git!”

“If we hadn’t...gotten these weapons we...would have been the ones lying on the floor instead.” Lohas struggled to speak, out of the breath.

They had both suffered dozens of injuries and could barely stand, using their swords as support. The steel body of the chimera was charred all over and part of its wiring had been ripped out. I could see Barbarossa and Lohas had already mastered their new swords. It seemed those weapons had been key to their survival this time.

“You guys! I can’t believe you even managed to defeat my chimera! Impressive!” cheered Shou.

“Do you feel like surrendering now? Colona seems to be out of commission

too... I won't try to kill you if you call it quits."

Although Colona was a robot, she had still passed out, and Shou was having to hold her up. I had used Oversword without an actual sword in hand, but thanks to my passive skills and my GM equipment, it had still dealt a lot of damage.

Her circuits had probably been unable to handle the strain, and she'd lost consciousness as a result.

"How magnanimous of you. Sadly...I'm not done yet!"

Urgh... As expected, he still has something up his sleeve. Guys like him always have a thousand backup plans. He was still riding his mechanical eagle and was keeping his distance. I wouldn't be able to stop him from summoning another monster.

"Behold my trap card! I can't wait to see your shocked face! Ha ha ha! Come forth, Beast Invocation!" he shouted, throwing another card toward the sky.

It shone even more brightly than the one he had summoned the chimera with, drowning the whole surrounding area in light. It was so bright that I couldn't look straight at it.

"Flash Bird!"

A bird as dazzling as the sun appeared in place of the card. It looked like...a penguin?

I was giving my full attention to the cute little animal in front of me when I noticed two people taking off on my map.

Wait! Is that...?

"Bye-bye! See ya, gramps!"

He was running away!

"Who the hell are you calling gramps?! You're older than me!" I retorted. "Are you really gonna run away after putting on such a show?!"

"I already took my payment, so my job here is done! I'm a mercenary, I don't work extra for free! So long!"

He's so freaking fast when he's fleeing! He's already at the edge of my map.

At this point, there was no way I could catch him. That Flash Bird of his had also disappeared. I hadn't noticed at all. I guess its job was only to distract me. Shou had even managed to retrieve his chimera in the process.

"Cap'n! He's trying to escape! Are we going after him?"

"No, he's way too fast. It's not like there's any reason for us to give chase either."

"Got it. Let's just finish what we started then."

"Yep. Now that Shou's gone, taking care of them will be child's play."

I took Seven Arthur out from my item box again and started lashing at the soldiers who had been content to watch our fight from the sideline until now.

From that point onward, it was almost too easy. After witnessing my battle with Shou, the soldiers had lost their will to fight and most just threw down their swords. Captain Piggy was the only one who kept resisting, screaming and insulting people with his thick voice. We tied him up and threw him into the sea.

The soldiers, who had just surrendered, begged me to save their comrades from the burning ship. Naturally, my men agreed immediately.

"We're done, Cap'n! We gathered all the soldiers on one ship as you ordered."

"Great! Did we suffer any casualties?"

"No! Thanks to the equipment you gave us, no one died. A few of our guys are wounded, but they're currently recovering with HP Potions."

I'd mass-produced HP Potions using my skills, and I was glad to hear they were coming in handy. Having a lot of men on my side was great, but if we didn't pack enough recovery items it could become a disaster instead.

I looked at the soldiers and saw that some of them were heavily bleeding while others were shivering, struggling with cold after having fallen into the sea. Since I had decided to spare them, there was no point in letting anyone else die.

Guess I don't have a choice, huh? I always knew I would eventually have to show my healing magic, and now was as good a time as any to experiment.

“Don’t move,” I said, addressing the soldiers. “I’m going to use healing magic. If you try to resist... Well, do I really have to finish my warning?”

They looked frightened and opted to stare at the ground in silence. I guess they had no plans to fight the man who had caused this whole commotion.

“Area Heal.”

I pictured the wounds of the soldiers neatly closing up. If I concentrated too much, it might end up backfiring like before, so I kept myself in check.

Everything seemed to have gone well—their injuries were now fully healed. Somehow, my magic had also warmed them up, and no one was shivering anymore. Those who had been suffering from hypothermia looked at their hands in wonder, enjoying the heat.

Barbarossa and Lohas came up to me.

“Cap’n, we finished dealing with everything ye asked. What should we be doing with these scallywags? Letting them join us would be a danger. We won’t be knowing when they’ll betray us,” Barbarossa warned.

“We’ll just send them back to the empire. That’s why I rounded them up in the first place.”

“If I may ask, Cap’n,” Lohas chimed in, “what’s the point in that? We could just put chains on them and hand them over to some country at war with the empire...”

I did consider that possibility, but I doubted any country besides the empire could handle such a large number of prisoners. Taking care of captives costs a lot of money. After all, you had to keep them fed at the very least.

No matter how you looked at it, war was expensive. It was better to send these guys back to the empire and have *them* use up their funds instead. Considering the traumatic events of today, I doubted they would ever be able to pick up a sword again either way.

When I told them I intended to send them back, the vice captain assured me he would take responsibility for the lives of his men and bring them home safe and sound.

I made sure to add a little threat here and there, telling them I wouldn't be so merciful the next time I saw them on the battlefield. They all shook their heads, assuring me we'd never cross paths again.

Good. I wasn't a saint. I forgave them once. There wouldn't be a second time.

I was finally able to head to the ship on which they had kept their prisoners. Many of them were hurt.

They had heard pirates had taken over and seemed extremely scared. But as soon as I used Area Heal, their behavior changed and they joined their hands in thanks—much like a prayer.

I was glad to receive their gratitude, but I wasn't used to it so I felt a bit restless. I caught Barbarossa looking at my embarrassed face and smirking.

I am so forcing him to fly again.

We asked around to see if any of the prisoners could steer a boat and tasked those who could with getting everyone else home. I was looking for someone to act as the captain and ended up meeting an actual general. I decided to leave the rest to him and he accepted with a smile.

He told me that he was in my debt and let me know that we could rely on their country—a nation in the east that hadn't fallen to the empire. *If I can't manage to find a job after getting to the Kingdom of Sentdrag, maybe I'll go looking for him.*

We sent the prisoners off east, and they all waved back, sending us their thanks.

From what I had gathered, their country was not accessible by sea, which made it hard to conquer for the empire as they relied mainly on naval warfare.

Once I get settled down, I want to visit their country at least once.

We gathered all the food we could from the abandoned imperial warships before continuing our journey north. I thought we might also be able to get our hands on some sort of treasure, but surprisingly enough, we found nothing of value. Considering what the prisoners had told me, there should have been some riches on the ship, so I assumed Shou had already taken everything.

So that's what he meant when he said he "took" his payment!

Either way, we were back on our way after dealing another blow to the empire.

Since we had been hard at work sinking their ships and rescuing the prisoners, I decided to hold a little celebration. I also wanted to show my thanks to my men for obeying my rash orders without a second thought.

We made some adjustments to the course of the ship's course and sailed to the mudflats—where there were barely any waves—before entering my Room to party.

In *Britalia Online*, Rooms could only be accessed from cities, but that rule didn't seem to apply in this world. Therefore, I could also use it as an emergency shelter if the situation called for it.

In the game, you could only use specific actions like "sleep," "sit," or "cook" on the furniture, but here, they looked and worked just like regular pieces of furniture, and I was free to use them however I wanted. Coffee came out of the coffee maker, water came out of the faucet, and the fridge was actually cold. *A dream come true.*

After entering my Room, the pirates were utterly shocked—the swaying of the waves couldn't be felt and luxurious furnishings were arranged neatly.

What surprised them most was the existence of the draft-beer dispenser. Barbarossa was especially pleased after getting to enjoy a fresh beer.

"That be hitting the spot! Sink me! I never knew fresh beer was so good!"

Why do you look ready to cry? Is it that amazing?

Lohas was happily cooking. *I guess the first time I saw him, he was wearing an apron too, huh?* He had been at a loss when he first saw that the stove produced heat without firewood, but he had gotten the hang of it surprisingly quickly. As always, I was impressed to see him adapt to his surroundings without a hitch.

"Cap'n, I can't believe such a convenient tool exists! You have pepper here and some condiments I've never seen! Cooking here is such a pleasure!"

As for the rest of the men, they marveled at the sofas' softness before flopping on them, dead tired.

Of course, I understood. Sofas were so soft and cozy. Sitting in one felt like getting hugged. If I gave them all a personal sofa, they might never stand again. *Maybe I should try using them as traps to catch enemies... Nah, I'd end up sitting on them and ruining the plan myself.*

I gave Lohas all the meat and veggies I had been keeping in my fridge as well as all the food we had stolen from the empire's ships, and went to prepare the bath. As the captain, it probably wasn't my job to handle that, but I just *had* to take a bath as soon as possible. My hair was dirty and my head felt itchy.

If they didn't mind going after me, I'd be happy to let the rest of them enjoy my bathtub afterward. Hygiene was important, after all.

While I cleaned up, I started reminiscing about my old life. I still felt very bad for my senpai.

As for my parents, I only contacted them every once in a while. They didn't approve of me working in the games industry. To them, a Game Master wasn't a real job, and they thought I was just playing around all day.

I wondered if my friends were doing all right. If they ever ended up in this world too, I would run to their aid, but I still hoped they wouldn't have to go through that. Nothing was better than living in a peaceful world. *But still...I reeeeeeally wanted to go to that offline gathering...*

"Cap'n!" I heard Lohas call me. "The food is ready!"

"I'm coming!"

All right, time to stop dwelling on the past. I'll join my new comrades and stuff myself.

Even with my clothes stained by the blood of the soldiers I had killed, I still got hungry. *I'm invincible, but that doesn't mean I can fight on an empty stomach.*

I stepped into the room and a pleasant aroma filled my nostrils. My stomach growled.

"Smells nice... The food looks amazing, Lohas."

“I used the meat you gave me and the ingredients we already had to cook a feast. I hadn’t gone all out in a while, so it was a lot of fun,” he said, wiping his forehead with a satisfied smile on his face.

I knew how to cook to a certain extent, but I wouldn’t say I liked it.

Damn... It looks so good. I wanna dig in.

“Let’s cheer! Everyone have a drink?!”

They all raised their glasses. Most were filled with fresh beer, but those who couldn’t handle alcohol were given freshly pressed orange juice.

“To today’s victory! And to tomorrow’s journey! Cheers!”

“CHEERS!!!”

At my signal, we all took a sip at the same time.

I downed half of my beer in one go. I was pretty good at holding my liquor. Actually, I was the one who could drink the most at my company. Back when I first started working there, one of my colleagues had tried to drink me under the table and ended up passing out instead. We had to send him back to his girlfriend in a taxi.

Next up was the food. Lohas had made deep-fried chicken and fries at my request. Apparently, these dishes also existed in this world, but the recipes were slightly different. I taught him how to make it Japanese-style—marinating the chicken with soy sauce, miso, and garlic, and then frying it. They were all ingredients that could be found in this world, and Lohas had dutifully copied down the recipe on some parchment paper. I also taught him that deep-frying chicken twice made it extra crispy.

I bit into the chicken and felt the juices fill my mouth. I immediately followed it with a large gulp of beer.

“Aaaah...!” I sighed.

That’s life. I could feel my energy levels going up with every bite.

My satisfied look prompted the others to jump in on it. I quickly saved a few pieces and left the rest to them. They deserved to enjoy themselves too. I could already see them getting addicted.

The fries were also fresh from the oven and incredibly tasty. While I was in jail, I had been able to turn the trash they gave me into fine bread, but I still missed junk food.

I noticed that Lohas had also served some rabbit. Apparently, it was something people were used to eating here. It had been sautéed and looked amazing.

I was enjoying my meal—and expertly using a fork and knife in the process, if I do say so myself—when Barbarossa approached me, face red from the alcohol.

“Ahooy Cap’n! Ye haven’t decided on a name for our pirate crew yet, have ye? Be havin’ any ideas?”

“You’re the ones who suddenly made me your captain while we were busy escaping the empire. I never gave it any thought...” I trailed off. “Do I really need to pick one? It was your crew to begin with so we can just keep the name you guys were using before.”

“We could, but...” He stopped in the middle of his sentence to down some more beer. “Ah! That be hitting the spot! Anyway, I still be wanting ye to pick a name! Come now! I’m begging ye!”

He tried to bow down to me, and his head approached the table dangerously fast.

I’d heard from Lohas that the crew’s previous name was “Barbarossa’s Crew.” I wanted to give them a name that was at least as good as that one.

“I’m not that good at naming things but...I’ll think about it.”

One of my men brought me another beer, and I sipped on it while trying to think up a good name. I was far from being drunk so I could still give it some serious consideration.

Masaki’s Crew... Nah, that would just be plagiarism. And Barbarossa’s name sounds cooler than mine in the first place. Maybe I could use the name of the game I used to play and go with the Britalia Pirate Crew...

I really wanted something more impactful. I kept pondering when Seven Arthur, still hanging at my belt, caught my eye.

“Pirates of the Round Table...” I whispered as the words popped into my mind.

Round Table was the name of the guild I was a part of back when I was a regular player.

I liked the sound of it. And it just so happened that we were currently sitting at a round table. Everyone sat together, facing each other. It meant that every member of the team was precious. *Pretty good, right?*

“Pirates of the Round Table... That be a pretty fine name,” Barbarossa said.

“I agree,” Lohas added. “It sounds a lot more like the name of a group than our old one.”

“It’ll also make our successors’ lives a lot easier,” Barbarossa concluded.

I wasn’t sure there was much point in thinking about other people inheriting the crew just yet, but everyone seemed to approve.

I hadn’t managed to come up with anything good by overthinking it so I figured trusting my gut instinct was probably better.

“Guys! Is everyone happy with calling ourselves the Pirates of the Round Table?”

Everyone nodded enthusiastically.

“Then that’s how we’ll be called from now on! Let’s cheer to that!”

“AYE, AYE!!!”

And so, we, the Pirates of the Round Table, kept the beer flowing and continued to drink long into the night to our escape from the empire and to our future adventures.



While Masaki’s pirate crew, the Pirates of the Round Table, sailed north, Shou had fled in the opposite direction. He was currently hiding inside a small room. You couldn’t feel the slightest hint of human presence here. Shou pushed a broken closet—the only piece of furniture inside—out of the way, and a hidden door appeared. He walked through, holding Colona up with one arm.

The secret room wasn't much more luxurious and only had basic necessities—food supplies, piles of books, and a bed. Shou laid Colona down on the bed and reached inside a wooden box. He took out a bottle of alcohol and immediately opened the cap.

He didn't bother looking for a glass, drinking straight from the bottle as he fiddled for a card.

“Communication Ball: Open.”

The card shone briefly, and a crystal ball materialized in Shou's hand. He set it on his desk and started mumbling something unintelligible. Strange static noises came out of the crystal ball, and suddenly, the figure of a woman appeared on its surface.

“Yo, Princess. I ran into some trouble, but I did manage to get my hands on what you were looking for.”

“Thank you for your hard work. You have done me a great favor by accepting this dangerous request of mine. What has become of the prisoners? It doesn't seem like you saved them...and Colona is in such a state too.”

“I pretended to be a mercenary to sneak on board, but pirates attacked us out of the blue.”

“Pirates? There are still pirates who would dare attack an imperial warship?”

“Most of them are under the empire's control, but I guess there are still some around. It wouldn't have mattered much if we were talking regular pirates, but their leader was an otherworlder,” he explained. “He's called Masaki, and he's incredibly strong. Anyway, that's how Colona ended like this. My Megalo Chimera is broken too.”

“My goodness... Well, Shou, tell me. What kind of man do you think he is?”

“If you're asking whether he's dangerous, then yes. I suggest avoiding him like the plague. He doesn't seem much of a warmonger, though. If anything, he's the type that attacks when attacked—although he returns it tenfold. He seems to have a grudge against the empire, and I have to say I almost feel bad for them. He's the kind of monster who can sink a ship with a single attack.”

“So he’s that strong... Is there any way we could bring him over to our side?”

“I’m not sure. He probably hates me considering how our first meeting went. I made use of the confusion to plant a few tracking bugs on him. He seems to be heading north. Considering the direction...it’s probably that kingdom.”

“The Sentdrag Kingdom. Jirou is there, is he not? I am sure he will know how to handle the situation.”

“Hmm... There’s something else I need to report. I stole a few documents along with that *seed* you asked me to bring, and...the Sentdrag Kingdom might be in trouble.”

“What do you mean?”

Shou took out a piece of paper and held it up in front of the crystal ball. A grim look had replaced his usual carefree expression.

“The Leviathan has fallen into their hands,” Shou said, his tone serious.

“How could that be?!”

“The Kingdom is in a bad position, and I’m afraid I can’t take care of this on my own. We might have no other choice but to get Mister Demon King involved.”

“I see. I will also start preparing. Shou, I’m sorry, but please continue to keep tracking that pirate and the Leviathan. I shall pay you extra this time.”

“Got it. You know I’m not one to forget my debts. By the way, if you’re thinking of rewarding me, how about you grace me with your presence in bed instead?”

“I see you never change,” the princess said with a little laugh. “You already have Colona, do you not? Not that I’m opposed to the idea.”

“I’m glad to hear that. Anyway, I’ll take a little rest and go back to work. I’ll hide the seed at the usual place.”

“Understood. Well then, I’m hanging up.”

“Yeah, yeah. Don’t stay up too late, princess. We wouldn’t want your smooth skin to suffer.”

The princess let out a strained laugh at Shou's words and ended the call.

"You're awake, right?" Shou asked, caressing Colona's face. "How are you feeling?"

She opened her eyes and slowly tried to get up. Shou immediately stopped her, forcing her to lie down once again.

"I'm sorry," she apologized, looking up at Shou from her position on the bed. "I failed, my lord."

"It's all right. Considering your opponent, it couldn't have been helped. Though I didn't expect the Megalo Chimera would also be defeated—I still managed to retrieve it, so it wasn't too much of an issue. Plus, I still got *something* out of this," Shou said, a large smile on his face as he threw down a dozen golden and silver items on the table.

He had stolen them while aboard the imperial warship and expected they would fetch him a hefty sum.

"You focus on resting. Even if you're a robot, you still need to take good care of your body, Colona. You're an important partner to me," he said with a sincere tone. "If you don't take proper care of yourself, I'll have to stay here and make sure you won't leave the bed."

"I understand, my lord. I will activate Sleep Mode for now."

Colona closed her eyes and soon fell asleep, breathing softly.

"Masaki, huh? I'm sure he'll make things interesting. I have a feeling this world is gonna undergo some big changes."

No one heard Shou's quiet mumbling. No one but the full moon, peeking through the clouds and illuminating the night.



"Huuuurts... Lohas... Water..." Barbarossa whined.

"Brother...you reap what you sow. The Cap'n told you not to drink so much," Lohas admonished before giving in, handing him some water. "Here you go."

We, the Pirates of the Round Table, were still heading north, even as

Barbarossa suffered from a terrible hangover.

As for me, I had enjoyed a wonderful bath after eating and drinking and felt as refreshed as ever. I'd allowed the rest of my men to use the bath after me so, for once, everyone was clean and smelled nice. Except for Barbarossa, whose breath reeked of alcohol.

It seemed the pirates weren't used to taking hot baths. They usually cleaned themselves with cold water and a washcloth.

They had thoroughly enjoyed their bath and we'd all thought about getting another cold beer afterward, but...I knew that one extra beer would be a one-way ticket to hangover land. As a result, we had all given up on the idea. All except Barbarossa. He had downed a few more beers and ended up in this state.

I figured the sway of the ship would give him a hard time so I'd left my Room open and let him sleep on the sofa. Not on the bed, though. That bed was mine and mine only.

As soon as I woke up, I started training straight away, as I always did. I enjoyed the morning sun and moved my body a little. Thanks to my passive skills, I was now able to perform acrobatics.

Since Lohas was tied up with helping Barbarossa, I decided to cook breakfast instead. I didn't make anything complicated, though.

I baked some bread and threw some bacon and eggs in the pan. I also made a salad with grilled fish and vegetables. Of course, I made some coffee too. This was pretty much my usual breakfast before I ended up here.

I couldn't be thankful enough for the coffee maker I had obtained from a special collaboration between *Britalia Online* and some convenience-store chain. I now got to enjoy delicious coffee for free every day. I had no clue how the machine was being replenished—the same went for the beer dispenser—but I was not about to complain.

"Cap'n, your cooking is amazing! I've never had such amazing bread!"

"Seconds!"

I made some more for the people who wanted seconds. I intended to have them work hard after this, so I could at least do that much. I kept the bread, eggs, and ham coming until everyone was fully satisfied. I hadn't had that much fun cooking in a long time.

Since it was for my new friends, maybe cooking wasn't so bad.

The rest of the day was as uneventful as the morning had been. We made sure to enjoy that peace after the previous hectic days. *Resting is important too.*

We spent the next few days relaxing while I continued to study this world and its magic.

Paddle and Peddle explained a lot of things to me.

Last time, I had learned that magic came from the Material World and that raw magical energy had to be harnessed and transformed in one's body before being released. Their next lesson was about the Material World itself. Apparently, this realm was composed of very different parts, and, while some doors were relatively easy to open, others were nearly impossible to access. They told me that the healing magic I had used came from the Door of Light, a door that only a select few could open. *So that's why they revered me so much...*

I also learned that the Door of Darkness, from which the Demon King himself drew his powers, was equally hard to open. The twins had never even managed to see that door.

The basic attributes of magic were fire, water, earth, and wind. Paddle could use wind and water spells while Peddle could call upon wind and earth magic. Lohas later told me that being able to harness two elements was already an impressive feat.

The twins had been surprised to see that these principles didn't seem to apply to me when I used game spells. They had asked me to teach them Wing, but I had no idea where to begin. Since they'd told me that having a clear picture in mind was the most important thing, perhaps I should tell them to imagine us flying together. Maybe it would work even better if I took them on a ride first. Either way, increasing our crew's airpower would be great.

In my idle time, I trained and tried to improve my imagination process. I managed to conjure a small spear after hours of work and threw it at a fish that was jumping out of the water as a test. The fish was burnt on the spot and fell to the bottom of the sea. *Having a small version of the spear is great! I'll be able to save some MP.*

Using too much MP meant accumulating mental fatigue. Because of that, you'd immediately feel it when your MP went too low. In that sense, it was better to save it to avoid feeling tired. I had a feeling that if I ever got to zero MP, I would pass out on the spot.

I tried teaching Paddle and Peddle how to use Wing and, while they figured it out quickly enough, I had underestimated the MP cost for them. They couldn't fly for long, so it wouldn't be very useful. At best, it could get them out of a crisis if needed.

I always looked at my map regularly, even when training, and, after a while, a boat mark appeared at its edge.

"There's a ship... It doesn't seem to be a warship, but I wonder where it came from."

I could get an idea of the ship's size by looking at the size of the mark, and this one didn't seem to be either a frigate or a caravel.

It looks a bit small for a fishing boat, though...

"I'll climb to the crow's nest and check, Cap'n!"

"Thanks."

I stopped training and let my MP recover. Even though my recovery rate was incredibly high, I would still get tired after focusing hard for a long time. Sadly, recovering my MP wouldn't magically rid me of my weariness.

The man left the crow's nest, climbed down the mast and came running to me the moment his feet touched the deck.

"Cap'n! That's a slave ship! I saw the empire's crest on the sail!"

One of the empire's slave ships... Might as well crush it, then. Depending on how many slaves they're transporting, we might be able to rescue them all and

let them sail with us for now. *Even if there are too many of them, we'll probably manage if we use my Room too.*

“Barbarossa, can I talk to you for a second?”

“What ye be needing, Cap’n?”

“We found an imperial slave ship. Tell everyone to get ready to fight.”

“AYE, AYE, CAP’N! At once!”

Barbarossa ran back, assembling everyone on deck. They were all efficient, joining me in a speedy fashion except for...one person. Someone had lost his will to stand up after a harsh battle with the sofa. *I should give him a stern talking-to later... And I need to be careful not to end up like him.*

Regardless, we sped up in the direction of the slave ship as I gave my orders as the captain.

“Hard astarboard! Our goal is a slave ship! Be careful not to hurt any of the captives!”

“AYE, AYE, CAP’N!!!”

We, the Pirates of the Round Table, were now sailing at full speed in the direction of the slave ship. Everyone was fully equipped and ready. We’d had a great meal and morale was high. Still, I couldn’t let my guard down.

“PI... PIRATES!!!” screamed what seemed to be the enemy lookout.

At his signal, men armed with bows, swords, and staffs came rushing out.

“Sink them before they even get close! Fire! FIRE!!!”

The magicians manning the slave ship started firing magic spells—boulders and magic-powered bullets—while the archers shot their arrows. I stepped forward and activated Storm, stopping all the projectiles in their tracks. They sank to the depths of the sea.

My Storm spell also made their ship sway violently which prevented them from launching any further attacks. They scrambled to grab anything they could to avoid falling overboard.

“We need to know where they abducted those people from. Try not to kill

anyone. We'll interrogate them afterward," I ordered. "Don't risk your own heads, though. Finish them off if needed. I'll be going ahead! Follow me!"

I jumped off with Wing before the pirate ship collided with its target, but I still noticed that Paddle and Peddle had successfully softened the impact with a wind barrier.

As soon as I landed on the slave ship, I used a combination of Nonlethal Attack and Sonic Blade to clear the way, sending the men in front of me flying, including the magicians that were standing at the rear.

Thanks to Nonlethal Attack, Seven Arthur's damage over time wasn't triggered and most enemies were left relatively unscathed. That said, though they were alive and hadn't been badly cut, they still seemed to be in pain, and two fell to the ground groaning.

Barbarossa and Lohas finally jumped aboard too and started to defeat the remaining sailors one after the other. They had definitely gotten used to wielding fire and thunder during our previous fight.

There were only ten men or so—excluding the slaves—on this ship, and we managed to wrap things up in less than a minute.

One muscular dude had tried running his mouth at us, bragging that while we were pretty strong, he would do... *Something, I guess?* I never heard what he wanted to say next because Barbarossa's thunder reached him and he fell to the ground, a nice afro replacing his previous hairdo.

We tied them down and started searching the ship. We found about ten slaves locked inside a cell. They seemed to have heard we were pirates in the commotion and were trembling in fear.

"You don't have to be scared," I said to them. "We may be pirates but we only attacked this ship because we have beef with the empire. We'll let you out in a second."

"You will let us go?" one asked, incredulous.

"I can go home? I can see my papa and my mama again?" a child continued.

"Of course. We will take you to the nearest port. From there, we'll have to ask

soldiers to protect you, though. Will that be all right?”

“Yes! Hmm...” The child paused. “Thank you so much, Mister Nice Pirate!”

Mister Nice Pirate, huh? I’m not sure a pirate can ever be a good person, kid.

“Cap’n! They’ve been locked inside a magic cell. If we try to open it by force, the people inside will feel incredible pain. We need to get the key...” Paddle said after checking the cell carefully.

A magic cell? If all we need is a key, I may be able to handle it myself.

I took out the Pick of the Bandit King, which I had already used once in a similar situation, and stuck it into the keyhole. The door opened immediately with a little clicking sound.

“How is that possible?! The key is still inside my shoe!” the enemy captain we had dragged along exclaimed.

God, he hid it in such an annoying place. If I’d had to, I would have questioned him until I got my hands on the key, but there was no point wasting my energy when I could just use the Pick of the Bandit King.

The slaves that had been captured and holed up on this ship were almost all women and children. They hadn’t been forced to wear slave collars, but their hands had been tied tightly with thick ropes. It seemed some had also been beaten up, based on the marks on their bodies. *Looks painful... I should heal them.*

“Area Heal,” I chanted, casting a healing spell on all of them.

They all looked at me in shock. A lady with golden fox ears and a fluffy tail was especially surprised. *Is she a magician?*

It was a very practical spell, allowing me to fully heal wounds without leaving so much as a scar, but it made me stand out a bit too much.

“Barbarossa, can you take them to our ship and let them rest? Lohas, you go to my Room and make something for them to eat. Run a bath as well, please. As for the rest of you, I want you to split up. I want one group helping them and one group interrogating the sailors. Make sure you learn where these people were captured,” I ordered. “Feel free to use any method, just make them

peak.”

My men nodded and sprung into action. I decided to head to the captain’s cabin to see if I could find any documents about the empire, but suddenly, I spotted a person at the edge of my map.

I walked in that direction but was faced with a wall. It looked like a dead end, although I could see on my map that there was definitely someone on the other side. I turned around and glanced at the captain. He immediately averted his eyes. *Bingo.*

I tried to picture some karate moves in my head, channeling my energy, before punching the wall in front of me. It crumbled down along with a loud noise.

On the other side was a small room with a cage. It was so small that only one person could fit inside it.

However, it wasn’t any ordinary cage. Chains were attached to the iron bars, forming a strange shape. It looked like some sort of seal.

I stepped inside the room to get a better view of what was inside. A girl was chained to a cross and silver nails that shone dimly had been hammered into her body. The room was barely lit, but I could still see how glossy her long silver hair was. It came down to her hips. Even with her red breastplate and her knight uniform in the way, I could still make out her attractive curves.



I had never seen a woman so beautiful and, for a second, I was entranced. The silver-haired beauty made a pained sound, struggling in her bonds and making her lustrous hair sway. I came back to my senses immediately.

“You’re alive!” I let out, fumbling at the door.

“Don’t! You’ll be eaten alive!” a voice came from behind me.

I turned and came face-to-face with the fox lady from before.

“Who are you? And what do you mean I’ll be ‘eaten’?” I asked.

“My name is Youko. I’m a magic scholar. This cage is a little bit special, you see. If you enter, it will immediately devour you. If you try to get her out without using the proper emblem, the same thing will happen to her,” she explained.

“I can’t believe a cage could do something like that...”

To think that cage was some sort of magical creature... It was impossible to break in or out of that cage. The captain must have that emblem she spoke of.

“You!” I said, addressing the captain. “Give me that emblem. You have it, right?”

“What?! No! I... I don’t! Only the president has access to that! I’m not lying! I promise! I’m not!”

“The president?”

“Yes! The president of the slave-trading company we work for. He’s the one who gave us that cage and...he...he should be at the imperial market!”

The president of a slave-trading company, huh...? What a pain. Wait, if that guy went as far as to provide them with a special cage, does that mean he was after that girl from the start? She might not be a regular person, after all...

The captain didn’t look like he was lying, but that didn’t mean we could afford to go back to the empire now. Looking for a way to break the cage altogether would be much quicker.

“Would the cage attack the person inside if someone tried to break in from the outside?” I asked the scholar lady.

She clearly knew more about the true nature of this cage than that lousy captain did.

“What?! Do you plan to fight it?!”

“Yeah. I can’t really turn my ship around now.”

“Well... This magical creature is similar to mimics. They usually target intruders before their prisoners. But this cage—it’s called a cage eater, all right? They’re made out of steel for the most part, so shallow hits won’t damage them at all. They’re incredibly sturdy and...” She paused. “To be honest, I think you should just give up on saving her,” she finally let out.

“She’s...right. You should...give up... You don’t...need to die...for my sake.” The silver-haired girl struggled to get each word out. Her voice was very feeble.

Nails were sticking out from her arms, her legs, and her torso, but she still made the effort to turn our way. It must have hurt a lot.

She looked at me, her red eyes shining like rubies. I hadn’t been able to see her complexion because of the darkness, but now that the room was slightly better lit, I could see how pale she was.

“I would have given up if I were a regular person. Luckily for you, I’m not.”

As soon as I stepped into the cage—with Invincibility activated, of course—its shape changed. Steel fangs appeared on the ceiling and under my feet and tried to bite down on me.

Naturally, the attack of the cage eater was no match for me in that state, and the fangs trembled as they tried to sink into my repellent flesh. I couldn’t move my arms and legs, so I simply released a Flame Javelin from the palm of my hand right into the ceiling. The upper jaw of the monster was destroyed along with a part of the rooftop—some light finally entered the room.

“You destroyed a cage eater in one blow... You... Who are you?!” Youko’s shocked voice came from behind me.

I still have more in store, you know? She’ll probably be even more surprised when she sees my Room. I have plenty of gadgets that must seem right out of a sci-fi story to the people here.

“All right. I’ll be removing the nails now, so stay strong, okay? I’ll try to alleviate the pain as much as I can with healing magic.”

“I’m sorry, but...healing magic...and potions...won’t work... I’m...a vampire...” she started.

Ooooooh! I did entertain the idea after seeing the silver nails and the cross, but it turns out I was right.

“So—” she tried to continue.

“Are you going to tell me I should give up?” I interrupted her. “I won’t. What’s wrong with trying to help people when I have the power to do so?”

“You’re...that kind of person, huh...? You’re...right. If I had...more power...I could have saved them...” she let out, her face full of regret.

She gritted her teeth. So she wasn’t able to protect those important to her... It must have hurt even more than those wounds.

“You can wallow in self-pity later. I’ll start pulling them out, so bear with it!” I said before reaching for one of the silver nails.

If I tried to go slow, she would only end up suffering for longer. In such cases, you just had to rip the bandage off in one go. Ten nails, in total, had been stabbed into her body. I used one hand to steady her while I took them out one after the other, dumping them into my inventory. I could always melt them into silver nuggets later to make some money.

I wanted to get out of here now, but I wasn’t sure how to handle the vampire lady.

“I’m going to bring you back to my ship, but... Should I cover you with something?”

According to what I knew about vampires, they had one absolute weakness: the sun. It was a little past noon at the moment, so wrapping her in some thick fabric or covering her with a box might be better.

“No... I’m good.”

“What?! You’re a vampire! Won’t you turn to ash if you come in direct contact with sunlight?” Youko exclaimed, reacting even faster than me.

As I thought, sunlight was no good. But why did she say she was fine?

“I’m...an inheritor.”

“AN INHERITOR?! I thought your kind only existed in legends... Does that mean that—?”

“Please keep your questions for later,” I cut in. “You said your name was Youko, right? I’m sure you’re also tired after spending so much time in that cell.” I turned to the silver-haired beauty again. “What’s your name?”

“Adelheid... I’m...Adelheid Bernstein...”

“Adelheid. Got it. It will probably hurt even more when I move you, but please bear with it,” I said, picking up Adelheid princess-style before walking away.

Nails had been stabbed deep into her arms, legs, back, and torso. If I tried to pick her up in any other way, it was sure to hurt even more.

“You sure are...a strange human... Aren’t you...scared of me? I’m a...vampire...”

“You’ve never done anything to me, so I don’t see why I should be scared. If anything, the people who locked you in there are much scarier.”

“Heh heh heh...” she chuckled quietly. “You really are...a strange human...” she let out before closing her eyes.

She seemed to have fallen asleep. *I guess she couldn’t get any rest with those nails inside her. She’s the strange one for being able to survive that.*

I decided I would let Adelheid sleep in my bed. Having her sleep in a hammock or on the sofa was bound to make her wounds worse.

We finished rounding up the sailors of the slave ship and made sure they were all tightly bound before taking the people who had almost been enslaved to my Room. Lohas was waiting for us, food at the ready.

He had quickly made some potato soup—a dish that was easy on the stomach—and busied himself filling bowls for everyone. The people we had rescued were famished and voraciously dug in, stuffing themselves with soup and bread. Barbarossa brought some coffee for the adults while Paddle and Peddle prepared cups of sweet café au lait for the children. The twins were much

better suited to taking care of children compared to Barbarossa, who was a bit of an intimidating giant.

My coffee maker also provided milk and sugar, which meant there was no risk of those ever running out either. I still had no clue how this all worked, but I wasn't about to complain.

"Cap'n," Lohas called out to me. "We're running low on bread. Could you go get some more?"

"Sure, I don't mind. If there isn't enough, I'll upgrade some dark bread."

Lohas seemed to be worried about our stocks, but I could make up for a shortage of good-quality bread with Upgrade. Sometimes, I was even lucky enough to get *yakisoba pan* out of it.

While everyone was busy eating inside my Room, I brought Adelheid to my bed so that she could rest. Naturally, I had no intention to do anything strange to her.

She had open wounds all over her body... It was just painful to look at her in this state.

What should I do? She said healing magic wouldn't work on a vampire... Still, it's great that she seems to be immune to sunlight. If I'd had to protect her from the sun, moving her would have been much more difficult. I wonder if Youko can tell me more about her since she's a magic scholar...

Adelheid sometimes whined as though she was in pain, but I left her for now and went back to the main room, where everyone was enjoying lunch, to look for Youko.

I guess she was hungry too, huh? Youko had already gone through three bowls of soup and was currently enjoying a cup of coffee.

"Oh, Mister Captain," she greeted me before adding. "I must say that you're quite the peculiar person. I've never seen these kinds of spells and magic items. I would love to study them in depth, but...you wouldn't let me take them apart, would you?"

"Of course not." I immediately refused. "Actually, I came to ask you about

something else. You must know a lot of things since you're a magic scholar, right?"

"I do. My specialties are magic items, alchemy, and golems. I'm also quite well versed in medicine." She paused. "You want to talk about Adelheid's condition, don't you?"

"You're fast on the uptake. And? Is there anything we can do?"

"Well... There are things we could try, but..." She paused as she set her cup on the table. "That would require a sacrifice," she finally whispered.

The others had eaten their fill and were lounging on the sofas. They seemed to be doing much better now and were busy observing all the curiosities in the room.

"Is there no other way?"

"We could just let it take its course. She will eventually heal. It's just that it will take up to...a year? No. Considering her wounds, it will probably take at least three years for her to fully recover."

"Three years..." I sighed. "And how would we go about speeding that up?"

"Someone..." She paused again. "Someone has to give her blood. If she sucks someone's blood, her recovery speed will improve drastically."

"That's a much better option, then."

"The issue is that...after being bitten by a vampire, you'd turn into one as well—or a lesser vampire depending on the situation. Since Adelheid is an inheritor, you would probably become one as well, but...if anything were to go wrong and you ended up as a lesser vampire, you would develop a weakness to sunlight. Lesser vampires turn to ash immediately under the sun. I know you're strong, Captain, but I don't think you'd be able to do anything about that..."

So I risk being turned into a vampire... A regular person would give up and let her rest for a few years in a safe place. But I'm no regular person.

I'm probably the only one who can help her.

It so happened that in *Britalia Online* too, "Vampire" was a status alteration you could obtain under certain circumstances. The only way to get rid of it in

game was to visit the church and undergo some ritual... Either way, what mattered was that with my Immune Status ability, I didn't have to worry about status alterations.

"I see. I can handle this."

"You can handle this?! Are you planning on throwing away your humanity? You're prepared to live during the night and turn to ash the second you see the sun? Stop acting like a fool!" Youko yelled at me, shaking my shoulders and splashing coffee everywhere in the process.

"Ye be Youko, right?" Barbarossa asked, grabbing her hand. "Don't ye be worrying. Our cap'n be stronger than a thousand scurvy dogs. If he be saying he can handle it, he be meaning it. I'm happy to see ye worrying about one of me crew, but I'd be appreciating it if ye could just trust him."

At Barbarossa's words, Youko reluctantly let go of my shoulders. She let out a huge sigh and sat down again as Barbarossa set down another cup of coffee in front of her.

In spite of his appearance, he was very good at taking care of people. I knew he always made coffee for the night watchman. I had even seen him carry one of his men to bed after he had fallen asleep on the job, covering his watch for him.

"Hmm..." A masculine voice I didn't recognize suddenly came from behind me. "That lady from before... She's a vampire, right? Why would you even want to help her?"

"What?" I asked, turning to face the person who had just spoken.

It was one of the people we had saved earlier. He looked like an adventurer.

Now that I think about it, Adelheid also asked me if I was scared of her...

Several people nodded. They seemed to agree with this guy. As for Youko, she was shaking her head.

"Mister Captain," she started. "That's just how it is. Vampires are feared wherever they go. Except maybe in the Kingdom of Sentdrag. They have historic ties with vampires there..."

“Do you also think she’s a monster and should be feared, Youko?” I asked her.

“No. Not in the slightest. I have fought alongside her—I know she’s trustworthy,” she stated. “But most people wouldn’t agree. She’s lived for far longer than any human and doesn’t have many weaknesses. Her magical abilities are boundless, she can fly...and she would even recover from those gruesome injuries in a split second if she drank someone’s blood. People are scared of such powers. Still...” She paused. “Please help her if you can!” Youko finally added, looking at me intently.

She seemed determined, and I could see how much she wanted me to help Adelheid. *Good. I’m glad to see she has at least one ally*, I thought. My joy was short-lived, though, as the adventurer still had something to say.

“Why would you side with a vampire too?” he asked Youko. “They’re monsters. There’s no point in helping them! It’d only make sense if you were planning to turn her into your slave.”

I let him go on about his nonsense. *Don’t save her, she’s a monster, turn her into your slave...* He sure had a lot to say.

I guess I somewhat understood where he was coming from. That didn’t mean I didn’t think it was utter bullshit, though.

“I have no intention of turning anyone into a slave. I’m going to save her just because I want to. I don’t care if she’s a vampire, a human, or some sort of Beast-Woman.”

He opened his mouth to object again, but I threw him the most intimidating stare I could muster. It probably worked, because he fell to his knees without saying a word.

“Cap’n,” Barbarossa stepped in. “Just go to the vampire lass. I’ll handle things here.”

“All right. Thank you, Barbarossa.”

“Don’t be thanking me. I only be here because ye saved me too, savvy?”

I let Barbarossa take care of the situation in the main room and went back to my bedroom. Adelheid was still asleep but showed clear signs of distress. /

really want her to get better soon...

I disabled Invincibility and HP & MP Recovery (Medium) before cutting my arm with a knife. I was afraid my wound would close up too fast if I recovered HP continuously.

Fuck, it hurts. I feel like my whole arm is on fire.

"Adelheid," I called, shaking her softly with my other arm to wake her up. "Here's some blood. Drink. You'll feel better."

"You..." she said, opening her eyes. "Do you even know...what you're...doing? If I drink your blood...you'll become my...kin... You won't be human...anymore!"

"Do you remember that fox lady, Youko? Anyway, she already told me about all that. I'm a little special myself, so you don't need to worry. Just drink to your heart's content," I reassured her. "Actually, I'd like it if you could hurry up," I added. "Look at all the blood I wasted already."

"But..."

Argh. Do you really have to be so stubborn in such a situation?! I'll make you if I have to!

"Just drink!" I exclaimed, pressing my bleeding arm to her mouth. I looked like some weirdo trying to force someone to drink alcohol, but it didn't matter.

I hit her teeth a little too strongly and felt a surge of pain, but I didn't relent and kept my arm pressed to her mouth. My blood trickled down her lips.

Adelheid looked at me, surprised, but after one taste of blood, it seemed like her vampiric instincts awakened, and she grabbed my arm with both hands, keeping it in place as she drank her fill.

The more she drank, the more difficult it became to remain conscious.

Ngh... That's a bit much, don't you think? Is this how it feels when your HP goes down...?

I took out a potion from my inventory and gulped it down to recover some HP. I started feeling a bit better.

I figured I might as well try to regain some strength—but not too much—and

opened my skill list to add HP Recovery (Low) and Max HP Increase (Medium) to my free slots. I wouldn't recover too fast, so I could be sure that my wound wouldn't close.

We kept going with that cycle—Adelheid drinking my blood and me drinking potions to keep my HP high enough to avoid passing out—and, after a while, I noticed that the holes in her body were starting to close up. She looked much healthier now that color had returned to her face. With her wounds healed, she just needed some rest.

Right as she licked my arm one last time, I used healing magic on myself. The bite marks disappeared immediately, and I felt my strength coming back. Of course, that didn't mean the blood she had drunk had come back, so I would also have to take it easy for a while. *All right, let's put Invincibility back just to be safe.*

"Who in the world *are* you? I've never heard of anyone being able to avoid a vampiric transformation and... No." She stopped herself, getting out of bed and kneeling before me. "I should thank you first. I'm forever grateful to you for helping me escape that cage and offering me your blood."

She proceeded to bow deeply. She looked like a knight swearing an oath to their king. *Wait, she would be a vampire knight, then. That's cooler than a regular knight.*

"Don't worry about it. I only attacked that ship because I hate the empire. I'm happy to make them suffer a bit whenever I can," I told her. "My name is Masaki, by the way. The people around here call me 'cap'n,' but I have to say I'm a little sad that no one says my actual name anymore."

I was happy that everyone respected me enough to call me "cap'n," but, as always, hearing someone say my real name made me the happiest. It made sense for my subordinates to stick to that title, but I still wanted the other people I met to call me Masaki.

"Is that so? I shall refer to you as Sir Masaki, then. You may call me Adel. Those close to me all call me that. It's shorter and easier to say, don't you think?"

"You're right. I'll take you up on that then, Adel," I said. "I know your wounds

have closed up, but you're still not fully healed, are you? Thank you for your gesture, but I think you should go back to lying down."

"But..."

"Don't overdo it. Based on your manners, I can tell that you used to work at some royal court, but you should also learn how to take it easy when you're hurt."

"I'm sorry for worrying you... I will heed your advice," she said, going back to bed and drawing the covers over herself.

I'm glad she listened to me so earnestly. If she had kept trying to move around, I would have dragged her back to bed myself.

"What country are you from, by the way?" I asked. "I'd like to take everyone back to the port closest to their home."

Adel's expression turned dark.

"I... My country doesn't exist anymore. It was brought to ruin by the empire, and the royal family has already perished along with it. I joined a group of adventurers along with some of my comrades to fight against the empire's army. We wanted to buy enough time for as many citizens as possible to escape but... As you can see, I was captured. I don't know what happened to my friends... By now they must be..." she trailed off.

I didn't need her to finish her sentence to get it. If they were lucky, her friends may have found a way to flee. Some might also have ended up in cells. However, the most likely outcome was that they had already been killed.

"I understand. What do you plan to do next? We're running from the empire and heading north to the Sentdrag Kingdom. But, to be honest with you, I don't think we'll be able to avoid the war even there. If you want to look for your countrymen, I can let you out at the nearest port. That's what I'll do for the others too," I offered.

"May I follow you instead, Sir Masaki?"

"Are you asking because you want revenge?"

"No... I mean, I can't say that I don't. I do hate the empire from the bottom of

my heart. But...if I were to get captured again, I could never face my dead comrades.”

“Then why do you want to come with us?”

“You said that you would not be able to avoid the war. I don’t think it’s right for me to. I don’t want anyone else to suffer at the hand of the empire...even if those people have nothing to do with me. That and... Sir Masaki, do you have any connections within the Sentdrag Kingdom?”

“I don’t...”

I barely knew anybody in the world, let alone in that kingdom.

At first, I wanted to capture a few imperial soldiers and offer them up to the king in exchange for his letting us stay in the Kingdom, but there were just too many soldiers aboard the previous battleship that we had attacked. It would have been too much of a hassle to detain them, so I had sent them back to the empire.

My best option was probably to get the royals to like me by gifting them rare weapons, High Elixirs, and other such precious items, but since I couldn’t exactly replace them easily, I wanted to avoid that as much as possible.

“I know people in the Sentdrag Kingdom. I would be of help if you’d take me along. Of course, my help extends to the battlefield too. I don’t want to brag too much, but a vampire who can fight in broad daylight is quite something.”

This was an easy choice. Getting connections in the Kingdom was already huge. I could also expect great things from a vampire when it came to battle. The empire had taken such great care in suppressing her—it was proof enough that she was a force to be reckoned with. She was also devastatingly beautiful.

Putting her looks aside, many of the members of the Pirates of the Round Table weren’t that good at fighting.

Paddle and Peddle could use magic. The twins made good use of their natural coordination and were especially proficient at combination spells. For instance, they had been able to sink a ship last time by working together and creating a debris flow from water and earth magic, successfully piercing large holes in the hull with it.

Lohas had mastered the Flame Blade and was able to swing it at will without ever setting our own ship alight. He was also good at using flames as a shield.

As for Barbarossa, he swung the heavy two-handed Lightning Sword around with just one hand, scaring enemies in his wake.

And, finally, me.

The people I just listed were all able to take on imperial soldiers in a fight.

But the rest were not. While I had armed them with good weapons, they were only average fighters. Their equipment could only make up for their shortcomings to some extent. If they had to face seasoned soldiers, they would lose.

Of course, they were still important allies to me. They did their jobs aboard the boat flawlessly and knew more about the sea than I ever could.

“If you can help us make connections in the Sentdrag Kingdom, that would be a great help,” I said. “Let me ask you myself, then. Will you please join us?”

“Of course. I’d love to, Sir Masa— Oh. Since I’m part of your pirate crew now, I should call you ‘cap’n,’ should I not?”

“Don’t. Just call me Masaki.”

“Sure. I’ll be in your care, Sir Masaki.”

“Likewise. Let’s both work hard,” I said, shaking her hand.

The Pirates of the Round Table were now one vampire stronger. Our newest recruit was called Adelheid Bernstein, and she was a special kind of vampire, an inheritor.

“Aaah... I also want to stay here forever! So soft... I love this sofa! Cold beer is the best...”

As for the one who had miserably lost to the power of the couch—the magic scholar, Youko Izanagi—she had also decided to jump on the bandwagon and join us.

I’m not sure her reasons for wanting to join are pure but... Whatever, let’s just roll with it. She seems to be a good person.

Chapter 3

Two new members had joined the Pirates of the Round Table.

The first was the vampire knight and inheritor, Adelheid Bernstein.

As a vampire, she had the ability to fly and harden mana at will into weapons like a spear or sword. I had heard that these abilities were incredibly rare and that barely anyone else was capable of such feats.

She was a gifted magician and an exceptional swordsman. She could even detect the presence of people around her. All in all, she was absolutely overpowered.

As long as she didn't start flying around, she also looked like any regular human, so there was no risk anyone would notice she was a vampire.

Our second recruit was a magic scholar who had suddenly decided she wanted to stay with us after falling in love with the furniture and appliances of my Room. Her name was Youko Izanagi and she seemed to be very interested in me too. *Honestly, I'm kind of scared. What if she tries to dissect me?*

She was proficient in a very particular area of magic: talismans. I was curious about it, so I asked her to show me what she could do, and she accepted with a smile.

She stuck a colorful talisman on a little pile of mud and it turned into a little mud golem. Apparently, the nature of the golem changed depending on the material she used. Using rocks would allow her to make a stone golem, and if she added some iron to the mix, it would result in a golem with iron parts.

She could give life to dozens of small golems at the same time, but if she tried to build one roughly the same size as a person, then she would only be able to power a few at once. If they were destroyed, it would still take her a few days to recover her mana, so she couldn't immediately replace them. On the other hand, she had no trouble powering fifty tiny golems at the same time and would only need a few hours to regain her mana after they were destroyed.

Her powers would definitely come in handy if we ever needed to throw waves of monsters at the enemy.

She couldn't use light or darkness spells, but besides those two types, she could call upon every other element to some extent. She could even use water magic to heal people. The effects were similar to potions and couldn't compare to my healing magic, but it was still something.

All in all, I was very happy to welcome a healer who could also build golems.

She was also well versed in magic items. *If I get my hands on anything interesting, I'll ask her to appraise it.*

As far as appearance went, she had blonde hair and her breasts were a regular size. When I had first seen her on the slave ship, she was dressed like a scholar, but she had changed into a Japanese-style outfit. It reminded me of the clothes the *onmyouji* wore back in my world.

Youko was actually from an archipelago named Yamato that was located on the edge of this continent. She had been captured by the empire's men after coming here as an adventurer.

She was a gorgeous lady...as long as she kept her mouth shut. She was rowdy and drank a lot. *A bit of a waste, if you ask me.* This being said, she was very easy to get along with.

We didn't try to recruit any of the other slaves. There were a lot of young children among them, so we just left them be for the most part.

From what I understood, buying and selling slaves wasn't a crime in this world. However, abducting war orphans to sell them was strongly prohibited in most countries, including the Sentdrag Kingdom. The empire was pretty much the only one with exceptions to this rule.

Now that I thought about it, I couldn't really condemn slavery as a whole. Some sold themselves into slavery to feed their families while others did so to be fed. I also didn't have an issue with turning criminals into slaves.

Such stories were commonplace—even in Japan a few centuries ago—and, if you stopped to consider history at large, issues often arose when slavery was prohibited. People suddenly found themselves unable to provide for their

families and died of hunger, while others had to work themselves to the bone for a meager wage.

I found myself wondering whether those people had regretted being granted their freedom. At least they got to eat as slaves.

This also had an influence on unemployment rates. When a cheaper workforce suddenly flooded the market, the workers that had previously occupied low-wage positions struggled even more. Even in the modern world, there were plenty of companies that offered shit conditions, making their workers slave away on low salaries twelve hours a day, 365 days a year without a single day off.

All in all, my point was that, sometimes, ending slavery brought more trouble to everyone than keeping the system going.

We changed course and sailed toward a satellite city called Schutzwald. With those we had saved, the sailors of the slave ship we had captured, and our own members on board, our rations were dwindling. We needed to stock up before continuing our way north.

As always, I left everything navigation-related to Barbarossa and his men. If you're wondering what I was doing during our journey, well...I was studying.

"Let's begin your exam, Sir Masaki," Adel said.

"Sure."

"First, we'll be quizzing you about letters, all right? Do your best, Masaki!" Youko cheered.

"How about you do your best and get up from the sofa...?"

Youko was cheering me on from the comfort of the sofa with a cup of coffee in hand. She always tried to drink in broad daylight, so I had taken the beer dispenser away and hidden it in my inventory. She'd whined, but I couldn't be bothered to listen to her.

How long has it been since I last took an exam? My student days felt so distant. Both in terms of time and dimension.

The reason I'd suddenly decided to study was simple: I had yet to buy anything in this world.

Not that I'd had the time to try. I was thrown in jail right after being summoned and was still in the middle of my big escape. I'd been busy destroying a few frigates, holding a fun party, and rescuing people from a slave ship. That very ship was currently being dragged along by our own and we had thrown the sailors that had manned it into the cells made for slaves.

Anyway, now that I had some time, I wanted to learn how to read and write letters and numbers so I could manage in both the city we would be visiting and in our destination, the Kingdom.

I wanted the pirates to teach me, but none of them seemed to be any good at those things. Lohas could read numbers but not text. Apparently, he had struggled to learn at least that much so he wouldn't get played when buying supplies.

Thankfully, Youko and Adel had joined us. Youko was a scholar and Adel acted like a knight, so I assumed they both had a decent education and had asked them to teach me.

They immediately accepted. *Knowledge is power*, they said.

The letters people used here looked like complicated, deformed katakana, but I still somewhat managed. I would have struggled a lot more if they had looked like the Cyrillic alphabet or something else I'd never seen before.

Their numbers were an odd mix of Roman numerals and Arabic numerals. I already knew them all, so it was relatively easy for me to remember how to combine them. When it came to the letters, though, my first few exams were full of mistakes. After a few days of studying, I managed to get almost everything correct, and it was finally time for me to take my final exam.

"All right! I'm done checking my answers. Here you go," I said, handing the thin wooden tablet I used in lieu of paper to Adel.

She took the tablet and stared at the letters one by one. Youko tried to take a look by leaning forward and ended up falling to the floor. Her first reflex was to protect the cup of coffee with her life. She didn't spill a single drop. *Good*.

Getting coffee stains out is a pain.

“There isn’t a single mistake,” Adel said after a while. “You’re amazing, Sir Masaki. Have you ever received lessons in the past?”

“In my previous world, kids are taught letters and numbers from a young age. The numbers you guys use are basically the same, so it was easy for me. Even the letters are a little similar, so I probably had an easier time learning them than most.”

I had already told them both that I was an otherworlder.

Apparently, all otherworlders had mysterious powers so they immediately accepted it, saying that it made sense considering what they had seen me do. Shou was also way stronger than regular people. If I ever had to fight him without Invincibility, I would probably struggle a lot.

The only thing I had kept a secret from everyone was the existence of my Invincibility skill. I might bring it up one day but, for now, it was better to pretend that I just had good defensive abilities. It would also make it easier for me to step up and act as a shield for everyone else if the need arose.

“Ouch...” Youko whined. “I understand now. That’s why you were able to get full marks on your math tests from the get-go,” she said, painfully getting up.

“Do you think I know enough to shop without issues?” I asked.

“Of course!” she exclaimed. “You could even find a job in a castle if you wanted to. Your writing is so neat and easy to read.”

Most people couldn’t read or write in this world. Even the people who made the effort to learn, like Lohas, usually stopped at numbers. Still, among farmers and regular workers, being able to read even numbers was a rare feat.

Educational institutions did exist here, but they were so expensive that only wealthy merchants and nobles could afford them. As for knights, they did receive classes as part of their training, so most of them did know how to read.

“I think writing neatly is very important,” I explained. “There’s no point in prioritizing speed if it ends up being unreadable.”

“I agree,” Adel said. “I wish some of the scribes understood that. They tend to

make every document look like a coded message.”

I guess that was a thing everywhere, huh? Some of my colleagues also used to do that. They wrote as fast as they possibly could to “save time” and I never managed to decipher their notes. I sometimes had to go ask other colleagues to read their gibberish for me.

I enjoyed some well-deserved cookies after my exam and I reminisced about the past. Both Youko and Adel wore relaxed and happy expressions as they bit into their own cookies.

When I tried making something with my Cooking skill, I ended up with dishes that tasted very...normal. They weren’t bad, but they were far from amazing. It did save a lot of time, but I always felt like something was missing. On the other hand, activating Quintessential Flavor before cooking normally allowed me to make the tastiest dishes I had ever tasted.

Quintessential Flavor was one of the highest-level cooking skills, and it let you boost the effects of food items. I didn’t think it would have any effect on the taste, though. *What a great discovery.*

If I keep using that skill every chance I get, they’re gonna nag me to cook all the time. I shouldn’t make anything but cookies and other simple side dishes. Everything in moderation.

I was still eating my cookies and drinking a nice cup of coffee, enjoying a leisurely break in my Room, when the lookout came knocking.

“Cap’n! Land ho! We’re getting close to Schutzwald!”

“Got it,” I answered.

Schutzwald... I wonder what kind of city it will be.

I asked Adel what she knew about it. “Let me see,” Adel said, thinking for a moment. “The city is under the protection of the Kingdom and makes most of its money from its fishing industry. Business is also booming. Knights of the Kingdom are always deployed there, so it’s very peaceful.”

“Can pirates really drop anchor in such a place?”

We hadn’t stopped at any towns since I boarded this ship, so I wasn’t sure

how we would be received. I let Barbarossa decide everything when it came to sailing. After all, he was the one who suddenly decided to make me the captain, so it made sense for him to continue doing his job.

“As long as we don’t make a fuss, the soldiers won’t move,” she stated.

“Actually, I think most pirates would lend a hand to the soldiers if anyone tried something. They’re regulars in this city,” Youko added, reaching for the last cookie.

Adel was faster than her and snatched it away.

“Hey!”

“The early bird catches the worm.”

She sure was merciless for a knight.

“Still, that’s good to hear. We can dock there without worries and go ask the soldiers to handle the slavers and the people we saved.”

“I think that’s a good idea,” Adel agreed. “They get the glory for the deed and we probably get some sort of reward out of it.”

“All the better if we can get some money in the process. But I guess if we end up earning too much, we’ll become a target instead.” I sighed.

“I’m sure you’d have no issues fighting back if that happens, Masaki,” Youko said immediately. “Isn’t that sword you carry as powerful as an artifact?”

For Youko to be able to guess that with just a look meant that she sure knew her stuff. She was right, though my sword was even more powerful than she seemed to think.

I mean... It’s one of those items only the hardcore geeks can get their hands on. Some players even spent literal days waiting for the boss who dropped it.

Now that I stopped and imagined the poor monster being swarmed by dozens of players every time it appeared, I felt a bit bad for it. *Spawn, be attacked, die. Sad life.*

I guess I’m also guilty of waiting half a day to get a shot at killing it.

“I don’t think you would, but, just to be safe, don’t tell others, okay?”

“I won’t. To people in my line of work, spreading this kind of intel is taboo. If I were to blabber, I’d become an outcast.”

“I see. That’s a relief.”

I didn’t want people coming at me to steal my sword. I was perfectly able to fend for myself, but there was no need to look for trouble when I could help it.

The three of us exited my Room and walked to the front deck. We could see the city gradually getting closer.

It was fairly large for a port city and dozens of ships were docked. *Business sure is booming.*

A little farther away were large ships. They didn’t seem to be frigates like the ships I had seen in the empire.

Are those...galleons? Dragons adorned every sail. They weren’t that numerous. *Ten ships at most?*

As I thought, the naval power of the empire was really out of this world. Their ships used better technology by at least a century and they outnumbered them by far. *It’s no wonder they manage to topple nations.*

I was still standing on the deck, observing the city and the ships, when I noticed a small boat approaching us. Someone who looked like a soldier was aboard. As soon as he saw him approach, Lohas leaned over and said something to him.

“I wonder what they’re talking about,” I mused.

“They’re probably wondering why we’re dragging a slave ship,” Youko said.

After chatting with Lohas for a few minutes, the soldier steered his boat toward the slave ship. Paddle, who could help with his wind magic, and Lohas also hopped on the slave ship.

It seemed like the soldiers wanted to take the slave ship to the military port for closer inspection. Lohas and Paddle would go along to explain everything and help them move it.

We parted ways with those two for the time being while the rest of us went to dock our pirate ship at an empty spot. As soon as we were done, a few

soldiers came to us.

“Are you the pirates who saved a group of slaves?” a soldier wearing light armor with red ornaments asked.

The same dragon I had seen on the sails adorned his plate armor and his small shield. I assumed this was the coat of arms of the Sentdrag Kingdom.

“We are. We’d like you to protect them from here on. Would that be all right?”

“Naturally. We’ll escort those who still have a homeland back there and take custody of the children who have been orphaned and protect them. I swear it on my honor.”

I later learned that the custody he spoke of involved getting those children into institutions where they’d work the fields or do other simple jobs while looking for foster parents. Many became maids or menservants after growing up in such institutions. As for the adults who couldn’t return home, they were taken to underdeveloped areas and could earn enough to live a simple life in exchange for their labor. Some young people also became adventurers and tried to make a name for themselves, but the kingdom did not take care of the people who made this choice. *I guess they can’t look after everybody either.*

“Good. I’ll get everyone off the ship, so wait for a second.”

“Wait. Are there any sick or wounded?”

“No. Everyone is healthy. We already cared for the ones that had light injuries.”

“I see. Thank you.”

I said we cared for them, but I made sure not to mention how. Being able to use healing magic seemed to be kind of a big deal. Usually, losing a limb was permanent, even in this world. *Good thing I learned all that before docking.*

I gave a small package to every single one of the former slaves before sending them off.

The contents? Cookies fresh out of the oven and my prized recipe. I figured most of them wouldn’t be able to read it, so I also drew little pictures.

The kingdom would take care of them now, but I wanted to do what I could for them until the end and had thought of this little surprise.

“Thank you so much, Mister Captain!” a child exclaimed cheerfully.

“Don’t open it until you’re alone, all right? Don’t sell it, and don’t let anyone steal it from you!”

“Yes!”

The children thanked me with a smile while the adults bowed deeply in front of me.

We made sure everyone had left safely before we ourselves disembarked. Lohas and Paddle were already coming back, followed by a knight wearing luxurious armor. *Is he the big shot around here?*

The group of knights bowed politely in front of me.

After seeing such a display, I was starting to get a little stressed, but I stood tall. I didn’t want them to look down on me.

“Are you Masaki, the leader of the pirates?”

“Yeah. I’m Masaki, the captain. You are?”

“I’m the knight commander of the Chivalric Order of the Sentdrag Kingdom, Marc Alan. I would like to personally thank you for liberating these slaves and capturing the slavers.”

The Knight Commander himself had come to have a chat. Now, *that* was a big deal.

“It’s no problem. I’ve also had some issues with the empire in the past. This was payback.”

“Still. Thank you. I heard you were a pirate, but I must say you don’t look like one. You feel more...special, than that.”

I’d barely said a few words, but he immediately noticed I wasn’t a pirate. *He’s sharp.*

“It’s only natural that you would feel this way. Sir Masaki saved me from a magic cage and even managed to heal my wounds,” Adel said proudly, suddenly

coming forward. “It’s nice to see you again, Count Alan.”

“Adelheid?! It’s a relief to see you in good health. I must admit I thought you were dead when I heard word of the fall of the Valentine Empire...”

Hang on, he’s even more of a big shot than I thought he was! And Adel knows him?

We followed Count Alan and entered a gorgeous mansion—although it was just one of the defense facilities used by the knights—before being brought to the parlor. I later learned that Count Alan despised lavish things. He seemed to be the type that preferred practicality over extravagance.

Still, it was obvious that each piece of furniture was of the highest quality. Barbarossa even told me in a shaky voice that the artworks that lined the walls were from the most esteemed artists across the continent. Some were so rare that most nobles couldn’t get their hands on them. He was a little nervous to be surrounded by so much luxury.

This room was obviously used to welcome important people. *I see that social cues are the same in this world and in mine. You have to show the big shots you care.*

“I would like to once again thank you for saving Viscountess Adelheid Bernstein. Aiding our ally, the Valentine Empire, is akin to aiding us.”

What the hell?

It turned out that Adel was actually a viscountess of a fallen country. Since I had seen female knights in the Granfang Empire, I hadn’t given much thought to her status and had assumed she was also a knight.

I was taken aback, but I wasn’t the only one. Everyone else, including Barbarossa and Lohas, was stunned. Everyone, that is, except Youko. I glared over at her.

“I mean...” she started. “The Valentine Empire was known for giving titles to talented individuals regardless of gender.”

“If you knew, then you could have told us...” I complained.

“It was much more interesting this way,” she answered, grinning as though

she was having the time of her life.

Youko seemed to have enjoyed speaking with Adel sans formalities and the same seemed to have also been the case for Adel. After all, the two had been captured together, and even after learning she was a vampire, Youko wasn't taken aback with fear or hatred. This had brought them together.

"Count Alan, I am no longer a viscountess. My mother and father have both passed away and the Valentine Empire has fallen. I'm just Adelheid Bernstein, a citizen of a fallen empire and the resident vampire of the Pirates of the Round Table."

"I see... So even that person is no longer... What of your house's retainers?"

"We fought the troops of the Granfang Empire to buy time for our people to escape. We lost and...most of them turned to dust as the sun rose. I'm probably the last vampire alive."

"Despite the circumstances, I'm glad to see you again. I'm sure the king will be pleased too."

Count Alan's smile had not budged for the entirety of their exchange. I thought he looked just like a fairy-tale knight, confident and gallant, but on second thought, it may have had more to do with him just being happy to see Adel. Either way, I was surprised to learn that Adel was even acquainted with the king. *I sure saved an incredible person.*

Now that he was done chatting with Adel, Count Alan looked at me.

I tried to sit straight without letting his piercing eyes throw me off.

"I would like to make a request of you, Pirates of the Round Table."

"What do you want?" I let out before correcting my manners. "Hmm, I mean... What would that request entail?"

"You said you fled from the empire, right? Please tell us anything you can remember about their current state. Anything at all. We do have spies dispatched there, but that hasn't been enough. Anything you can tell us will be a big help."

Since Count Alan is a friend of Adel's, I can probably trust him. I don't think it's

a bad idea to share what I know with him.

“I understand. I’ll tell you everything I know.”

I figured our conversion would take a long time, so I decided to let my men go shop for supplies. If I had them stay here the whole time, they’d eventually end up with upset stomachs from the stress. Only Barbarossa, Youko, and Adel remained in the room with me.

I told Count Alan that the empire was actively summoning otherworlders. That magic couldn’t be used within their prison. How many warships I had seen. That they were bringing thousands of beastmen as prisoners from somewhere. That I blew up almost all the ships docked at the military port when I escaped.

He had been listening quietly the whole time but almost choked on air at that last sentence.

“Wh-What did you just say? I must have misheard. You couldn’t have blown up a hundred ships by yourself, could you?”

“I was pretty lax about it, so I might be wrong, but I think there were a hundred and twenty large ships—they’re frigates, right? And then for the smaller ones—the caravels, if I’m not mistaken—I think there were forty of them. I placed the bombs on the hulls myself, but it’s possible that I messed up a few. Still, considering the sound of the explosions, most sank immediately after. The rest should be damaged beyond repair.”

“Cap’n, you forgot to mention the fleet we ran into,” Barbarossa said.

Thanks for the reminder, I totally forgot about that, I thought.

“Right. After that, we ended up running into more imperial warships. We sank three, seized one to give to their prisoners so that they could go home to the east, and left the soldiers one to scurry back to the empire with. We warned them we were on our way north and wouldn’t let them off so easily if we ran into them again. I don’t think they have the guts to come after us.”

Both Count Alan and Adel looked dumbfounded as they listened to my report.

“How in the world did you sink all those ships...?” Count Alan muttered.

“I can’t fathom this... The empire’s fleet destroyed my homeland, so how...?”

Adel also whispered in shock.

“Trade secret,” I said before pausing for a while. “No, I feel like I should tell you two. One of my abilities allows me to summon monsters that will explode after a set time. I stuck those to the hulls of each ship.”

Count Alan frantically noted down what I was saying, his quill moving like crazy.

“Now I get it... No one is keeping watch under the surface of the sea. If you can hold your breath underwater for long enough, you would indeed be able to pull this off...” He trailed off before asking, “But how were you able to hold your breath for so long?”

“I recreated air. It’s not difficult once you’ve mastered wind magic.”

“You can even use magic... You said you can also fly. With these two skills, I can see how you managed such feats.”

I didn’t lie. The twins had told me about this air creation thing, so it was legit. It just so happened that I had never needed to use it thanks to Underwater Breathing.

He seemed to accept Time Bomb easily enough, though. *I guess since people like Shou are already known to summon monsters, it doesn’t sound too outlandish.*

“Do you know where the prisoners you saw in the capital came from?”

“I only saw them from my cell, so I’m not sure. I did see beastmen with wolf characteristics and others with cat features, but that’s all.”

“It’s all right. I appreciate the help. Based on your description, they’re probably from the south,” Count Alan said.

He proceeded to explain that there were more beastmen in the south and suggested that another country had probably fallen to the empire.

After that, my men also told Count Alan what they knew.

Barbarossa explained that he had been dragged into the empire’s war in the southern sea and had fled after losing many of his comrades. Apparently, joining the empire or fighting them were the only two choices available to

pirates in this area. Some of the weaker crews had even left their ships behind to become bandits on land instead.

Adel spoke of the war between the empire and her homeland and told the story of how she had ended up on a slave ship. As for Youko, she explained that she had gone to the Valentine Empire to become an adventurer but was captured.

While we were talking, a butler entered the room, poured some tea for us, and set expensive-looking sweets on the table.

I didn't usually drink black tea, but it was delicious. The sweets were also pretty good, but...to be honest, I thought the cookies I made with my Quintessential Flavor skill were even better. *I guess that skill is just too OP.*

Although we arrived in this city a little after noon, the sun was already setting by the time we'd finally finished our discussion.

"Thank you very much for sharing your stories with me," said Count Alan. "I will head back to the Sentdrag Kingdom when I'm done writing my report. I may depart as soon as tomorrow, but would you like to join me?"

"Yes. We would much appreciate the help getting into the country," I said with a grateful bow.

Having good manners was vital in my own world as well, and I knew how to behave respectfully.

I may be their "Cap'n," but I can't go acting like a pirate around nobles.

"I've prepared a lodging for you, so please rest as much as you can tonight. It will get colder as we approach the Sentdrag Kingdom—I'll make sure to find some warm clothes for everyone too."

"You're doing too much for us. Thank you."

"It's nothing. You joining us means that our naval power will greatly improve. I also need to thank you for dealing such a big blow to the empire already. If anything, I should be doing more to show my gratitude," he explained. "I believe His Majesty will also reward you when he hears about the information you provided us, so you can look forward to that."

We accepted Count Alan's goodwill and headed to the luxurious lodgings he had prepared for us.

We were relaxing on the top floor for a while when our comrades who had gone shopping joined us. They made a fuss in front of the door for too long, hesitant to enter such a high-class establishment, and ended up attracting some city guards as a result. Thankfully, Adel stepped out to explain the situation and the misunderstanding was cleared.

People tend to listen when a great beauty is the one explaining, I thought. Men worked the same in my world and in this one. That guard totally checked out her boobs.

Now that everyone was back, we had dinner, and I explained what had happened with Count Alan and what our next step would be.

If everything went well, our crew would soon work for the Sentdrag Kingdom. Or, at least, that's what Count Alan had suggested.

"We're not joining their navy?" Lohas asked.

"If we be joining, we'll be having to obey their code and fight alongside their seadogs. We won't be fighting like usual, and, to be frank with ye, those landlubbers ain't going to be wanting us in their fleet. That there Mister Big Shot understood all too well," Barbarossa answered.

Pirates should act like pirates. That's what they do best. We would be leaving the protection of the country to the navy while we cleared out the trash that ventured too close our way. If the navy was on the righteous path, we'd go down the path of darkness instead.

"Now that everything's been said... Off to bed, guys!" I ordered.

"AYE, AYE, CAP'N!"

They hurried to bed. I had let them drink a little during dinner, but we had to stay proper. After all, we'd be on our way to the Sentdrag Kingdom tomorrow. I wanted everyone to be in top form and no one argued, settling in the fancy beds without a word.

Barbarossa was almost unstoppable when he started drinking, so I had Lohas

deal with him. I said he could drag the old dog to bed if he had to. *I'm sure he'll manage.*

In the end, all of us enjoyed the comfort of our soft, fancy beds and replenished our strength ready for the following day.

I awoke from a great night's sleep, got out of bed, washed my face, and immediately headed out for my usual training session. There, I found Adel, already up and swinging her sword.

Adel could change the shape of her sword however she wanted and her irregular stances reflected that ability. She suddenly moved her sword as if she was holding a spear before switching to a scythe or hammer stance.

I pitied the people who practiced orthodox forms and had to face her. For most soldiers—who'd all received the same standard training—she must have been the worst possible adversary.

She greeted me as soon as she noticed me. "Good morning, Sir Masaki."

I used to run into Adel in the morning a lot back while we were still at sea. We often sparred as part of our respective training. Depending on the day, we'd fight using weapons or barehanded.

"I'm going to pass on today's spar and just jog for a bit. What about you?" I asked.

"I'll keep you company," she said. "Enjoying the morning sun with a light run sounds nice."

Her smiling face was lit by the rays of the rising sun, and my heart skipped a beat. She looked somewhat mystical, and I was enraptured by her beauty. I hadn't felt that way in ages.

I forced myself to calm down, refusing to let those feelings overwhelm me, and started running instead.

"Let's go! The loser has to make coffee after this!" I said as I tried to focus on running. I wanted to kill off my feelings.

"Hey! Wait!" Adel exclaimed.

We jogged through the city bathed in the morning sun and saw people cleaning and setting up their shops. I even spotted an old man sleeping on the floor in a dim corner. He was holding a bottle of alcohol. If he could sleep on the streets without getting attacked, it had to be pretty safe around here.

Not that he should be passing out drunk in the streets either way, I thought.

We circled back to our lodging after a while. A short run like that was not enough for us—a vampire and someone using Physical Reinforcement (Extra High)—to break a sweat.

I didn't go all out to show off my skills and ran at a nice pace. My body felt warm and relaxed.

As for our little bet, Adel ended up winning. *To be honest, I wouldn't even be able to come close without my skills.*

We went back inside and entered my Room. I served Adel coffee and chocolate-chip cookies and was busy pouring myself a cup when I heard someone knocking.

"Come in," I said, thinking it was one of my men.

"I hope I'm not intruding," Count Alan answered, coming through the door. "What a nice aroma... May I ask where this room came from? There should be no such room here."

Well, well, well... It's regrettable, Mister Count, but now that you've learned my secret, I have no choice but to... Nah, I'm messing around, I'll just explain it to him.

"This is a special space I can access with my magic. There's access to water, and we usually cook here. This isn't the only room, by the way—there's a bathroom and a bedroom too. I do realize how incredible this space is so I'm keeping it secret. Only our crew and the people we saved last time know about it. I'd be very thankful if you could stay discreet about this as well, Count. Here, take a bribe," I said, handing him the cup of coffee I had poured for myself.

"This magic is indeed prodigious. I've never seen most of the magic items you have here. If the other nobles knew about this, they would certainly plot to get their hands on it. You're right to keep this hidden."

I guess my coffee maker ended up being mistaken for a magic item again. It is indeed very practical.

“Hm... What a subtle and deep flavor!”

“Try these too,” Adel said, pushing the plate of cookies his way. “Sir Masaki is the one who made them. They’re even better than the sweets they serve at the palace.”

It seemed like the cookies I made using Quintessential Flavor were even better than I thought.

“I’ll give it a try,” he said, picking one up and taking a bite. “Now I understand your reactions to yesterday’s hospitality. If you get to enjoy such delicacies like this every day, I wouldn’t care for other sweets either.”

So he did notice. How sharp.

“I’m glad to receive your praise,” I said. “Why are you here so early? We still have some time before departing for the Sentdrag Kingdom, don’t we?”

“I received a report this morning.”

“A report?”

“An imperial warship is on its way here. One of our units tried to stop it, but it seems like a wind-magic user is on board. They failed in arresting them.”

“A single ship? That’s suspicious,” I said.

Until now, the empire had destroyed its enemies with overwhelming numbers. For them to suddenly send a single ship... It was obviously some sort of ploy. *This is dangerous...*

“Let’s hurry as well,” I added. “I have a bad feeling about this.”

“So you also think it’s strange...” he sighed. “But we aren’t yet ready to set sail. It’s all been on too short notice.”

“Our ship has been loaded, and we’re ready to depart anytime,” I offered.

“Could my troops and I join you? I hope I’m just worried for nothing but...” He trailed off.

“No problem,” I said, and gulped my coffee in one go.

I went to explain this to my men. Even though they were currently having breakfast, they reacted fast, emptying their plates in a matter of seconds and heading to the ship with their belongings.

I started following them but suddenly had a realization. *We're missing one person! Youko's still sleeping!*

"I will go get her," Adel said after a sigh. "Sir Masaki, please lead the count to the ship."

"Thanks. I can't exactly barge into a lady's room..."

I left Youko to Adel, and showed Count Alan and his troops to our ship. After a few minutes, Adel appeared, carrying a half-asleep Youko on her back.

"So...sleepy..." she whined.

"Come on! It's time to wake up!" I yelled.

She's not a morning person, huh? She won't be of any help if something happens.

"If you don't wake up, I'm taking the sofa away," I added.

"I'M UP! HELLO! GOOD MORNING!" she reacted immediately.

Now she's up, huh? The process had been a bit tedious, but we finally had everyone aboard.

The count had already settled the fees for our accommodation, so we were free to depart immediately. Paddle and Peddle used wind magic to make sure we didn't waste any more time.

I checked our surroundings on my map. There were a few fishing boats here and there. I was a hundred percent sure those were actual fishing boats and not the empire in disguise because the marks on the map read "fishing boat." If they weren't, the system would have added a question mark next to them.

Getting to the Kingdom of Sentdrag from Schutzwald usually took approximately half a day. However, we were sailing at full speed thanks to the twins' magic so, according to the count, it would only take us two hours at most.

I had given them plenty of MP potions. Now they just had to put in the work.

As for me, I rearranged my skill list to be ready for a fight at any time.

Passive skills: MP Recovery (Medium), HP & MP Recovery (Medium), Physical Reinforcement (Extra High), Close-Combat Mastery (High), Heightened Senses (High), Leadership (Medium).

Active skills: Oversword, Sonic Blade, Grand Armor, Levitation.

I kept my usual combo and added two skills that might come in handy to protect Mister Big Shot if needed. Grand Armor was a defensive skill while Levitation gave the ability to float in the air for a set time.

Both skills could be used on a rather large area and affected teammates as well as the user. With Grand Armor, I could boost everyone's defense *a lot* in one go. As for Levitation, it would let me make my comrades hover in midair. If we ran into a situation where we risked falling into the sea, it would help a lot. Although it didn't allow people to fly for real like Wing, you could still hover for a while.

I had just finished getting my skills ready when a voice sounded in my ears.

<I can't sense anything strange around us for now. I'll keep patrolling.>

It was Adel. We used a magic spell called Telepathy to converse with each other without speaking.

When I asked her to keep watch from the sky earlier, Youko advised us to use Telepathy so we could stay in contact. The method was simple. We just had to hold hands while activating the spell. Now we were linked.

It was a bit strange to hear someone speak right inside my head at first, but, more than that, I was surprised to see an interface window pop up with the first communication. It was the Log.

In game, the Log was pretty much a chat box separated into several

categories. From there, you could talk with other players by using private messages, otherwise known as “Whispers.” Apparently, Telepathy was being processed in much the same way as Whispers, and I could see everything we had said written there.

There was also a category called “Party Communication” which allowed only teammates to see your messages.

I tried it out, and, although my teammates were able to hear me, they could not answer. There was no such issue with Whispers, so I created links with the people who could use Telepathy.

Messages sent with “Shout” could be heard by everyone in the area. If I used it, my voice would reach every single person up to the corners of my map so I couldn’t really try it out for no reason.

<Got it. If you get tired, come back, all right?> I messaged back.

I faced the horizon and...pretended to look at the sea while I stared at my map some more. There were several display settings available—I could check out what was at the bottom of the sea or even underground if I wanted to.

I was focused and prepared to block attacks from above, in front of, and under us. I had zoomed out as much as possible to see threats from afar as well.

“At that speed, the shore of the Sentdrag Kingdom will soon come into view,” Count Alan said. “See this cliff? Once we go beyond it, we’ll be in Sentdrag.”

“There are quite a lot of cannons set up on that cliff,” I remarked. “I can see fortifications too. From the looks of it, the empire shouldn’t be able to attack you too easily even with a large armada.”

Count Alan showed me his map, explaining that the coastline of the kingdom was deeply indented with coves. The military port was located between two cliffs, and a canal continued all the way through there up to a large lake that the people of Sentdrag were particularly fond of. A bit farther away was another canal that could be used by private ships and merchants that led to the same lake. Since the commercial port was located on the shore of the lake, merchant vessels had to go up this canal.

Atop the cliffs, they’d lined cannons and large crossbows. *They’d put quite a*

bit of effort into their defenses.

Still, the longer I looked, the more I felt unsettled. I still had a bad feeling...which suddenly became a reality.

“What the—?!”

“Sir Masaki! This is bad! Leviathan, the sea god, is attacking the kingdom! The navy is already fighting it!”

A large shadow suddenly appeared at the edge of my map right as Adel reached out.

“I just noticed it too! I’ll head there immediately. Don’t do anything dangerous, Adel!” I responded.

“Understood!”

“Did something happen?” Count Alan asked, having noticed the shift in my expression.

“I just received word that the Leviathan god or something is attacking the kingdom as we speak.”

“Impossible! Why would the Leviathan do that?”

“I don’t know. The battle has already started, though. I’ll be going ahead,” I said in a hurry. “Paddle! Peddle! Full speed ahead! Barbarossa! You’re in charge now!”

“AYE, AYE, CAP’N!!!”

I buffed my allies with Protection, Quick Bite, and Powered, and then activated Grand Armor and Levitation to further support them.

I took out MP and HP potions from my inventory to make up for the costs and downed them as fast as I could. I couldn’t waste time recovering naturally.

“Sir Masaki! Please protect my country!” Count Alan pleaded.

“You got it!” I agreed quickly and set off at full speed with Wing in the Leviathan’s direction.

Soon, I saw a huge sea dragon thrashing about with uncontested fury. It was much larger than the frigates and lived up to its title “sea god,” as Adel had

called it.



Adel had flown all the way to scout out the port, but when she spotted the beast, she doubted her eyes. The Leviathan, revered as the god of the sea, was in the middle of attacking the warships along with its familiars.

The soldiers of the kingdom were pouring all of their strength into the battle but were at a loss. Neither shells, nor arrows, nor magic could breach the aqueous membrane that surrounded the beast. On the other hand, the Leviathan's water blasts shattered their ships apart easily.

The Leviathan's familiars, the sea serpents, were also tough, and jumped at warships and fishing boats alike. The soldiers retaliated, but in the face of so many strong monsters, it was incredibly hard for even seasoned fighters to hold their own.

Adel's first reflex was to contact her savior, Masaki.

He had also sensed the presence of the Leviathan. His senses were as sensitive as Adel's—if not more so.

<I just noticed it too! I'll head there immediately. Don't do anything dangerous, Adel!>

<Understood!>

As soon as she was done talking with Masaki, Adel sped toward a fishing boat that was on the verge of being sunk by a sea serpent. She turned her raw magical energy into a spear and threw it. It pierced the serpent's head, killing it on the spot.

"I... I'm saved?! What just happened?!" The fisherman was confused.

"You'll have time to think later. Focus on escaping for now!" Adel ordered.

"You... You saved me! Thank you so much!"

"I don't need your thanks, just hurry!"

"Y-Yes!"

He finally listened to Adel and immediately steered his boat away from the

disaster toward the canal, a place the monsters had not yet reached.

Adel continued to materialize spears, launching them at sea serpents. Spotting a cluster of the familiars, she turned her mana into a circular blade to decapitate several in one strike. Still, there were too many of them.

The sea serpents were not about to let themselves go down without a fight and blasted water at Adel.

She evaded their attacks, but more and more of them were setting their sights on her. High-velocity water streams were flying at her from every direction, driving her into a corner.

Don't do anything dangerous, Adel!

Masaki's words popped into her mind again. If she retreated, the sea serpents would go back to attacking the allied warships and fishing boats. Next to her, a ship sank after taking one too many hits.

He told me not to put myself in danger, but...if I retreat, these people will die!

I wonder if he'll come for me again... she thought.

Adel had only stopped to think for an instant. But that instant was becoming her downfall.

Noticing her hesitation, the sea serpents reorganized and attacked at once. Adel was one second too late to dodge. A strong stream, sharp as a blade, dug into her arm's flesh.

"Argh!"

Although she was able to move about under the sun, vampires were significantly more powerful at night. Her self-healing powers couldn't catch up. She wouldn't be able to recover before the night fell.

Now that Adel had been weakened, the sea serpents continued their offensive, firing one water blast after another.

Adel couldn't attack and defend at the same time in her current state and instead focused on evading. This prompted some of the serpents to split off and return to attacking the ships.

“No!”

I can't watch any more people die.

Spotting a stream of water leaving a serpent's mouth, heading for a ship, she dashed at full speed, erecting a wall of mana right before it hit.

The sea serpents were merciless. Seeing that she was distracted, they opened their jaws to attack her once again. More than thirty monsters were focused on her. Even if she were to use all of her mana defending herself, it would not be enough.

“Masaki!” she screamed.

At that moment, Adel's sorrowful voice did not sound like that of a dignified knight. She was a young girl crying for help.

The moment before her fate was sealed, a large fiery spear came flying and crashed into their heads.

“I made it in time! Adel! Are you okay?!”

She raised her head, looking in the direction of the voice, and saw the person she had been waiting for. Masaki was here.



Pheeeeew! I almost didn't make it!

Even at full speed, covering the distance up to the edge of my map took me longer than I expected.

When I finally made it, Adel was protecting the kingdom's fleet from water cannons. I had warned her not to put herself in harm's way, but I could see that she was hurt... Trying to save others was a good thing, although I wished she'd treasure her own life a little more.

With the sea serpents preparing to fire at Adel, I conjured a Flame Javelin while picturing something very specific in my head—an image of the spear locking onto several targets at a time and piercing each of their crania.

My magic training had paid off, and my single spear separated itself into several spears midair, each destroying a serpent's head.

The monsters all came crashing through the surface of the sea in a second.
Dang, that was so cool!

First, I had to take care of Adel's wound. She'd have trouble fighting like this.

"You're hurt, Adel... Take some of my blood," I said.

It wasn't an offer, it was a demand. I disabled Invincibility and sliced into my arm with my mithril knife. I would be in danger if monsters attacked me while I was in this state, so I used Gravity Wall. Sea serpents wouldn't be able to touch us for a while.

"I'm sorry. I ended up overdoing it..."

"You fought to protect these people, right? I won't ever blame you for trying to protect someone. You did well, Adel," I said, gently petting her hair as she sucked blood from my arm.

These serpents aren't gonna let us have our moment, huh?

They were already preparing to launch another attack in our direction. I stopped petting Adel and raised my hand to conjure another guided Flame Javelin.

Ha ha ha, they're such trash monsters. One blow and they go BOOM... All right, all right. I shouldn't get too ahead of myself.

Adel was still pressed close to me, gulping down my blood.

The thrill of the battle was bringing out emotions I had buried deep within myself. I forced myself to focus. We were in the middle of a fight.

As soon as Adel had drunk enough blood, her wound closed up in a matter of seconds.

"I'm sorry. I let you do all the work."

"It's all right. You can make up for it now. I'll distract the huge thingy over there, you take care of the familiars," I told her after downing an HP potion.
"And don't—"

"Don't do anything dangerous.' I know. I won't make the same mistake again."

“Good. Let’s go, then!”

We both jumped into action. I activated Invincibility again and used my new guided javelins to reduce the sea serpents’ numbers on my way.

Now that there were fewer familiars for Adel to worry about, I concentrated all of my strength into a single Flame Javelin and launched it in the direction of the large dragon. My attack had the same power and size as the one that had once busted a ship’s mast in one hit.

And it...ABSOLUTELY DIDN’T WORK! *What the hell?! Even if this type of attack isn’t the most effective against it, it should at least do something?! I blew up half a frigate with that skill!*

My Flame Javelin did hit the actual body of the Leviathan after evaporating its water membrane, but it didn’t succeed in leaving even the smallest scar on its scales.



“I guess it won’t work unless I use a different element.”

Although it didn’t take any damage, the Leviathan turned to stare at me, the only person who had managed to dispel its protective armor.

My original goal was to distract it, so all in all, it’s a success.

It opened its maw wide and fired a blast of water at me. Compared to this tsunami, the sea serpents from earlier looked like kids playing with water guns.

Naturally, it was still useless in the face of my Invincibility. I wasn’t hurt, nor was I sent flying by the pressure. I was still hovering in the same spot, unbothered. If the attack had been classified as a physical hit, I should have been pushed back, but nothing of the sort happened. This meant it was a magic spell.

The Leviathan seemed surprised. In a way, I understood. Its attack literally didn’t do anything. *Ha ha! It looks so confused!*

It was time for payback. *That thing is so huge. I should use it to experiment a little while I’m at it.*

“Vortex Blast.”

I conjured a lightning spell. Lightning-aspect spells were the most difficult to cast within the category of wind-magic attacks.

The amount of MP I had to burn to use it couldn’t even be compared to Flame Javelin, but it still wasn’t enough to affect my flying. After all, my GM equipment reduced my MP consumption by thirty percent.

Bluish bolts of light started concentrating between my hands as sparks flew all around me. I focused on holding it for a while before pushing both of my hands forward, releasing a laser beam made of electricity.

It’s something I’d been thinking about when I used it in game, but now that I was seeing it in real life, it really was just like a human rail gun.

I probably look more like a Charged Particle Cannon at this point.

My fully charged Vortex Blast was about to hit the Leviathan when it...was completely dispelled. It had been absorbed by the water membrane—which

had already fully regenerated! *Argh! What a waste of MP!*

I did learn that electricity wouldn't work, so it wasn't a complete waste but...
Yeah, no, I still feel like I used up my MP for nothing.

It did succeed in keeping the Leviathan's attention on me. It had realized that blasting water wouldn't work, and this time, it produced large whirlpools and propelled its massive body toward me.

I didn't take any damage from the impact, but its kinetic energy did push me back. I might have been able to avoid it if I were in a position to brace myself, but I was hovering in the sky. There was no way I could brace myself, and I was sent flying.

It might not have hurt, but I felt a bit sick from rotating in the air.

<Masaki!!! Are you all right?!> called Adel through Telepathy.

<I'm good. Don't worry. How is it going on your side?>

From where Adel was standing, it must have looked like a devastating hit. I was totally fine, though. I threw in a bullshit explanation, telling her that I had managed to parry in time, and she sounded relieved. Invincibility was like the perfect parrying skill, so I didn't really lie, did I?

<I'm almost done clearing out the small fry. The soldiers are also having an easier time now that they can focus on the familiars without worrying about the Leviathan. The Pirates of the Round Table finally reached us too! They're rescuing people as we speak,> she reported.

<I see. I have something else to tell you. I noticed a single ship to the northwest. Once you're done, go check it out.>

<Understood!>

I had moved my map window to the edge of my field of vision to keep track of what was happening, and I could see a ship far from the battlefield. It didn't look as if it was coming here or running away. I wanted to go check it out myself, but I had my hands full with the Leviathan.

I tried using a blade formed from cutting winds and even threw stone missiles at it, but nothing worked. I figured there was no point in trying out water magic

as it definitely would not have any effect.

Since magic didn't seem to be the way to go, it was time to try my favorite combo—Oversword and Sonic Blade. Most of the attack's power was stopped by the thick water membrane, but it wasn't completely useless. I could see a slight cut on the monster's scales. If I could get my combo to hit at full force, it would deal much more damage.

The Leviathan roared and started lashing out, slapping its humongous tail around until it eventually came my way. It was too large for me to avoid and I was sent flying back once more. I hit the surface of the water several times, ricocheting like a skipping stone.

My vision was going round and round, but I felt less sick than expected. I guess the effects of Immune Status had kicked in. Without it, I may have vomited myself to death.

The Leviathan stood proud. It probably thought that its new strategy was the way to go and continued attacking me with its tail.

I dodged at the last moment by rushing forward, but it kept coming after me.

So fucking stubborn! I whined, but I had finally found a way to counterattack.

The constantly regenerating water membrane was the most annoying thing to deal with here. It blocked both magic and physical attacks.

Then I just need to get rid of it. With my Flame Javelin.

I dodged the Leviathan's tail and soared in the air once more. Once I was high enough, I suddenly let myself fall before speeding up to pass right under its head. By entering its blind spot for a split second, I had time to aim at the body part that looked the weakest—its abdomen—and throw a Flame Javelin at point-blank range.

The area surrounding the impact immediately turned white as it was engulfed in steam. Somehow, I'd managed to burn its scales a little. Probably because I had put everything I had into the blow.

Now's my chance! Before the water membrane could regenerate, I used Oversword to slash at the monster.

Three additional damage-over-time waves helped me deal extra hits, and since the Leviathan was not protected by anything at the moment a large bloody gash appeared on its body.

ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOAAAAAR!!!

It sounded almost like a human scream. The Leviathan was revered as a god, but even gods felt pain.

I had finally found the right strategy. Its membrane was already regenerating, but if I could burn it again, I would be able to land more direct strikes. It would take a while, but I could definitely get rid of it eventually.

I checked my MP and noticed how much that last Flame Javelin had drained. Since I had also used Vortex Blast a while ago, I only had around half of my meter left. I drank an MP potion and went to continue the fight, but suddenly, Youko contacted me with Telepathy.

<Masaki! You can't kill the Leviathan!> she cried out.

<What?! What the hell are you on about?>

Why can't I kill it? If I let it go, it'll destroy the Sentdrag Kingdom!

<Just listen to me! The Leviathan controls all the sea monsters in this whole area! If it suddenly dies, there won't be anything to keep them in check anymore! They'll attack!>

<Then what am I supposed to do?! I've only got its attention for the time being, but there's a limit!>

<The Leviathan normally just defends the tranquility of the sea. It usually attacks invading imperial fleets. There must be a reason it suddenly turned against the kingdom!>

<So you want me to find out why it had a change of heart?> I asked as the beast swung its tail at me again.

I couldn't fight and discover the Leviathan's motives at the same time. And if I kept stalling, it was only a matter of time before I lost my focus or it just

decided not to bother with me anymore and directed its ire back toward the Sentdrag Kingdom.

On the other hand...if killing it meant a rampage of sea monsters, it'd be a huge disaster for not just the kingdom but every nearby port city.

<Exactly! I know I'm asking for a lot, but good luck!> Youko responded.

<Stop making it sound so easy! Argh! I got it. I'll do it!> I shouted back as I dodged a few more of the Leviathan's attacks.

I ended the chat and focused my attention on the Leviathan.

I decided to go back on the offensive and observe it closely. Speaking about observing...there was a good skill for that: Appraisal. It could be used on enemies to gauge their strength but could also be used to discover more about unknown items.

I evaded a few more hits as I switched out Sonic Blade for Appraisal in my skill menu. Then I activated it on the Leviathan.

Leviathan—God of the Sea

Race: High Ancient Dragon

HP: ??????/??????

MP: ??????/??????

Status Alteration: Subjugated (Max.)

I can't see its HP and MP?! How come even Appraisal isn't working there? And...there's something fishy here. What's up with its status?

I couldn't fathom a spell that would work on such a large monster. There's no way they could subjugate it with a collar either... Maybe there's a hint somewhere. I'm gonna have to look it over thoroughly.

I continued to duel the Leviathan, just to keep its eyes focused on me, as I started to check its body. The only problem was...it was too damn long! Even though its tail was coming out of the water, my map was telling me the dragon

was over ten kilometers in total. *No way in hell they got a collar on this thing! It's way too big.*

Still, I couldn't give up, and I continued to look it over until I heard Adel's voice.

<Masaki! The Leviathan is being controlled by someone! Don't kill it!>

<I know! But I can't figure out what's controlling it!>

<It's that empire ship you spotted earlier! They were quite eager to tell me the truth after I cut them up a little. They used some sort of spear!>

<I can't see any spear where I'm looking...>

Wait. With that thick water membrane surrounding its whole body, they couldn't have stabbed its scales!

So if it wasn't on the outside of its body, then...it had to be on the inside! I had no clue how, but those imperial bastards had found a way to get that spear inside the Leviathan. I was almost certain that was where it was.

<What's wrong, Masaki?>

<The Leviathan is protected by a water membrane so...I think that spear is inside it.>

<Inside?! We can't do anything about it if that's the case!>

<Of course we can. I'll just have to let it eat me. Once I'm inside its belly, I'll just have to look for the spear and get rid of it. Easy, right?>

<What are you talking about?! You can't do that Masaki, you—>

<It's the easiest way to deal with it,> I declared, interrupting her.

<Wait! Masaki!!!>

Ignoring her protests, I cut the telepathic communication and rushed at the Leviathan, waving my sword at its nose.

It blocked most of my attack with its membrane, but I still managed to scratch the tip of its nose. It flew into a rage, opening its mouth right in front of me.

The beast likely wanted to bite down upon me, but that's exactly what I'd

been hoping for. This was the quickest approach.

ROOOOOAR!

It gobbled me down with a loud roar.

I had gotten inside its mouth—just as planned. *It's dark. I can't see anything.*

With Invincibility, I hadn't gotten hurt in the process, but there was no source of light inside the monster's body and everything was pitch black. I used Wisp—a spell that produced light—to illuminate my surroundings.

Urgh. I should have expected this...

My surroundings were pretty gory, which was probably only natural considering I was currently *inside* a freaking dragon. I would have been a fool to expect it to look like a regular cavern.

I opened my map to check whether it'd work even in these circumstances and was able to see every nook and cranny of the Leviathan's body. *Is my map treating this like a dungeon?*

I was walking in very acidic liquid and the Cloak of the Azure Dragon—which I wore for camouflage—was melting from the bottom up. It would have been a shame to let such a precious item melt away, so I decided to take it off.

Without my camouflage, my armor shone brightly. *Guess I don't even need Wisp now.*

My GM equipment was not affected by the strong acid at all, so I didn't need to bother hovering above the ground and walked forward carefully. I did have Invincibility protecting me, but who knew what could happen inside a dragon?

I walked around for a while until white lizards appeared out of nowhere and jumped at me. *Are they supposed to be white blood cells? Like an internal defense mechanism?*

They weren't slow, but they might as well have been snails compared to the Leviathan itself. I slashed at them with Oversword and they disappeared in a puff of white smoke. *Huh, I don't remember the sea serpents doing that. I guess*

these guys are different?

I continued to move forward, defeating the lizards as I walked, until I eventually spotted something that wasn't lizards or innards. It was a strange tree that emitted a dull ominous glow. A skeleton laid next to it.

On closer inspection, there was a spear hidden in its roots. *How suspicious.*

This had to be the cause of this mess.

I studied the skeleton more in detail. It was still wearing cheap rags and a particularly familiar collar was dangling from its neck. It looked exactly like the one those imperial bastards had tried to put on me. *They must have been a slave or a prisoner of the empire...*

I had a pretty good idea of what had happened now. They had fed this poor fellow to the Leviathan with the spear in hand. When they died, the spear took root inside the Leviathan's body, growing into that ominous tree.

They're a victim too, I thought, looking at the pile of bones. I reached out and picked one of them up. Thankfully, it was counted as an item.

It's too sad to leave them here alone... I'll gather their remains and give them a proper burial later.

As I was putting his remains inside my inventory, a little pendant emitting a rainbow-colored glow rolled to the ground. It was the only keepsake this person had left so I picked it up too.

I might be able to find out more about them with this.

Once I was done, I took my sword in hand again and slashed at the tree. The same water membrane that had been protecting the Leviathan on the outside stopped my blow.

"Then I'll go with this!"

I already knew how to handle that membrane after all the fighting I had done earlier. I conjured a Flame Javelin and slammed it into the tree with all my strength. Just like before, the membrane started evaporating and the surface of the tree ended up scorched. I had hoped to completely destroy the tree with my spear, but it was sturdier than I thought.

Still, I couldn't waste any time, and I used Oversword to lacerate it before the membrane regenerated. The additional damage-over-time waves kicked in, and the tree splintered into tiny pieces. I tried to salvage some of them, but they immediately disappeared into purple smoke.

"So they won't leave any proof behind..."

Right as I sheathed my sword, the Leviathan started thrashing around, its insides pulsating with every motion. It was trying to get rid of the intruder within.

Fuck! It's trying to digest me! I activated Wing and jumped before I ended up in an...interesting place.

I retraced my steps until I found the entrance—aka its tongue and fangs. Its mouth was wide open so I used that opportunity to fly right out. The sun blinded me. *Ah, I'm out. I never want to go inside a monster again.*

I need to put my cloak back on, I suddenly remembered. My GM gear was way too eye-catching without it.

A voice I wasn't familiar with reached me through Telepathy.

<Otherworlder, you have released me from that detestable binding force. I offer my thanks to you.>

I looked around, trying to figure out who had just spoken, but there was no one else around. Therefore, it could have only come from the Leviathan. I'd never expected it would suddenly talk to me.

<I should apologize, actually. You were dragged into a human quarrel, and I ended up hurting you,> I responded telepathically.

<HA HA HA! I was subjugated and could not control my strength, but still...to think a mere human was able to hurt me! How many thousands of years has it been?>

As expected of a god. It sure has lived a long time.

<I was desperate and I didn't know you were being controlled until well into our fight. Please forgive me.>

<There's nothing to forgive. I shall bestow a reward upon you for freeing me

from the irritating chains that clouded my will. Not to mention, we just had a very satisfying bout. You deserve my respect for managing to cut through my defenses unharmed. You may outlive me, kid! HA HA HA!!!>

The sea god that stood proudly in front of me seemed to be having a good time. *I only managed that thanks to Invincibility! I would have been long dead without it!*

<If I may, what exactly are you planning to give me? If it's something like eternal life, I'd rather you didn't.>

<I do not have any such power. This shall be your reward.>

As it spoke, the Leviathan created a small sphere made of light, and it flew toward me. I didn't know how to receive his gift and extended my open hands, waiting. As soon as it reached me, the light disappeared, revealing a blue bracelet. It was beautifully ornate, and I loved that the deep blue of the bracelet didn't needlessly glitter under the sun.

What a fine bracelet, I thought.

<This is a beautiful piece. I really like the design,> I said honestly.

<I do not know what "design" means, but I'm glad to hear you like it. As long as you hold on to this bracelet, my retainers shall aid you. I'm sure you will need their help if you're to continue your fight against the empire. This bracelet will also allow you to summon a water dragon. Make good use of this ability.>

Summon a water dragon? There was only one class in *Britalia Online* that could summon dragons—the Dragon Knights. But if memory served me right, they could only summon flying wyverns... I checked my spell list and noticed a new skill had indeed appeared. It read "Water Dragon Invocation."

Leviathan's Bracelet: A bracelet representing the gratitude of the sea god, Leviathan. The mighty sea will come to the aid of whoever bears this bracelet.

Special Ability: Water Dragon Invocation

Rarity: EX (Extra Rare)

It's my first time seeing an EX item... My GM equipment never had a rarity ranking in the first place, so I wasn't surprised that it didn't here either, but I had never seen any Extra Rare item in *Britalia Online* either.

This new spell consumed a crazy amount of MP. I could still somehow pull it off thanks to my equipment and buffs, but even I wouldn't be able to use it several times in a row.

<I get it now. You gave me something amazing. Thank you.> Then I asked, <Don't you want to get back at the empire for what they did to you?>

<An old oath forbids me from attacking human lands. And, if I were to unleash my fury on you puny humans, I would harm those who bear no sin as well. I may even submerge the whole continent under the waters. I have no intention of going that far, and I will not act on that grudge of mine. I shall leave the matter in your hands.>

I had seen the strength of its water breath. If it started blasting the empire, the regular citizens, the slaves, and the prisoners would all be killed alongside the soldiers. The poor animals that lived in the empire's lands would also be dragged into the mess.

For an almighty god, the Leviathan is pretty considerate.

<That and...revenge sounds like a lot of work. I enjoy a simple life. Eating and sleeping are good enough for me,> it added.

<So that's your actual reason?!>

The hell?! Here I was praising it for its godly benevolence when it's just a lazy bum!

<I shall take my leave. If I remain here, the puny humans over there will be troubled. I took a liking to you, little otherworlder, so I'll offer some advice. Be careful around other otherworlders. They're powerful beings and threaten the stability of this world. I hope you will not follow the same path.>

<Thank you for the warning. Be careful not to chow down on anything weird next time!>

<I learned the hard way not to trust offerings too easily. I shall order those who worship me to bring something better next time. I will not eat humans again.>

Good to see it has learned its lesson... Since it loves eating so much, it wouldn't hurt to give it a little parting gift.

<I'm happy to hear that. Let me give you something to make up for the trouble. It might not be enough for a giant dragon like yourself, but I hope you enjoy it anyway,> I said, taking out some homemade cookies from my inventory.

They soon left my hands, surrounded by a bright light, and flew toward the Leviathan.

<I accept your offering. I will now return to the depths of the sea. I wish you luck in your future endeavors.>

<Thanks. I'll smash the empire for you, so don't worry and rest up.>

The Leviathan moved its large head up and down at my words as if to nod before diving into the sea. Its movements were slow and calculated, and it disappeared without any waves, leaving the surface of the sea calm and undisturbed.

I hoped I'd never cross paths with it again. It was tiring to handle such a large monster. *He threw me around so many times I still feel sick.*

Suddenly, something closed in on me from below.

"What?!"

Whatever was approaching was so fast that a gust of wind made me lose my balance. I freaked out for a second, wondering what was happening until I found myself in Adel's arms.

She was holding on to me and shivering.

"I'm so glad...you're alive! I thought... I thought you would die!"

Adel had already seen her parents and the king she served pass away in front of her very eyes. She had also lost many of her comrades along with the citizens of her country. People she had sworn to protect. And this time, she had come

close to losing me as well...or at least, that's how things had looked to her.

I made her worry...

I couldn't see her face, but her shoulders were trembling. *She's crying.*

I returned the hug and started petting her hair to calm her down.

"Look, I'm alive and well. I wouldn't have acted this way if I weren't sure I'd be okay in the end."

"Then...you could have...told me that..." she struggled to speak in between her sobs.

"I was in a hurry. I was worried the Leviathan would eventually start attacking the kingdom if I didn't act fast."

I felt like I was just blurting out excuses. It was my fault for not explaining the situation to her, but it was true that I was short of time.

"Hmm... I'm sorry to disturb you guys during such a nice moment, but...did you notice that everyone's staring?" Youko suddenly interrupted.

"Ah," Adel and I let out at the same time.

Right. I was still hovering above the spot where the Leviathan had been. The exact spot *everyone* had been focused on during the battle. Then Adel had flown to me, jumping into my arms. And I had caressed her hair gently...



The kingdom's sailors and our teammates had seen it all unfold! Even the count was looking at us with an annoying grin plastered on his face.

ARGH!!! I'M SO EMBARRASSED I WANNA DIE! Even Immune Status and Invincibility couldn't save me from this.

Chapter 4

After suffering through the most embarrassing moment in my life, I led Adel to our ship. She probably felt the same way as she seemed to be keeping her distance.

My crew had aptly rescued the people who had fallen into the sea, and many of them were sitting on the dock, drinking warm soup.

Lohas must have made it to warm them up.

Still, I was pretty impressed. How did he manage to focus on cooking while the waves raged and rocked the ship about?

As soon as Adel and I stepped on the dock, Count Alan rushed over. He was completely unarmed. I assumed my magic had helped him out.

“Sir Masaki! Thank you so much for saving my country! I can’t believe the Leviathan was being controlled...”

“Hopefully this will never happen again. The Leviathan told me it wouldn’t eat humans anymore.”

“What?! Did... Did you speak with the sea god?!”

“Ah. Yeah. It was much more friendly than I expected. It even gave me this,” I said, showing Count Alan the bracelet I had received.

Since it was a bracelet, it didn’t count as an arm equipment piece, which was super convenient.

“It’s truly magnificent...” Count Alan trailed off, looking at the bracelet with rapt attention.

“Hang on! I can feel tremendous magic coming from it!” Youko—who had approached us while I wasn’t paying attention—suddenly cut in.

“After giving this to me, the Leviathan told me it would let us humans deal with the empire. It was worried it would harm too many beings if it tried to carry out its revenge itself.”

I probably shouldn't tell them it was just too lazy to bother with revenge. A god should, at the very least, seem dignified.

"I understand..." said Count Alan. "For now, we should head to the castle. I need to give a full report to His Majesty as soon as possible."

"What about us?" I asked.

"As the captain of the pirates and an otherworlder, I would appreciate it if you would accompany me, Sir Masaki. You too, Adelheid."

It would probably be too much trouble to bring everyone to the castle.

Three of them can reach me with Telepathy so I'll know right away if anything happens. They should be okay on their own for the time being. Adel and I can join them at the inn when we're done.

"All right."

"Works for me too."

We steered the ship toward the military port. The aftermath of the battle was quite apparent there.

"Cap'n!" Barbarossa called out to me. "Me and the lads be checking out the town and booking an inn while ye be there!"

"Sure. Let me know if anything happens."

We arrived at the military port and Adel, Count Alan, and I disembarked. The rest of the Pirates of the Round Table headed toward the second canal. They'd dock at the lake.

"We can enter the castle directly if we go up these stairs," Count Alan explained. "The city is already bustling with rumors of your exploits. They call you the Azure Hero and the Crimson Princess Knight."

"They think I'm a hero? They'll probably be disappointed when they hear I'm a pirate."

"I'm not a princess either..."

Adel didn't seem to like standing out too much. She was just like me in that

respect. I'd rather people didn't pay attention to us. To be honest, being called a hero was a bit of a pain. I'd just be burdened with unrealistic expectations.

I was starting to regret going over-the-top against the Leviathan. Not that I could have helped it...

The three of us were climbing a long flight of stairs. The steps shone under the light. After a while, the walls surrounding the staircase on each side changed. They were now white and smooth. *Is that marble?*

A few moments later, we arrived on a pathway that led straight to the dazzling castle. The flooring was pure white, just like the walls. It was all very uniform. Small ornaments had been placed in every corner, and it all reminded me of the old temples I had seen in my history textbooks and on TV back in my world. *The reliefs on the walls are so detailed... Amazing.*

We entered the palace. Adel and I were still walking behind Count Alan, following his lead, when a soldier ran up to us. He said something to Count Alan, who immediately took out a bunch of papers and handed them to the soldier. The soldier accepted them, bowed, and left as fast as he had come.

I wonder what that was about...

"His Majesty wants to see the two of you," Count Alan said, turning to face us. "He observed your fight with the Leviathan using his telescope."

Wait! That means he saw that whole...hug thing between Adel and me! NOOOOO!!! Arrrgh! He's the king, I can't refuse to see him just because I'm embarrassed. Damn it.

"An audience with the king? I don't know the first thing about court etiquette, though..."

"Don't worry. You can just copy what I do," Adel offered. "The king of this country isn't too particular on etiquette anyway."

"Thanks. I'll do just that then."

I just have to copy Adel's every move... That shouldn't be too hard.

"I intended to introduce you to His Majesty one way or another, but this makes things easier," Count Alan added. "This way."

We were supposed to wait in a reception room for a while, but the plan had changed. We now had to go meet the king at once.

As we walked toward the audience room, I looked at Adel's face. Her expression looked distant—as if she was reminiscing. *She knows the king. Maybe she's already been through these corridors in the past.*

A few minutes later, our group reached the audience room.

A red carpet had been draped over white marble floors. At the back of the room, a man sat on the throne. He was wearing a thick red mantle and a heavy-looking crown was resting upon his head. There were a few guards around him and others neatly lined up along each wall.

These were probably the king's personal guards. The few knights that stood closer to the king were particularly well-dressed. Their armor looked even more expensive than Count Alan's.

I didn't know what I was supposed to do, and I was a bit slow to follow Adel's lead, getting down on my knees and bowing.

"Lift your heads."

At the king's command, Adel and I did just that.

I finally got to see the king's face. I was a bit worried he'd get mad at me for staring too much so I didn't dare let my gaze linger too long. At first glance, he seemed to be in his sixties. His white hair and beard were particularly distinctive.

"Count Alan. Your righteous deeds have greatly helped the Sentdrag Kingdom in these times of crisis."

"Thank you for your kind words, Your Majesty!" Count Alan thanked, bowing deeply.

The king turned to look at me. *God, I'm so streeeessed. Someone save me. Can't Immune Status do something about my stress?!*

"I'm Laurent El Sentdrag. You are the one who stopped the Leviathan, are you not? I was impressed by your fight. I didn't think you would make it when I saw it swallow you whole. You surprised me!"

He really did see it all.

“I heard that you’re already known as a hero among my people,” he continued. “You are indeed worthy of that title. I offer my thanks to you on behalf of our country.”

“I don’t deserve such praise,” I answered. “I just did what I could.”

“How humble! No, I insist, you are a hero indeed. You saved my people.”

“My father is right. Not even our oldest legends mention someone leaving a fight with the Leviathan unharmed. Your achievement shall go down in history. Be proud.” One of the knights standing close to the king had just spoken. *He called him “father”... This must be the prince. I get why his armor was so luxurious now.*

He was a very handsome man with jet-black hair, and he was *built*.

“Yes! I will strive not to tarnish this honor!” I exclaimed, bowing deeply once again.

That’s probably the kind of answer they were expecting, right? They both seemed happy enough with my behavior.

“It has been a long time, Adelheid,” the king said, finally addressing her. “I’m sorry I wasn’t able to come to the Valentine Empire’s aid.”

“The Sentdrag Kingdom and the Valentine Empire are a long distance from one another. I’m glad you kept us in your thoughts, Your Majesty. My fallen comrades surely appreciate your kindness too.”

“How long has it been since you last came to visit us? You were still so little when my younger brother brought you to meet me. You used to run around the royal palace so full of energy,” he laughed. “You grew up into a fine young lady, Adelheid.”

“Please... Please don’t say that, King Laurent! I’m not a child anymore.”

Adel was bright red. *Cute*. Wait, what did he just say? “My younger brother”?!

“Is Adel...the king’s niece?!” I whispered to Count Alan.

“Yes. You didn’t know?” he whispered back.

“I never heard about this... Adel didn’t mention it at all.”

“She doesn’t like to get special treatment because of her parents, so she was never very vocal about those things,” he explained.

If she just went around telling everyone she met that her parents were part of the royal family of some foreign country, people would definitely look at her differently.

I guess that’s why she didn’t tell me. I should respect her wishes. I don’t really want to start treating her like a princess out of nowhere either. Not that I even know how you’re supposed to treat a princess.

“You also became an adult when in *other ways* too,” the king joked. “Your embrace earlier looked like it came right out of a romantic play.”

“I’m sure someone will make it into a play eventually, father,” the prince joined in.

“King Laurent! Prince Leon! Please stop...”

So the prince’s name is Leon, huh?

The king and the prince were obviously joking around, but I couldn’t help but turn as red as a tomato.

Stop talking about making it into a play! I’m really going to die of shame.

I couldn’t see Adel’s face, but I was pretty sure she was just as red.

“Now, now, let us get back to business. I need to reward the three of you properly. First of all, to Count Alan, who did his utmost to protect his country, I shall bestow the land of Andra.”

“Thank you!”

Count Alan’s territory grew a little bigger today. Getting land as a reward also meant increasing your tax revenue and getting your hands on several enterprises within that territory.

It doesn’t really concern me, though.

“Masaki Toudou, I bestow upon you the Sentdrag medal as well as the title of baronet. You will henceforth be known as the Azure Hero. You also deserve

another reward for destroying so many empire ships. You shall receive one million flan.”

Hang on. I get a medal of honor and a noble title?! A baronet is better than a knight, right? The king even officially recognized me as a hero. There’s no way he confirmed the story about me destroying the imperial ships so fast either. Is he just taking my word for it?

“Your Majesty,” Count Alan suddenly spoke up. “I’m sorry to interrupt, but I must tell you that I haven’t been able to confirm whether Sir Masaki truly destroyed those ships yet...”

“I have already received word from one of my spies in Granfang. It’s true. He’s personally seen Masaki a few times too.”

“Some dude— I mean... Someone saw me?”

“You may enter,” the king called out.

A man donned in a full set of armor suddenly jumped down from the ceiling.

So this guy saw me? I stared at his face, but he didn’t quite ring a bell... I felt like I may have seen him somewhere, though... Or maybe not... *This is strange, I usually have a pretty good memory.*

I kept looking at the man, but his overall appearance was very average. He wasn’t skinny or bulky. Even his height was average. He seemed to be about...fifty? *There are guys like him everywhere.*

“Ha ha ha!” the king started laughing happily as I stared at the man, puzzled. “You look like you’re not sure whether you’ve met him before.”

“Please don’t tease him too much, Your Majesty,” the mysterious man told the king before addressing me. “Sir Masaki, I’m a spy of the Sentdrag Kingdom. We met a few times when I was pretending to be a guard. I used to bring you breakfast, remember? I lost some belly fat thanks to your advice.”

“AH!” I exclaimed. “You are...!”

I suddenly remembered. He was the guard who used to chat with me. We had only exchanged a few words here and there, but it had meant a lot to me at the time.

“Let me introduce myself once more,” he started. “I’m a special spy under the direct orders of the King of Sentdrag and...I’m an otherworlder, just like you. I used to play an MMO called *Sengoku: Samurai War Chronicles* back on earth. My character was a ninja master. Anyway, my name is Tanaka Jirou.”

“You’re also from earth...”

“You did well destroying those ships. I planned to sneak you out before your execution, but you ended up running away all by yourself. It allowed me to finish my mission and retreat without any issues. Thank you.”

Jirou intended to help me all along... So that’s why he stopped to chat with me. I would have followed him without argument since he had always been nice to me.

“Jirou. I’m sure the two of you have much to talk about, but keep that for later. First, I want to reward him properly. Bring me the medal,” the king ordered.

“At once!”

Jirou disappeared and...reappeared a split second later! He was holding a small medal.

I had no idea how I was supposed to behave on such an occasion, so I stayed knelt.

Adel’s voice reached me with Telepathy. <Stand up and present your left side to His Majesty. He’ll pin the medal on you.>

I did exactly as she said and the king attached the small medal to my Cloak of the Azure Dragon. I thought it would take him a few tries to pin it properly, but his motions were smooth, and it was done in a few seconds.

“I would normally bestow you with land to rule as well but...”

“Father,” the prince interjected. “Baronet Toudou just became a nobleman. Managing a territory would be difficult for him. I suggest gifting him a residence instead. We have the perfect estate for him too.”

You’re so right, Prince. I totally want the house! Even if I get huge sums of money, it may lose all its value if the market fluctuates. Plus, I have no idea

whatsoever how to manage a territory.

“You’re thinking about that estate, are you not? I suppose that if Adelheid is to stay with him, it would be most appropriate. All right. Let’s settle on this. I shall bestow land upon you following future achievements,” the king concluded.

“The rest of the nobility will find this reward easier to accept, indeed,” the prince agreed.

Argh. If I do anything else, I may end up with a territory to manage. I’m starting to want to give it all up and lock myself in my Room like that sea god.

“Lastly, Adelheid Bernstein. For protecting the lives of my soldiers and defeating countless sea serpents, I will knight you. I want you to remain in the royal palace, but...it looks like you already have a master you wish to serve.”

“Yes! I’ve been saved by Sir Masaki twice. Since he is now a baronet, I would like to offer my sword to him.”

“Father, many of the noblemen are dying to get their dirty hands on Adel. It would be safer for her to remain by Sir Masaki’s side.”

“You’re right,” the king agreed. “I will accept your request, Adelheid. Do your best as his knight.”

Adel was not in line to inherit the throne of Sentdrag, but she now held a noble title. On top of that, the blood of the king flowed through her veins, so I could easily imagine why so many men would target her. It would be safer for her to become one of my vassals.

The king also accepted my proposal to consider the Pirates of the Round Table as my personal armed force. The prince later told me that the king’s decision was partly motivated by his need for an independent unit that could employ hit-and-run tactics. The prince was very honest and quite friendly. I couldn’t help but have a good impression of him.

That was how Adel and I became nobles of the Sentdrag Kingdom. I also made a shit ton of money and got a house in the process.

Just thinking about the court drama I would probably get dragged into from now on was tiring me out already, but I tried to keep my eyes on the bigger

picture. It was worth it if it meant defeating the empire. I'd just have to put up with it for a while.

Ah! I still need to go have a talk with Jirou. I hadn't been able to have a proper conversation with Shou, so I was all the more eager to ask him to teach me about this world. *Since he arrived here before me, he must know a lot.*

There should be many other otherworlders besides Jirou and Shou. If the people who kept disappearing while playing MMOs all ended up being summoned here, it meant there ought to be many who could be powerful allies...or dreadful enemies. If I had to fight them, they'd be a much bigger threat than the Leviathan...

The next few days ended up being absolutely hectic.

After my audience with the king, I asked Paddle where the crew were with Telepathy and got the name of the inn they had booked. When Adel and I arrived, they were in the middle of partying even though it was still the middle of the day. The kingdom's sailors and my men were sitting together, drinking and eating as they joked around. Apparently, the sailors had invited them to have a drink as thanks after the battle.

When Adel and I told them about our encounter with the king, they all got even more fired up.

"To think the Azure Hero is in my inn! I'll keep other customers out of your hair for the day, so you fellows enjoy yourselves!" the owner even chimed in before turning to his employees. "Hey! Keep the alcohol and food coming!"

The hero story spread that far already, huh?

When I informed them all that our pirate crew wasn't a pirate crew any longer but had instead become more like my personal navy of sorts, both my men and the sailors were flabbergasted. Their shock turned to joy in a matter of seconds, and they started shaking hands and hugging one another.

"Good news! You know what, I always thought pirates were bastards, but I'm happy to see there are good guys like you too! Let's protect the kingdom together from now on!" a man with a number of scars across his body

exclaimed. He looked to be a seasoned sailor, perhaps even an officer.

“Aye! I can’t believe our cap’n suddenly became a nobleman, though! Nah, I guess I should have seen it coming since he be worth his weight in gold! HA HA HA! Let’s work together from now on, me hearties!” Barbarossa answered.

Glad to see the seafarers getting along so well. They sure have a lot in common.

In the end, more than half of them were completely useless the following day. *Hello, hangover.*

Still, we followed Count Alan to my new house. And what a house it was!

It was located in the farthest corner of the noble residential area, but it came with a large garden and a fountain. The house itself was as gorgeous as it was large.

“I... Why are they giving me a house this lavish?”

I thought I’d get something that looked more like...a regular house. I had pictured my home in Japan. If anything, I thought it might have a small garden, but I didn’t expect *this*. It looked like the mansions of the super rich celebrities I sometimes saw on TV.

“This estate used to belong to His Majesty’s youngest brother, Adelheid’s father,” Count Alan explained.

“This is my father’s...” Adel trailed off as she looked around.

From what I had understood, the noblemen here were sticklers for proper etiquette. They wouldn’t appreciate a newcomer being rewarded with a large estate out of nowhere.

However, this mansion used to belong to Adel’s father. Until now, the king had managed it himself, but now that she was here, it made sense for the estate to be given to the lord she served—in other words, to me. This way, the rest of high society wouldn’t be able to complain. Or, at least, that’s what Adel and Count Alan had told me.

Count Alan also helped us find a nice house next to the sea. The rest of my crew would live there. Apparently, some of the sailors they befriended also

lived in the area so they'd be able to drink and train together.

After a few days of cleaning and preparing the house, Youko, Adel, and I were finally able to take it easy in the new mans— *Hang on, it's my house now, so let's call it the Toudou Residence*. We were able to take it easy in the Toudou Residence.

There was a very good reason I had two girls living with me. I promise.

After receiving my title, I was overcome with requests from noble families, rich families, and merchants begging me to marry their daughters. Ever since I moved in, the flow of letters and visitors hadn't stopped for a moment.

What the hell am I supposed to do with all your daughters? I have no intention of starting a harem.

Apparently, my age was a key factor in this new mess. I was currently twenty-eight years old. In this country, it was way past the usual age of marriage, and everyone seemed to be under the impression I was a late bloomer.

I went to Count Alan for advice and he suggested I should just get together with Youko and Adel. I have to admit I almost spilled my coffee at his words. I somehow managed to keep it together while freaking out on the inside. Marrying several women was the norm here. Count Alan, for instance, had four wives.

I didn't take his advice at first. I figured I might as well continue to ignore these people, but the marriage talks and requests to take random girls as my lovers were getting out of hand. People were even starting to gossip about me, saying I must be into either MILFs or little kids since I kept refusing all these young ladies. Then they started throwing literal kids and old ladies at me, and I was *not* having it. Eventually, they decided I must be gay, and I finally lost it.

I went to ask Adel and Youko to do me a favor.

"And so..." I started after explaining the gist of my problem, "I'm not thinking about marriage at the moment, but the people around me keep pushing for it and..."

"To put it in a nutshell, you're asking us to marry you?"

“Yeah... Even if it’s just for show, it would help me a lot.”

I had only known them for a few weeks. It was too early to date, let alone marry.

Adel and Youko thought about it for a few minutes. They looked dead serious.

“I... I wouldn’t mind marrying you,” Adel finally said.

“What? Ah, you mean that you wouldn’t mind pretending to be my wife, right?”

“No. Hmm... I wouldn’t pretend. I wouldn’t mind being your lawful wife,” she said, her face completely red.

Adel...wants to marry me for real?!

“Ah. The spot of first wife was stolen right in front of my eyes. Whatever. I also agree. It doesn’t have to be for show. I’d be okay with being your second wife,” Youko said before adding. “Oh, and by the way, I haven’t mentioned it yet, but my parents are also part of the Yamato nobility so don’t worry about my lineage.”

“Holy moly! You too?!”

“Who’s Moly?”

“Never mind that. Why haven’t you said anything about being a noble?”

“Well...I was kind of done with my family so I ran away from home,” she casually explained. “Anyway, I feel like I’m ready to settle down, and I like it here.”

“I... I see...”

The archipelago of Yamato was a maritime nation that had remained closed off to the rest of the world until very recently.

For some reason, they had both agreed. *I don’t know... It was so easy, it doesn’t even seem real. Are these two beauties really going to marry me?*

Back in my original world, I hadn’t really met anyone after entering the workforce, but now that I had been given this opportunity, I wanted to make both of them—and myself—happy.

I got sidetracked for a second, imagining our happy futures before getting a hold of myself.

“Thank you,” I said after clearing my throat. “Would you two be all right with starting with an engagement before we...get into anything else? We’re still in the middle of a war so... If it’s okay with you, I would like to hold a ceremony after we finally manage to bring peace back.”

“I understand... That’s not a bad plan,” Adel answered.

“We’ll still get married in the end, so I don’t mind waiting a bit longer,” Youko said.

The two of them decided to go with my idea. It may have sounded like I was just trying to push the wedding back, but I felt like I needed the war to be over to fully focus on them. I wanted to be good to them.

People should finally stop bothering me if I announce that I’m getting engaged.

Another issue I was having was people applying to become my personal soldiers. My crewmates were strong enough, and I didn’t feel the need to recruit anyone else, so I kept refusing. For a baronet, my personal force was already more than powerful enough. Not to mention, I was pretty good at fighting myself.

Anyway, that was the whole story behind my new domestic life with Adel and Youko.

When I only represented myself, it was easy enough to do whatever I wanted, but now that I was a nobleman, I couldn’t act carelessly anymore. On top of that, there was a limit to what I could do on my own. When it came to foreign affairs, countries had to take a stand, not individuals.

As we were in the middle of a war, I also had to be ready to head into battle at any time if the king ordered it. You could say I was on standby.

For the time being, I had asked my crew to help patrol the kingdom’s territorial waters. Lohas, being the amazing cook he was, was in high demand, and every ship wanted him on board. Apparently, the practice had made him even better, and he had built strong relationships with the sailors thanks to his

delightful dishes.

They do say that the way to a man's heart is through his stomach...

I made a point of keeping in contact with my crew, and I went to visit them every day in the mornings and evenings to have a little chat. It may sound trivial, but in my opinion, those little gestures were the most important.

I'm their captain, after all.

A few days had gone by since I had announced my engagement to Adel and Youko.

At first, some noblemen and merchants kept trying their luck, coming to my mansion and asking me to take in their daughters as well. I decided to have two pirates guard my front door at all times, and it eventually got better. I had already given them good equipment, but I had them dress in a heavy set of black-and-white armor over it. With that getup, they looked pretty damn intimidating. Some people even started gossiping about black-and-white guardian gods protecting my mansion. *If only they knew those "guardian gods" were actually pirates...*

Their costumes were nothing more than camouflage pieces. They didn't have stats of their own, but they looked cool and didn't weigh anything which made them pretty convenient to use. My crew had assumed these suits of armor were magic items because of that and, in a way, they weren't wrong.

This actually prompted me to show the armor to the Magic Item Guild of Sentdrag. They *loved* them so I decided to offer up a few extra camouflage pieces I had lying in my inventory to study. They hoped to mass-produce them, and I had agreed on the condition that a portion of the revenue made it back to me. I was sure they would sell well since many people apparently refused to wear some pieces of equipment for the sole reason that they didn't look good. *Britalia Online players were the exact same...*

One day, I asked Adel, Youko, and Lohas—who was on break—to help me organize the items in my Room. There were hundreds of weapons, equipment pieces, and costumes to sort out. We made a different pile for each item category.

Ah, I can almost smell the money I threw into this game when I look at all this.

I pulled out a swimsuit from the mess and immediately tried to hide it but Youko caught me.

“Oh, my! Masaki! You even have such things?”

“No... I mean. Yes, but I got it from a lottery. I swear I didn’t buy this on purpose.”

“I would have been very disappointed if you actually liked to collect girls’ swimsuits,” Adel cut in. “I’ve never seen one that looked like that, though.”

She picked up the school swimsuit and studied it.

Adel. I beg of you. I’d die on the spot if you wore this, so stop holding it up in front of you. I’m a very healthy man at the end of his twenties.

Dozens of pieces of menswear, womenswear, armor, and suits were lined up in front of us. I had Japanese-style clothes, Western clothes, Chinese clothes, medieval European armor, and samurai armor... Hell, I even had a panda onesie. With everything put together like this, my Room was starting to look like a theater’s costume storage. While I was lost in thoughts, Youko chose an outfit, walked to the mirror, and held it up in front of her. She had picked out a beautiful white dress with lace peeking out from the hem. I obviously had never worn it, but that costume was popular enough that I’d got it for potential exchanges.

“I like this one,” she said before turning to me. “Hey, Masaki. What do you think about dressing up and going out a little?”

“Now that you mention it, it’s true that we haven’t visited the kingdom at all until now.”

We had gone to the palace and to a few stores, including a furniture shop, but we had yet to find the time to enjoy a proper outing in the capital.

The weather is great today so we might as well enjoy it, I thought.

“The three of you can go, then. I’ll finish organizing,” Lohas offered. “I’m pretty good at tidying up, and I’m having fun looking at all these interesting clothes!”

“You don’t mind? Thank you, Lohas. Well then, let’s pick up some outfits real quick and... Adel?!”

I thought I hadn’t heard Adel speak up for a while now, and I glanced around the room to look for her. She was holding up a gothic lolita dress, twirling around with a soft smile on her lips. As a knight, she usually wore dignified clothes and probably never got the chance to wear this kind of frilly dress. Looking at her spin and spin with the dress pressed against her chest, I couldn’t help but think she was incredibly cute.

“Adeeeeel! Are you listening?”

She let out a surprised squeal. “Wh-What is it?”

Fuck, that was cute.

Was she picturing herself in the dress and having so much fun that she didn’t pay any attention to her surroundings? *I’m pretty sure we found Adel’s outfit.*

“We’re going out,” I told her. “You can wear that dress. What about you, Youko? Have you decided?”

“What? I... What’s going on?!” Adel sounded incredibly confused.

“Hmm... I think I really like this one,” Youko answered.

“Then I will wear...that I guess,” I said.

I had decided on a dark brown suit and picked out a black necktie with brown stripes to match.

“Hey! Tell me what this is all about!” Adel complained.

“We figured we’d wear these clothes and go enjoy some fresh air,” I explained. “You can take whatever accessory you like from the box over there, by the way. Is an hour enough time for you to get dressed?”

“We... WHAT?! I need to wear...that?! And accessories?! No way, I haven’t worn such things since I was a child...”

“I always wear light makeup, so one hour should be plenty. And don’t worry about Adel, I’ll make her as pretty as a doll. All right, follow me, Adel.”

“W-Wait! Youko! I—”

Youko didn't give Adel any room to argue and dragged her off to another room. Adel looked at me with eyes calling out for help, and I extended my arm toward her when...

BAM!

Youko slammed the door shut. *Well, there's nothing more I can do, now.* Beyond that door was the girl's secret garden. I'd never step foot in there and neither would Lohas. He was a gentleman. Still, I was surprised to see Youko that pumped up. *Maybe she's the type who likes to dress up other people?*

"Well then, I'll concentrate on organizing all of this," Lohas said.

"Thank you. I'll leave it to you. Please sort them by their effect. You can use the Sorting Spectacles to check."

"Understood."

I finally had an opportunity to do a little sightseeing. Although I had learned how to read the letters and numbers used in this world, I still hadn't been able to go shopping, and I was dying to try it. Even in my previous world, I liked to shop and walk around the city. *Time to inject some money back into the economy*, I thought. I hadn't even touched the money I'd gotten as a reward yet.

I haven't worn a suit in ages. When I was still in Japan, I wore one every day to go to work, but the one I was wearing when I was summoned had suffered from my little trip to prison. *If we see a tailor in town, I'll ask them to fix it for me. It's one of my favorite suits.*

I checked the time on my interface and when around forty minutes had passed, I made my way to the entrance. There was no point in bringing a shopping bag along as I could just dump whatever we bought into my inventory. I was just pacing in the foyer, waiting, when I heard a door open upstairs.

I looked up to see Adel wearing a black gothic lolita dress and a necklace with a blue gemstone. She was standing at the top of the staircase with Youko right next to her, wearing the white dress she had picked out earlier. She'd tied her hair with a long ribbon.

They're both gorgeous, I thought.

"I... Hmm... Masaki... Please don't stare so much... It's embarrassing," Adel let out.

"She's right..." Youko added. "I didn't think you'd look so intently..."

Not good. I couldn't stop myself from staring at them.

They both looked a little shy as they came down the stairs. I scratched my cheek, nervous. I was probably bright red myself. It was only natural, though. I didn't have much experience dating in my previous world either and...Adel and Youko were really beautiful.

"So, where exactly are we going?" Youko asked. "You wanted to visit the capital, but it's pretty big, you know?"

"Hmm... I don't really know. I usually only go from here to the tavern, so I just want to walk around and see other places. Is that okay with you?"

"I don't mind," Adel answered. "I haven't walked around in the capital in so long, so I'd love to."

"I'm also good with that." Youko agreed too. "Ah! If we end up passing a sweets shop, I'd like to stop there."

"I planned to have lunch in town too anyway, so we can also grab some sweets while we're out."

The royal capital had kept an old-town look but was very well maintained. There were plenty of restaurants in the city center and a lot of things worth seeing. It was still only 9 a.m., and I was really looking forward to the rest of our outing.

The three of us just walked the main roads. Horses and carriages were stopped at the city gates so we only crossed paths with fellow pedestrians. I had seen the imperial capital of the Granfang Empire from the windows of my cell and witnessed several close calls with carriages almost running into people. On the other hand, the streets of the Sentdrag Kingdom were nice, clean, and safe. I liked them much better.

"The whole city is pretty much a pedestrian zone," I said.

“What’s that?”

“It’s a place where cars... I guess it’d make more sense for you if I said ‘carriages’ instead... Anyway, pedestrian zones are areas where carriages are forbidden, either for the whole day or at specific times,” I explained.

“When I was a child, there were still carriages and horses moving about in the middle of the city,” Adel said. “It was quite dangerous, so Sir Jirou proposed a new regulation arguing that carriages and horses shouldn’t be allowed to enter the city during the day.”

I see. Introducing traffic control sure sounds like something Jirou would do.

According to Adel, most decision-makers and noblemen had been dubious at first. They worried it would have a limited effect on public safety while delaying deliveries, and Jirou had struggled to convince them to implement the policy. Eventually, they agreed on a one-month trial. The results spoke for themselves. The number of injuries went down drastically while the deliveries were barely impacted.

Now that I paid a little more attention, I noticed that some people were pushing carts full of goods around. *That’s a much safer way to handle deliveries.*

I was wondering how they dealt with emergencies, and Adel explained that they used a dedicated bell. When it rang, pedestrians made way immediately.

“So the nobles noticed it worked wonders and finally accepted the change.”

“Yes. Before the policy was passed, I used to hear countless stories of maid and butler trainees getting in horrible accidents. The nobility naturally welcomed a safer city. If anything, I heard that many are happy to contribute to the streets’ maintenance now.”

They contributed? I was pretty sure some of them would just want to boast that so-and-so road had been built thanks to them. *Putting money into public order and garbage collection is a surefire way to build a good reputation.*

“It’s great that the city’s safer now,” I said. “I wouldn’t even feel it if a carriage crashed into me, but regular people would get hurt.”

“Even seasoned soldiers would get hurt! You’re the only one who wouldn’t!”

Adel and Youko both yelled at the same time.

Fair enough. I always kept Invincibility on so I couldn't be caught off guard or harmed by a stray bullet or something.

The three of us continued our stroll, but I kept feeling like people were staring. We weren't dressed like usual, so no one called out "Azure Hero" or "Crimson Knight Princess" as we passed by, but... *Ah. I get it now. They're looking at Adel and Youko. Not all of them, though. Some men are sending me murderous glares. Wait. I feel like someone's looking at my butt?! What the hell? Weirdos!*

"Hmm... Am I the only one bothered by the stares?" I asked.

"I don't know, I feel like people aren't staring as much as usual..." Adel answered.

You're probably just too used to it, my dear Adel. On my end, I felt like more people were shooting daggers at me than usual. After a while, the stares gradually disappeared. I felt much better.

"Oh. Adel, I meant to ask you something. Do you know any tailors in this area? I have damaged clothes I want fixed."

"There used to be a shop called Tailor Dave in that alley over there. They had a good reputation. I don't know if it's still there, though..."

"That one?" Youko said, pointing at the back of the alley. "The signboard is very old, but they seem to be open."

I stepped into the alley and saw the signboard. A little jacket was drawn on it along with the words "Tailor Dave." There were racks of clothes in front of the shop so it was definitely open.

As we stepped inside, I prayed they would be able to bring my suit back to its former glory. *I really, really hope they can.*

"I'm happy to see it hasn't changed at all," Adel whispered to us. "The owner is getting on in years, but he still seems healthy."

The interior of the shop was very neatly arranged and as soon as we stepped in, a gentle-looking old man greeted us.

“You’ve grown into such a beautiful young lady, little Heidi,” he said when he spotted Adel, his voice emotional.

Apparently, “Heidi” was Adel’s nickname when she was a child. After she became a knight, she was reluctant to keep using such a cute nickname and made the switch to Adel.

“Can I call you Heidi too?” I asked.

“Please... I’m begging you, please don’t... That nickname is so embarrassing!” she refused, blushing.

I was used to calling her Adel, so it would feel strange for me too to suddenly switch to another nickname. I decided I wouldn’t go for Heidi unless the need arose. *If I have to, I totally will.*

“It’s good that he said he could fix your suit, isn’t it?” Youko said as we exited the shop. “You’re really attached to it, right?”

“I am. It reminds me of so many things... I don’t think I’ll have the chance to wear it much in this world, but I did want it repaired. I’d be happy enough to use it just to decorate my room or something.”

The owner told me that it would take him some time to mend, so we decided to go get an early lunch and headed toward the area where most restaurants were located.

He had never seen this type of garment before and wasn’t sure how to go about it, but he said he’d work it out. He also asked me whether I minded if he made a pattern draft out of it. I didn’t. He seemed good at his job, and that was all that mattered to me. If suits became a thing here too, I had a feeling nobles and rich merchants would like them. Eventually, everyone would head to work wearing a suit and... Wait, no. I don’t want to turn this fantasy world into another Japan.

I was walking in between Youko and Adel, chatting with them, when a delicious smell came floating our way. I could also hear the sound of meat sizzling. We were getting closer to the restaurant district.

Somehow, it looked a lot like Japan. There were all kinds of stalls selling

chicken skewers, french fries... They even had sausages! *Why doesn't this place look like the rest of the city?* While I mused on it, I felt drawn to the stalls. *Argh. I really wanna eat street food, but I'm with two ladies, and that just won't do...* Youko also looked at the chicken skewers like she was dying to eat some, but it would probably be better for me to bring them to a proper restaurant.

The restaurant's interior was very neat and modern. I looked around and noticed people who looked a lot like nobles. Of course, there were also ordinary folk. But it probably meant that the quality was pretty high and the price tag reasonable enough. I picked at random, but I may have stumbled upon a very good restaurant on my first try.

I ordered a Salisbury steak and Adel got a white fish meunière cooked in white wine, while Youko went for an assortment of fried vegetables. We got some bread on the side, and Youko wanted to order beer as well, but I stopped her. The general atmosphere of this place didn't really go with beer.

The food was amazing. I wouldn't be surprised if this restaurant was one of the most popular around. I exchanged some words with the waiter, asking him about the restaurants in the area, and he told me that most chefs around here had learned cooking from Jirou. He apparently was very keen on finding a good place to eat at and had decided to fund the entire district with his own money. After a few years, his expertise had spread far and wide. I heard that merchants, chefs, and even farmers were very thankful to him. *Well, I'm thankful too, Jirou.*

It was around that time that Jirou met his wife, a noble lady who grew up in the countryside and had fallen in love.

"I'm so full... It was amazing."

"I agree. It was as good as your cooking, Masaki. I'd love to come again," Adel said.

"I want to order some beer next time, though," Youko chimed in.

There's no hope for you, Youko, I thought. I did get where she was coming from, though. I would have liked to have beer too. But I felt like it would go better with street food. Speaking of which, I had seen ramen at those stalls... *I'm so going there tonight. Jirou, I can't believe you went and recreated ramen*

in this place... Thank you. Thank you so much.

“Come again!”

We bought some crepes—or at least something that looked like them—at one of the stalls and continued our little stroll. The kingdom was still at war so we naturally passed a lot of soldiers on the streets. However, they didn’t seem to be doing too bad. Most were smiling and having fun, enjoying a well-deserved day of peace.

“I always thought that walking and eating at the same time wasn’t very proper...” Adel said.

“But it’s good, right?” Youko answered.

“It’s a bit different from the desserts I’m used to, but it’s still pretty good,” I answered.

The sweetness of the fruits and whipped cream filling went perfectly with the softness of the crepe. It was my first time tasting those fruits so I didn’t know what they were called or anything about them, really, but I supposed it didn’t matter much. The important thing was the taste. We were finishing our desserts when I learned there was a park in the area. We decided to go rest there. Some thugs tried to stop us on the way, but we easily turned the tables on them and turned them over to the guards.

I took the chance to try and replicate the aikido moves I used to see on TV, and, if I dare say so myself, I did a pretty good job of it. Now that my overall physical abilities had increased, I had an easier time seeing my opponents’ moves, which meant replicating them was a piece of cake. *With a bit of training, I should be able to use aikido in real fights too.*

After handling this little incident, we continued our way to the park to have a nice postmeal rest.

The park was large and well maintained. Some children were happily playing in the water, running around in the shallow pond located in the center of the park.

On the grass, I could see families sitting together and mercenaries taking their

naps. I even spotted a few guards sleeping under the shade. *These guys are skipping work, aren't they? They look dead tired—I may as well pretend I haven't noticed anything.*

We did not sit on one of the benches. Instead, I took out a picnic blanket from my inventory, and the three of us settled under the shade of a large tree.

“Resting at home is great, but it's really much nicer to be out,” I sighed. Now I was able to relax fully. “The air is so clean in this world too.”

“That's not the case in your original world?” Adel asked.

“Well... We have this thing called exhaust gas and... There's no way you know what that is. Hmm...” I trailed off while thinking of a way to explain. “There's no magic in my world, but technology is very advanced. For instance, we can light up a whole room by pressing a single switch, and we can easily heat up food. The things I have in my Room are commonplace there.”

My coffee maker and beer dispenser aren't so commonplace, though, I thought. I still had no clue how they never ran out. If I ever figured out how it worked, I still wouldn't tell anyone or try to mass-produce it. The market would crash if something so OP was democratized. *I'd better keep that one to myself.*

“The issue is that our technology is polluting nature,” I continued. “It's detrimental to the environment, and people get sick. Technology advancing was incredibly beneficial to humankind but it came with a big cost.”

“That sounds a lot like what we call magic hazards here... No world is spared,” Youko sighed.

“I don't really know what that is, but I'll assume it's similar to pollution, then. In my world, some countries were hard at work to reverse the effects after we had to live through disasters. We tried to clean the air and the water.”

Other countries still didn't give a crap and continued to exploit all the natural resources they possibly could without giving a shit about the environment, but there's no need to bring this up, I guess.

“Hey...Masaki... Do you want to return to your world?” Adel asked.

“I... I don't really know.”

“You don’t know?”

“There are people I owe a lot to over there. I miss my friends and my family, and I want to see them again. But at the same time, I don’t know if I can even go back, and there are also people I like here now. Not to mention, I have something I need to finish... I think I won’t know what I want until I’m faced with the opportunity to go home for real.”

“I see...”

“And...you know... The two of you agreed to become my fiancées. If I could bring you with me when I go, I would. Leaving you here after everything would be way too irresponsible. While we’re on this topic I always meant to ask: why *did* you agree to marry me?”

I had to know. I didn’t think such things should be left unsaid.

Let me bring up a past trauma of mine. I used to have a girlfriend. We started dating when we were still students and had been together a long time. I always thought we’d get married eventually but...she suddenly dumped me. Over the phone. She told me she had agreed to date me “because she felt like it at the time,” but she “couldn’t see a future with me.” I trusted her, and I was sure she understood me and my job, but she also suddenly revealed that she thought I was “playing games all day.” I was at fault too for paying more attention to *Britalia Online* than to her. And I should have discussed our relationship with her more deeply. Then she wouldn’t have stayed with me just because she “felt like it.”

That’s why I needed to ask Adel and Youko why they had agreed to marry me.

“I... Hmm... You know...” Adel stuttered. “You gave me your blood to save me and...you continued to worry about me even when my wounds had healed. I’m a vampire, but you still treated me like a person... You’re the only one who treated me as an equal besides His Majesty and Count Alan, and I was really happy about it. I didn’t really see you in a romantic way until...the battle with the Leviathan. That’s when I realized that...I liked you and... AAAAH!” she screamed, bright red.

Adel hid her face with her hands, refusing to meet my gaze. Even her ears were flushed red. I was also a bit shy to receive such a confession, but more

than anything, I was glad to hear she liked me.

“Th-Thank you...for saying that.”

“I don’t have as good a reason as Adel,” Youko started. “I’ve never been in love before so I’m not sure I truly understand it. But when I’m with you, Masaki, I’m always having fun and I feel at ease. And if I try to think about not seeing you anymore, my heart aches... I’m not sure, but I think that’s what people call love, isn’t it? I’m sorry I couldn’t give you a better answer.”

“You don’t need to apologize, Youko. I’m the one who suddenly sprung these wedding talks on you. I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t interested in the two of you all along, but I did ask you to marry me without knowing for sure if I was in love or not, and I’m regretting that a bit. But now that we’re...engaged, I’ve been growing more and more fond of the two of you. I have a lot of flaws, but I still hope you’ll...stay with me forever. Will you?”

I was probably even redder than Adel had been, but I kept looking at the two of them. I didn’t want to look away. Not while saying something like this.

“Of course,” Adel answered.

“That goes without question! Let’s spend more time together so you won’t worry about this. I have no intention of leaving you!” Youko said.

“Me neither!” Adel added.

Their words made me so happy. I didn’t deserve them. I could feel the piercing gazes of the people around me, most likely wishing for my early demise, but I didn’t care at all. I was too happy to pay any attention to them.

After that, I laid down on the blanket and ended up falling asleep. The park was so peaceful that I didn’t wake up until the sky had already darkened.

It was a pity that we didn’t get to enjoy our full day out, but...since I got to rest my head on Adel’s thighs, I couldn’t say I was mad about it. As for Youko, she was nestled against me. She was still sleeping soundly. *I guess she naps every day, so it’s not that surprising that this peaceful atmosphere would make her even sleepier.*

Even though the sun had fully disappeared now, Youko still hadn’t woken up. I

decided to carry her on my back and we headed home. I was chatting with Adel and I mentioned wanting to buy something for the two of them to remember our first date by.

“The accessories you gave us are more than enough,” she said. “You can get us gifts next time.”

I would. I wished peaceful days would continue so that we could go have fun together again. I readjusted my hold on Youko and she let out the cutest yawn ever.

Adel and I laughed, walking in the direction of the black-and-white guards at the end of the street.

Chapter 5

It was a fine day. The marriage talks and requests to become my personal soldiers had calmed down, and Adel, Youko, and I were ready to welcome a guest at the Toudou Residence.

“I’m done making coffee! This magic coffee maker sure is convenient,” Adel said, entering the room with three full cups.

“Honestly, I never expected it’d end up being *that* life-changing when I first bought it,” I responded.

“Coffee is readily available in this country, but cold beer is impossible to get outside of your Room. If anything, it’s the beer dispenser that’s life-changing!” Youko exclaimed.

“The prince must already be on his way, so don’t drink today,” I warned her.

Youko only ever thinks about alcohol...

“I know, I know.”

The guest we were waiting for was Prince Leon. Yesterday, one of the palace stewards had come to inform us of his upcoming visit.

“I wonder what he wants to discuss...” I wondered.

“The prince likes to be on the front line. He may be coming to discuss an offensive against the empire,” Adel suggested.

“Since you dealt a huge blow to the empire’s navy, he may be planning to attack their ground forces this time,” Youko added.

Apparently, the empire’s naval forces were very quiet nowadays. The number of ships in their navy had been greatly reduced which meant the surrounding countries were now able to resist.

It turned out it was a great idea to blow up all of those ships before escaping.
Good thinking, me!

I suddenly spotted two people heading through the front gate and walking toward the mansion's entrance on my map. I looked out of the window to check who it was. As expected, I saw the prince and...*who's that? Oh! It's Jirou, isn't it?*

As a true ninja, Jirou blended in with his surroundings incredibly well. His lack of any noteworthy facial features made him very hard to remember. Even after meeting a few times, you'd only be left with a vague impression of him, a quality Count Alan showered him with praise for.

I stood up and asked Adel and Youko to follow me to the entrance so we could welcome them.

"Thank you for coming, Prince Leon, Sir Jirou. We've been expecting you."

"I'm glad to see you look well, Sir Masaki. I heard the nobles and rich merchants were giving you a lot of trouble recently," Prince Leon greeted me.

"Thankfully, my two companions agreed to marry me. Things have calmed down a lot since then. We'll be holding the ceremony when the war ends," I explained.

"Is that so? When our struggle is finally over, I'm sure the whole continent will be at peace for a long time," he answered before adding. "I have things to discuss with you on that topic."

I thought so. He came to discuss the war. To be honest, I also didn't want the war to drag on for years. The sooner it ended, the better.

"I see. Please follow me to the drawing room," I said, leading the way.

Prince Leon was almost like a brother to Adel. I could trust him, and I decided that telling him about my Room wouldn't be an issue. As soon as I explained what it was, he got curious, so I led him and Jirou there to have our talk.

"So that's what your Room looks like! Your magic is very impressive," he said, looking around in awe.

"How I've missed the smell of proper coffee..." Jirou let out. "I didn't think I'd ever get to taste it again."

Jirou took a moment to enjoy his first taste of coffee in a very long time. He

looked a bit emotional.

“You’re welcome to come have a cup whenever I’m here. I also have a chilled beer dispenser so feel free to enjoy that as well!”

“For real?! I’d love to take you up on that!” Jirou exclaimed, leaning over the table.

He must have really missed good beer and coffee. Beer was also a thing here, but it was always served lukewarm. It wasn’t undrinkable, but beer was definitely best served cold and Jirou seemed to be of the same opinion.

“Is cold beer that good, Jirou?” the prince asked.

“It is! Once you try it there’s no going back, Your Highness.”

“Interesting. I’d love to have one, but...there are important things I must discuss with you first. Do you mind waiting, Jirou?”

“Of course not. I’m sorry to have rushed you, Your Highness. I lost my composure for a moment.”

All right. I’ll prepare some deep-fried chicken and battered fish for them to have with the beer later on, I decided. If the prince tasted that combo, I’d definitely get into his good graces.

“Sir Masaki, the reason I came to find you today is to ask you to participate in a military operation. We will be taking back a stronghold we lost to the empire.”

“Taking back a stronghold... What would I need to do?”

“Well... A foe that is rather difficult to handle is hiding out in that stronghold. I want you to distract and hold her off while we deal with the rest of the army. My father strongly recommended you for the job after he saw you return from your battle with the Leviathan unscathed. Do you agree?”

“You want me to act as a decoy... Well, I’m probably the most suitable for that job. I’ll do it. Can you tell me more about that ‘foe’?”

Depending on the type of enemy I was dealing with, I’d have to adapt my strategy. The more I knew before the battle, the easier of a time I’d have.

“I’ll explain that,” Jirou started. “But I also have something else to tell you

about, Sir Masaki... Or would 'Toudou Masaki-san, Game Master of *Britalia Online*' suffice?"

"What?!"

Jirou suddenly dropped a bomb on me, and I didn't know how to react.

Of course, I'd be shocked. I hadn't mentioned a thing about *Britalia Online* or my job as a GM to anyone here.

And yet, he knew everything.

The most likely explanation was that he had somehow found out about my GM skills... Regardless, it was a mistake to let myself relax in front of this man. I had to remain on my guard.

The atmosphere in the room had turned icy cold. At this point, the situation could escalate in a split second. Adel, Youko, and the prince had sensed the sudden change and didn't dare make a move. Eventually, Jirou broke the silence.

"You don't have to be so wary of me. I'm not going to tell anyone else about it so don't worry. How should I go about this...?"

He seemed to ponder over the situation for a moment before reaching into his pocket and taking out an identification card that had turned yellowish from years of use. It was folded up vertically, and he opened it for me to see. Inside was a golden emblem that gleamed under the light and a few words protected by a layer of plastic. It read...

"National Police Agency, Community Safety Bureau, Chief of the Missing Persons Unit, Inspector Jirou...or at least, that was my job title twenty years ago. Toudou Masaki-san, you went missing on March 7, 2020."

"That day is...the day when I was summoned here!"

On the 7th of March, 2020, I passed out in a corridor at work while on my way to get dinner, and I suddenly found myself in this world. Jirou knew that date! And he also said something extremely unsettling... *Twenty years ago?*

"I'm not sure where I should start. First things first. As I just told you, I was a police inspector. I used to investigate the serial disappearance of video-game

players on my own. You worked as a Game Master so you must have heard about it, right? People disappearing all of a sudden while playing online games... I heard it became an urban legend of sorts among gamers.”

“Y-Yeah... We received dozens of inquiries about that from our players.”

“As you can expect, we received calls about it at the police station too. They used to be sporadic when you were summoned but after five years—right before I myself was summoned—they became increasingly frequent. I was the only gamer at the station and I decided to pay more attention while playing *Sengoku: Samurai War Chronicles*. I figured I may as well try to investigate it. Sadly, I couldn’t find out much but, one day, while I was playing, my room suddenly turned dark and I lost consciousness. When I came back to my senses, I understood that I had become a ninja master, exactly like the character I used to play. This happened in February 2025. More or less twenty years ago.”

“I’m confused. Does that mean that you were summoned five years after me, and yet you appeared in this world twenty years before I did?”

“Exactly. I believe that at the time, the latest expansion of *Britalia Online* was called...” He paused to think. “I think it was called ‘The Return of the Fiendish Emperor.’”

“The Return of the Fiendish Emperor”?! We’d barely started development on that expansion when I disappeared! It was supposed to introduce a ton of content such as new jobs and meta-defining skills like HP & MP Recovery (High).

“Don’t you think that gap is strange?” I asked.

“It is, but after investigating this world for so long, I can affirm that the moment at which you appear in this world doesn’t reflect the time at which you disappeared in our original world. This matches my friend’s testimony as well.”

“Who’s that friend?”

“They’re working on a different mission at the moment. I’ll introduce you when possible, but let’s focus on the matter at hand for now,” Jirou said before taking a deep breath and continuing his story. “The country that summoned me has long fallen to another kingdom. The people of that kingdom tried to subjugate me, but I used my ninja skills to confuse them and escape. I hid in the

back of a carriage and arrived here. However, I wasn't able to secure any food when I escaped, and by the time I reached the Kingdom of Sentdrag, I was exhausted and starving, and I just passed out."

"That's when my father found him," the prince continued in Jirou's stead. "He decided to take in Jirou, who was very weak at the time, fed him, and kept him at his side."

"Yes. After that, I joined His Majesty on the battlefield time and time again and did everything I could to repay my debt, helping him ascend the throne."

The prince's expression hadn't changed once this entire time. He must have heard the whole story from Jirou before. On the other hand, Adel and Youko looked at each other, visibly confused.

"Hey, Youko," Adel whispered. "Are you following this?"

"Not at all..." Youko whispered back.

I felt a bit bad about keeping them out of the loop, but explaining everything right now would be impossible. I'd need to talk to them properly and answer all of their questions later.

"When I was investigating the missing gamers, I looked into you," Jirou continued. "I even learned that you came from a family of farmers and that they cultivated crops in polytunnels."

"How was my senpai doing?" I asked after a pause.

Now that we were talking about my previous life, I couldn't help but worry about my senpai. *He must have been swamped with work after I suddenly disappeared...*

"He was worried about you. He thought you may have had an accident... Well, I supposed he wasn't wrong in the end."

"I see..."

I made him worry... But yeah, speaking about accidents, getting transported into another world had to be the worst possible type of accident.

"Anyway, I told you all of this for a reason. Earlier, His Highness was telling you about a difficult opponent... Well, she's also an otherworlder."

“Someone from the same world as us...”

Just like Shou. I was thankful to have Jirou as an ally. Otherworlders were the most reliable allies but the worst possible enemies.

Speaking of Shou, I was pretty sure that I hadn't yet seen the full extent of his abilities. He must have had many more tricks up his sleeve, but he seemed to have accomplished his objective and left without trying to fight me seriously.

“I don't know her name or face, but the soldiers nicknamed her the Sniper Princess. She's been known to use a wide array of weapons such as knives, pistols, machine guns, rifles...even heavy weapons like rocket launchers and antimatériel rifles in larger-scale battles. Based on that, I'm guessing the game she used to play is—”

“Probably a VR game like *Commando City*. It's an FPS where all the maps are cities,” I cut in.

I had tried *Commando City*. You played as a soldier entering different maps modeled after real-life cities. The selling point was the large array of weapons available in the game.

“Most likely, yes. She turned our stronghold into an impregnable fortress.”

“Is she that strong? Even if she's protecting the stronghold with long-range magical attacks, we could interfere by using our own long-range spells,” Adel suddenly spoke up.

Most long-range magic spells had a reach of around four hundred meters. If I pushed myself a little, I should be able to get to six hundred meters. Though my accuracy would fall a lot at that distance.

“Three kilometers...” Jirou said simply.

I immediately understood what he meant and brought my hand to my forehead, leaning against it in despair. *A monster.*

Adel and Youko didn't seem to get it.

“What do you mean, ‘three kilometers’?”

“She has a range of three kilometers. Every single person who has stepped within her range is dead or heavily wounded. We even tried to send soldiers

with robust antimissile shields, but her bullets went right through the shields *and* the soldiers' armor."

"How is that possible?!" Adel exclaimed.

"What?! We can't do anything about it with arrows or magic, then!" Youko followed.

She could snipe people from much farther than I had expected. I assumed she had some sort of skill that worked like an aim assist, but still...three kilometers!

Now that I thought about it, I remembered seeing gameplay videos of *Commando City* where skilled players shot aircraft pilots from the ground. *One of those skilled players is now my enemy, huh?*

"Then it's settled. I have to be the one to go. A run-of-the-mill offensive will never work against a sniper like her."

Her bullets might push me back somewhat, but I doubted she could send me flying as far as the Leviathan had.

"That would be a great help," the prince thanked me.

"I accepted a noble title. I have to do my part now. It's only natural."

"I see. I'm sorry for giving you such a dangerous first assignment. This being said, I'm more at ease now that I know you'll come with me."

Wait! The prince is planning to tag along?! Is he going to be all right on the front line?

"Prince Leon, you'll be coming with me?"

"Of course. If their prince is hiding in the rear, the morale of my troops will inevitably fall. I will be on the front line to lead and inspire them!" he said proudly.

"Your Highness, please give up on this idea. If you're shot, there won't be any point in continuing the battle," Jirou said in an attempt to stop him.

Is the prince all brawn and no brain?

"Do you need me to come alone?" I asked, changing the subject. "Or should I bring my retainers?"

“A small elite force would be best. We will be flying to the stronghold, so please bring two other people at most,” Jirou explained.

“How will you head there, Prince Leon?” I asked. “I could carry you while I use Wing, but if we travel like that for a long time, I’m afraid it’ll be uncomfortable for you...”

“You don’t need to worry about that. I’m a Dragonar so I’ll just ride my dragon. I can take two more people along if needed.”

If the prince has a personal dragon, there shouldn’t be any issues. I know a few tips and tricks we could use, but there’s no need to go out of my way and disclose them now.

“All right, then let’s bring Adel and... Youko, do you want to come? Barbarossa is scared of heights, and Lohas is pretty busy helping out with the patrols.”

Lohas was pretty much the personal chef of the sailors now. I heard he even used the sword I had given him as a makeshift stove to deliver smoking-hot meals even at sea.

If the Flame Blade were alive, it may just cry from the shock, but I couldn’t say I cared much. As long as he was making good use of it, I was happy enough.

“Sure, I’ll come. My golems can become our shield if necessary and we can try using a human-wave approach using clay dolls.”

“It’s decided, then! Jirou and Lady Youko will be riding with me. We’ll launch the operation at dawn, two days from now. Prepare accordingly,” the prince concluded.

We all nodded in agreement.

“Understood. We’ll make this plan a success,” I affirmed.

We then set out to prepare for the mission.

On the day before the operation was set to begin, I went to find my men. I told them about the plan and as soon as I mentioned we’d fly there, Barbarossa took a step back, visibly afraid.

This whole flying business ended up being quite traumatic for him, huh?

“You can leave the sea to us! Focus on beating up those imperial bastards!” one pirate exclaimed.

I nodded, bade them farewell, and walked back toward my house. I still had a few things to handle before tomorrow. My men watched me leave, waving until I left their field of view.

I need to make this mission a success! For their sake too...

I couldn't die, but the same wasn't true for my comrades. I needed to make sure that casualties would be kept to a minimum by striking first.

I decided on the skills I'd use this time. I kept my staple skills and added a few Nonlethal moves. I wanted to be able to take prisoners.

Passive skills: MP Recovery (Medium), HP & MP Recovery (Medium), Physical Reinforcement (Extra High), Close-Combat Mastery (High), Heightened Senses (High), Heightened Trap Detection (High), Resist Pushback.

Active skills: Stun Bolt, Silent Blow, Nonlethal Attack.

I still remembered how badly I struggled from getting blown away by the Leviathan and decided to add Pushback Cancel this time. Getting pushed was not a status, which meant Immune Status didn't help with that, and so I had to use a separate skill.

I wouldn't die from it, but getting tossed around was a pain in the ass. And it made me look ridiculous.

I couldn't ignore the possibility of the enemy setting up traps in advance so I also added Heightened Trap Detection just to be safe. If we stepped on a land mine or a C4 trap, my allies would definitely lose their lives.

As for Stun Bolt, it gave me the chance to inflict paralysis on the enemies I hit. If I used it along with Silent Blow or Nonlethal Attack, I'd be able to easily suppress the enemies with one hit without getting noticed. I'd just have to be

careful not to break their necks with that one hit.

I had taken some time to craft some items yesterday. Although I still had some High Potions and High MP Potions in my personal and room inventories, my stocks had gone down recently.

I only needed medicinal herbs and a few other plants to make them, and I happened to find some at a store so I bought a lot. I then used Potion Creation to make 99 High Potions and 99 High MP Potions in one go and gave some to Adel and Youko.

“You really can do anything, Masaki. You’re good at cooking and you can even brew potions... I don’t know how I can help you,” Adel sighed.

“I’m sure he’d love it if you helped him in *that* way,” Youko offered before letting out a little laugh.

“*That* way? What way is that?” She sounded genuinely confused.

Youko looked like she was having the time of her life as she leaned in and whispered something in Adel’s ear. Adel just nodded frantically, her face getting redder by the second.

I had a pretty good idea of what Youko had told her, but I wished she wouldn’t give Adel stupid ideas.

Of course, I did think of the two of them as women, and my imagination got the better of me from time to time, but...we were still at war. I intended to keep myself in check until peace returned. They both understood that and didn’t try to initiate anything either.

Still, I didn’t want them to feel insecure about our relationship, so I kissed them both.

They immediately flushed red, and, although it was a bit ridiculous for someone my age, I felt my face heat up just as much.

I know enjoying a loving kiss before a fight is the worst death flag there is, but I’m invincible. I don’t care about flags.

I hadn’t changed my equipment at all. I was still using my GM gear under a camouflage cloak. I had asked Adel and Youko to change theirs, though. I made

sure to place an emphasis on defensive stats so they wouldn't get hurt.

Adel was wearing a set called the Light Armor of the Red Fairy. It boosted defense, magic, and speed. As for Youko, I had given her the Seimei's Robe set. It upped both her magic attack and resistance to physical attacks while also giving her the skill MP Recovery (Low). I had picked these clothes with their usual styles in mind, and I must say the two sets suited them perfectly. Finally, I'd given them bracelets that further boosted their defenses and HP recovery rates.

With all this, they'd manage even if we had to fight a war of attrition.

Now, we just had to wait for daybreak.

The day had finally come.

We headed toward the garrison closest to the stronghold, with me using Wing, Adel flying on her own, and the prince riding his dragon with Youko and Jirou. Youko, being the sleepyhead she always was, was struggling to stay upright, and Jirou had to hold her so she didn't fall to her death. Speaking of Jirou, he was currently dressed like a regular soldier.

"Are you okay with just this equipment?" I asked him.

"Yes, don't worry. This is nothing more than a cover I conjured using my ninjutsu. If I disable it, my actual gear looks like this," he said, removing his skill.

His armor immediately disappeared, revealing a black ninja outfit.

According to him, this outfit was one of the highest-ranking sets in *Sengoku: Samurai War Chronicles*. Ninjas were very good at disguising themselves and his skill was much more practical than my camouflage pieces.

Jirou also told me that he had an ability similar to Stealth, which allowed him to become invisible. However, he had been sensed and shot immediately when he had tried it. This meant the lady we were facing also had pretty decent skills herself.

After flying for almost a full day, it was time for a rest. Naturally, we decided to spend the night inside my Room.

“This is really convenient...” the prince said. “We don’t need to stay on our guard, and you have plenty of food and water. That sofa seems perfect for naps too... Lady Youko, please let me try it for a while.”

“No way. I’m not giving up my sofa. Not even to you, Prince Leon.”

My prospective second wife seemed hell-bent on protecting her spot—even from the prince himself. The moment she entered the room, she headed straight for the sofa and sank into it. She seemed very relaxed.

Obviously, we hadn’t been able to fit the prince’s dragon into my Room. To make it up to it, I had given it buffalo meat. The dragon seemed ferocious, but it happily accepted it and wagged its tail almost like a puppy.

After a good meal and a night of sleep, it was time to depart again. As planned, we reached the garrison on the evening of the second day.

Dozens of soldiers had come out to welcome us. *They probably spotted the dragon from afar*, I thought.

“My prince, Sir Jirou, please allow me to welcome you,” a man wearing a fine set of armor—probably a graded officer—said, stepping forward. “I’m assuming the three guests you brought with you are the ones you told me about using Telepathy. Baronet Toudou, the renowned Azure Hero; the Crimson Knight Princess, Lady Adel; and the baronet’s second wife, Lady Youko.”

“Indeed,” the prince confirmed. “Without further ado, I’d like to hear your report.”

“At once!”

The range Telepathy could cover depended on the talent of the caster. A skilled magician could reach people over very long distances. Still, it was impossible to get messages all the way across the kingdom so magicians were posted in key areas all over the country. Their job was to relay important messages.

I heard similar communication systems existed in most other countries as well.

We entered the main building and heard that dozens of soldiers had been

wounded. Most had been shot through the arms, shoulders, or legs.

“There are so many wounded that our medics can’t keep up. Medical supplies are running low too...” the officer reported.

Prince Leon let out a sigh.

Without our stocks of medicine, it would be hard to keep fighting. Let alone this garrison, the whole army would eventually suffer from the shortage.

I’ll heal as many people as I can and share my potions, I decided.

“Can you tell me how many soldiers are hurt?” I asked.

“Including light and serious injuries...around eighty people. The mortality rate has been rather low so far, but a few soldiers have passed away from the aftermath of tetanus.”

“I see,” I answered. “Please take me to the infirmary. I’ll heal them.”

“Of course! Follow me.”

As we approached the field hospital, the stench of blood assaulted my nostrils. Along with the smell of sweat and other bodily fluids, it was hard to bear.

I felt like puking for a moment, but I managed to control myself. I had gained some resistance to blood after cutting down so many people in previous fights.

The soldiers all stared at us as soon as we stepped into the room. Among them, some had torn or missing limbs.

I kept my mouth shut and walked to the middle of the room. I made sure every soldier was within my range before casting my spell.

“Area Heal”

I pictured them fully healthy and put in as much mana as I could. I even imagined their lost limbs growing back.

Considering how badly hurt most of them were, I had to do that much or it would never be enough.

“What is—? What?! MY WOUND!!!” one of the patients screamed

“MY ARM GREW BACK!!!” another one continued before adding. “YOU! Look at your leg!”

“I can’t believe it! I can move my leg!”

They all looked at their wounds in awe, cheering out loud.

However, I had used much more MP than I expected to, and I couldn’t keep myself upright. I fell on one knee. *Fuck. The world is spinning. I’m gonna pass out. Is that how it feels to be low on MP?*

“Argh...”

“Masaki! Are you okay?!”

“Adel... Give me... MP Potion...”

“I’m on it!” she exclaimed, rummaging through her pockets and handing me a High MP Potion.

She helped me drink it, and I finally started seeing straight again.

Phew. I didn’t think healing them would drain me that much.

I totally exceeded my recovery rate. Now I understood why healers were such a rarity in this world. If the caster wasn’t careful enough, they’d end up worse off than their patient.

I should use skills to make up for that the next time I have to heal that many people at once.

“Thank you... I feel much better now,” I thanked Adel.

“I didn’t know you could use healing magic, Sir Masaki. It was worth bringing you here, even if just for this,” the prince said.

“As you can see, it’s very taxing so I can’t use it too often,” I explained. “This being said, we should be able to go through with our plan now.”

I still couldn’t muster any strength and had to rely on Adel to stand up. Youko was right next to us, visibly worried. I felt bad for making them worry, but I had to admit it felt good to have them fuss about me.

I looked around and finally realized something.

“Many of them were heavily wounded, but very few died, right?”

“Indeed. The Sniper Princess most likely missed their vitals on purpose,” the officer explained.

She missed on purpose.

I could think of several reasons why she'd do that. The first was that she was trying to exhaust the kingdom's supplies, much like I had tried to cut down the empire's forces. Recovery items were consumables which meant they were limited.

If she kept hurting people without killing them, the garrison would be overrun by sick people to treat. In the worst case, infectious diseases could even start spreading among the soldiers. If it came to that, the whole garrison would be lost. There'd be no choice but to burn it to the ground to avoid the spread.

Still, if her goal was to kill everyone, it'd be faster to just headshot them herself. Which meant that...she may not want the blood on her hands.

Her mission is to prevent people from approaching so she shoots them, but she doesn't want to kill anyone so she misses on purpose.

If she disagreed with the empire but still hadn't run away, it probably meant she was being controlled by a slave collar. Even in this situation, she had found a way to disobey to a certain extent.

According to Jirou, if you disobeyed a direct order while wearing a slave collar, it would strangle you. However, it would not kill you. You'd be left in a state of suffering until your master stopped it.

If I could get to her...then I can use the Pick of the Bandit King to unlock her collar. Then everything should be okay...

“...ki”

It's definitely worth a shot.

“Hey! Masaki. Are you all right? You looked lost in thought,” Adel said, trying to make eye contact.

I had stopped paying attention to my surroundings while I was thinking.

“Yeah. Don’t worry, I was just thinking about something. We need to talk,” I answered her before turning to the prince. “Prince Leon, could we move to a quiet place?”

“You have something to say? Of course. The briefing room should be empty, let’s head there.”

“All right.”

We walked to the briefing room. I made sure to clear the area so that no one would overhear our discussion. I explained my theory and then proposed a plan of action.

And...that’s why I was currently inside the stronghold.

You may be wondering how I got inside. Well, it was fairly easy. I hadn’t bothered walking the narrow path that led to the fort. I simply activated Wing and Stealth and flew to the roof before entering the building.

I made sure to be as discreet as possible and opened my map. Dozens of people were inside the fort. Sadly, although my map could differentiate many things, it couldn’t tell me who the otherworlder was. I’d have to look for her myself.

Let me explain in detail why I had decided to infiltrate the fort to look for the Sniper Princess.

“You want to check out the empire’s otherworlder, that infamous Sniper Princess, before we begin the operation?!”

“Yes. I think there could be two reasons why she’s not killing your men on sight, Prince Leon. One, she’s trying to make the kingdom exhaust its resources. Two, she’s soft... She doesn’t want to kill anyone.”

“You’re right...” the prince agreed. “She’s never shot anyone in the head or the heart, and, considering her skills, that just doesn’t make sense.”

“Indeed. While it may be difficult to precisely aim for someone’s head, no one has been shot in the chest. Even if she didn’t hit their hearts directly, she should

at least be trying to,” Jirou analyzed. “I’ve been trying to observe her, but I couldn’t get close. Even with my ninja technique Stealth Mino, she could sense my presence.”

“I have a skill called Stealth. It allows me to be undetectable, regardless of the enemy’s abilities. I can fly into the fort if I also use Wing.”

“Then maybe you could...”

Stealth is more of a toggle than a skill, but I won’t tell them that.

Prince Leon and Jirou both agreed to my plan, but Adel and Youko were making sour faces.

“I’m sure you could get in, but...isn’t it too dangerous, Masaki?” Adel asked.

“Stealth sounds amazing. It really does. But still, it would put you in an incredibly difficult situation. If you get caught, what are we supposed to do?” Youko added.

I understood why they were so worried. I hadn’t told them anything about Invincibility.

I wasn’t sure whether Jirou knew about it or not. After all, Invincibility and Stealth weren’t skills. They were toggles from the GM interface that should have had no business existing in this world.

“Wouldn’t you say it’s better to keep casualties as low as possible? Obviously, I don’t intend to become one either. But if the Sniper Princess is being forced to act this way by the empire, I want to save her. As someone from the same world, I owe her that.”

Adel and Youko reluctantly agreed after hearing my explanations.

As soon as I had recovered from my excessive use of healing magic, I took off with Wing and hid with Stealth.

“He really disappeared! Jirou! You can sense people’s presence, right? Can you sense Masaki?!”

“No... He hid all traces. He should be fine like this... Although I have no doubt Sir Masaki would be fine even if he got shot.”

Now that I had shown them how effective Stealth was, I flew toward the stronghold.

I was enjoying the cold evening breeze when something unexpected suddenly happened.

WHOOSH.

A bullet cut through the air, a few centimeters away from my arm.

Did she notice me?! At this distance?! With Stealth on?!

A weak roar came from behind me, and I immediately looked in that direction. A wild griffin had been hit and was falling to the ground, whimpering.

So that's what you were aiming at, Sniper Princess...

As expected, her aim was fearsome.

Anyway, now I was looking for her while using Wing, Stealth, and Invincibility.

The fort had been built to be easy to defend. All the doors had been locked, but the windows had almost all been left open. Which was reasonable enough considering how high up they were.

Who would expect someone to sneak in through here?

The fort had also been built on a mountain. While it was easy enough for its occupants to fire at potential intruders from their position, it was almost impossible to shoot up at them—they'd just be fighting against gravity.

Still, I noticed that on one side of the fort, all the windows had been shut. I could also see on my map that many people were lying down in that area.

It must be some sort of barracks or a break room where soldiers can take a rest.

The sky was getting darker. I walked in front of a room and suddenly heard a clicking sound. Several soldiers walked out.

I stuck close to the ceiling to avoid bumping into them and decided to follow them.

"Damn. That little girly is so annoying. She could just kill them and save us the

trouble,” one of them said.

“Nothing we can do about it. She’s still a kid. Even a monster like her can’t be that coldhearted.”

“She’s already looking pretty good, though... I wanna have a taste.”

“Give it up, dude. The last idiot who tried that lost his head. Haven’t you heard?”

“I know, I know. But we have that farmer now. She’ll be obedient as long as we hold on to her. To be honest, I like the farmer girl better...”

“Me too. She’s fucking hot, right? I have to watch her sometimes, and I can’t begin to tell you how badly I wanna grab her boobs.”

“Fuck, you’re so lucky. I wanna watch her too.”

“I want her to bully me.”

“With a whip. Now that’d be something.”

“I’d do them both. One sister on each arm. That’s the dream, baby.”

“We may get our way when the empire doesn’t need them anymore...”

These guys are complete freaks, but let’s ignore that for now.

They entered another room, but I didn’t follow them. I continued to hover in the stone corridor and tried to make sense of everything I had just heard.

Who’s that farmer? They mentioned something about sisters so she’s most likely the Sniper Princess’s sister. Does that mean she’s also an otherworlder? She’s probably being kept as a hostage... If they call her a farmer, she probably doesn’t have battle-oriented abilities. If I can get to that girl, I’ll probably be able to convince the Sniper Princess to stop fighting us... Still, I can’t remember anything about online farming games... Ah! Maybe she was summoned after me, and I hadn’t had the chance to hear about her game. It doesn’t matter. First, I need to find her.

I didn’t have much information to go by, and the stronghold was rather large. If I just looked around, the sun would rise before I found her.

What do I do now?

“Ugh... I need to take a piss!” a soldier said, slamming the door open and dashing into the corridor.

It was one of the guys I had seen earlier. If I remembered correctly, he was the one who said he got to watch the farmer.

Great. I can just ask him. And by him, I mean, his brain.

I hadn't tried it on a person yet, but this was the perfect occasion.

I followed right behind him, keeping myself concealed with Stealth, and checked to see whether another soldier was in the toilets. *No one in sight.*

I struck fast, hitting the man from the back right as he was about to start his business with a combo of Silent Blow, Nonlethal Attack, and Stun Bolt.

Of course, attacking him meant Stealth got deactivated, but it shouldn't be an issue. No one was near us according to my map.

The soldier couldn't even scream as I dragged him to a stall and locked the door behind us. I brought my hand to his forehead and activated another GM-exclusive ability: Log Analysis.

Log Analysis allowed us GMs to see our targets' latest actions. It didn't work on inorganic matter such as bones, though. I had tried it on the skeleton I found inside the Leviathan's body, but, since it hadn't activated, I had reached the conclusion that it only worked on living beings.

A window popped up in front of me, and I was able to see the man's memory in video format. There were buttons to fast-forward, pause, scrub for a specific scene... *Great, there are so many useful options.*

At that moment, the image that appeared in front of me showed a urinal. I used the fast-rewind button to gaze into his past.

Eventually, a woman appeared. She wore a straw hat and...just like the soldiers had pointed out, had great tits.

If she's wearing that straw hat even indoors, it must be some sort of equipment. It probably raises her stats or has a special effect.

After rewinding some more, I finally figured out where the girl was. That room was in the back of the fort. I immediately checked that location on my map.

Two soldiers were guarding the door.

I exited the building through the toilet's window and flew toward the back of the fort. I spotted a room where the light was on. It couldn't have been the operations room. The position was too strange for that. I was pretty sure it was exactly the place I was looking for. *Let's do this.*

I approached one of the guards from the back and used my combo—Silent Blow, Nonlethal Attack, and Stun Bolt—on him. He collapsed to the ground immediately and Stealth deactivated.

“Wha—? Where the heck did you—?”

I took down the second guard the same way before he could raise the alarm. Thankfully, both guards succumbed to the paralysis effect and couldn't say a word anymore. I knocked them out, tied them down with rope, gagged them, and pushed them into a corner—they wouldn't be bothering me in the future. I then opened the door to the room where I hoped to find the farmer girl and stepped in.

The room was very strange.

There were tons of beakers and test tubes on every shelf. Not what I would expect in a farmer's room. If anything, I felt like I had just walked into a laboratory.

This being said, there were plant pots all over the room too. Inside, they were growing familiar fruits and vegetables—like apples and even sugarcane.

“This is amazing...” I accidentally said out loud.

Someone approached me.

“Oh my. Welcome, Mr. Customer. Wait... You don't look like an imperial soldier... Are you a thief?” a woman asked calmly.

Her voice was gentle. She has reddish-brown hair and her skin was very pale. As for her figure... Yeah, her boobs were really big, just like I had seen in the video. *Big boobs, small waist, large butt. I get why the soldiers are so into her.*

She was wearing working gloves and long rubber boots. Going off her outfit alone, she did look like a farmer.

“I mean, you could say I came to steal something, yes. Are you the farmer? If so, I came to steal you away,” I said, my tone unsure.

I tried imitating a certain third-generation thief, but it was incredibly embarrassing. She wasn’t wrong—only soldiers and thieves would venture into a place like this.

“If you’re asking about my profession, you’re right. I’m a farmer. To think someone would come to hit on me! What should I do,” she answered me, giggling.

She didn’t seem too worried even in a situation like this, but we had to hurry. Someone would eventually notice. I wanted to flee with her before the guards came after us.

“Putting that aside, I have something to ask you. Do you know your sister is being forced to shoot people against her will?”

“I do. Of course, I do. I was taken as a hostage so there’s that, but I think she also feels somewhat responsible.”

“Responsible?”

“Yeah. How should I explain this...? My little sister got pulled away by some dark and sinister force, and I grabbed her hand on reflex. That’s how I ended up in this world. It’s kind of a pain, though. I can’t watch my favorite TV shows anymore.”

She’s kind of an oddball, but I think I get the gist of it.

To put it in a nutshell, her sister was being summoned, and, since she grabbed her hand, she was brought to this world along with her. Then she was taken as a hostage and her little sis ended up with no choice but to shoot people even though she didn’t want to.

“I can’t really do much about your TV issue, but I can get you out of here. Let’s escape together. I’ll help your baby sister too, of course.”

“I’d absolutely love to take you up on that, but...we’re going to have a little issue with my collar here,” she said pointing at her neck. “If I go against the empire, it strangles me and that’s not cool.”

“Let’s get it out of the way, then. Don’t move,” I said, approaching her.

“All right. Should I close my eyes too?” she asked, carefree.

“No need.”

I’m starting to think “oddball” wasn’t strong enough. You must have been struggling so much, Sniper Princess... I thought, mentally patting her back.

I studied her collar. It was the same as the ones the slaves I rescued had been wearing.

I took out my trusty Pick of the Bandit King and unlocked it effortlessly.

“Impressive! You really got it off. Thank you so much... Hmm...”

“Masaki. My name is Toudou Masaki. Let’s go look for your sister now. Do you know where she is?”

“Nice to meet you, Masaki-san. I’m Kisaragi Haruka. My little sister is called Akiha. She should be on the top floor. Let’s go and avoid being spotted by the guards!”

On the top floor?! Dang, I went right past her...

“Here we g— Hey! What are you doing?”

“I need to take the seeds and poisonous plants I was growing here with me. How am I supposed to pay back the people who threatened my baby sister without them? Hee hee hee...”

The way she planned murders with a bright smile was incredibly scary.

“I... I see... Can you hold my hand?” I asked when she looked about done.

“Yeeees! All good to go. Make sure to escort me properly,” she said, giving me her hand.

“I’ll do my best to meet your expectations,” I answered, holding her hand and activating Stealth and Wing.

“Oooh! We’re flying! That’s so coooooool!”

“We don’t have any time to waste so let’s hurry!”

I hadn’t bothered properly hiding the paralyzed guards so when the next shift

started, the soldiers would immediately notice Haruka was missing. If they sounded the alarm, getting to the Sniper Princess would become difficult.

It was a fight against the clock.



The young girl lowered her sniper rifle and let out a little sigh.

The night breeze calmed her down after focusing so hard for so long.

I thought I felt someone's presence, but it must have been my imagination. How did I mix up a wild griffin with a person? I'm probably tired from focusing all day...

She was putting away her weapon using one of her abilities—Weapon Roulette—when she heard someone's voice.

"I heard you fire your gun. Did something happen?"

A guard was alarmed by the gunfire and had come to check the situation.

"A wild griffin was approaching the fort so I shot it down."

"Is that all?"

"Yes," she answered coldly.

The guard didn't step into the room and left just as fast as he had come.

She hated it when the soldiers entered her space. It wasn't without reason. She had been attacked in the past.

The girl—who was nicknamed the Sniper Princess out of fear and admiration alike—sat down on the stone floor and looked at the sky.

She couldn't help but wonder why things had turned out this way.

On the day when everything changed, she had just been playing *Commando City*, like always. Her rank had dropped three places. Still, she had put up quite a fight. She had shot down dozens of foot soldiers and even a few aircraft.

She had decided to take a break after that game and took off her VR headset. That's when it happened.

She couldn't move her body and felt herself being sucked into a strange

space.

If it had stopped there, it would still have been all right. Sadly, at that exact time, her sister had come barging into her room. She hadn't hesitated one second, running up to her and grabbing her hand. In the end, the two sisters were pulled into the space.

She didn't fully understand what had happened afterward. Strange men had put collars on them and assessed their fighting abilities.

For some reason, the girl was able to move just like her character in *Commando City* had.

She could make a window appear in front of her eyes and pick weapons and equipment from it. With that, she was able to handle direct assaults, sniping missions, and military tactics. She handled guns as though she had trained all her life and was able to shoot down birds high in the sky with one bullet.

The same couldn't be said of her sister.

Back in their world, her sister used to play an online game called *Farmer Island*.

The player took care of an island, plowing the fields and raising chickens, cows, and other animals to produce food.

Her sister was very good at that game and always ranked among the top players. She was able to harvest high-quality rice, crossbreed sugarcane so that it could be cultivated indoors, figure out ways to make hens lay large quantities of eggs... She had countless achievements, and, although she didn't have the first clue about it, was a bit of a celebrity within the *Farmer Island* community.

The empire had also noticed her talents.

They intended to use the girl as a sniper and her sister as an agronomist.

At first, the girl declined. She tried to leave, but her sister was taken hostage. After that, she had no choice but to follow the empire's orders. She couldn't go against them and risk endangering her sister.

And so she pulled the trigger, just as she was ordered.

She was also given items to use.

For instance, she had been given a magic item that allowed her to see long distances. It came as an earring. She had never worn any until now, but they had pierced her ear against her will and stuck it through.

She was scared of shooting people. But if she didn't, her sister would be the one to...

She made a point of resisting in the only way she could. She refused to hit people's vitals and focused her bullets on the arms, legs, or shoulders of her targets.

Sometimes, soldiers had very sturdy armor and her bullets were deflected. When that happened, she used an antimatériel rifle instead.

With her rifle's scope and her heightened sight, she could see the horrible wounds on the soldiers' bodies. The times she was forced to use the antimatériel rifle were the worst. The sheer power of these bullets ripped the poor soldiers' limbs right off.

She had thrown up countless times.

Even if she did not kill them on the spot, they might die of blood loss... They might die of infections...

The enemies weren't only those outside the fort. They were also inside those inside these large stone walls.

Once, she had been assaulted in her sleep. Several men had tried to hold her down, but luckily, she had been able to fend them off with a knife. For the first time, she hadn't used a gun but a knife. She had killed someone with her bare hands. The image of her hands drenched in blood followed her into her dreams every night. She couldn't stop thinking about them. She pictured them, again and again.

The girl didn't have any time to rest. She was always on her guard, pushing her detection skills to the maximum.

Besides herself, everyone was an enemy.

Until one day, someone appeared in front of her and tore down that belief.



I took the farmer's hand and flew off with her.

"Do you know in which room your sister is being kept?"

"I think it should be around the middle of the top floor. She said she'd have a wider field of vision from there," explained Haruka.

"They let the two of you chat?"

"Yep. Only once a week, though."

Makes sense. If they never let the Sniper Princess check on her sister, she'd never obey so easily. She'd get agitated, wondering whether Haruka had been wounded or even killed.

"You said it was in the middle. Around there?" I pointed

"Let me see... Oh! It's that room! Look! The window is cracked open. Let's go say hello from there, hee hee."

"Can't we just enter normally? I guess the faster we see her, the better..."

I was getting swept into Haruka's pace, and I wasn't sure what to think about that. Regardless, I approached Akiha's window from the sky.

"You're her sister, so you take a look first," I said. "I don't want to intrude on her changing her clothes or something."

"I don't see the issue. She's got a killer body, I promise! I should know, I used to cop a few feels whenever I could."

"Well, I *do* see the issue! Just look already!"

We're hovering midair next to an enemy fortress and you're talking about your sister like a total creep? I didn't sign up for any of this.

Poor Akiha must have it rough with a sister like that...

I sighed and got closer so that Haruka could see inside the room. I had no intention of peeking until I got the green light. I didn't want to see her in the middle of... *What the fuck?! Did Stealth just deactivate?!*

"Heeeey! Akiha-chan! Open the window!"

Haruka had deactivated Stealth by knocking on the window. *What is she even doing?!*

“Onee-chan?! Why are you...? Wait?! What?! Are you flying?!” Akiha exclaimed.

“Sorry, but can we hold the explanations for later?” I cut in. “If we get found out, it’ll be a pain, so try to stay quiet.”

“Who...?” she started, but she seemed to understand the situation midsentence. “I got it. Onee-chan, can you be quiet too?”

“Of course!” she all but screamed.

I almost broke into a cold sweat as I ushered her into the room and entered after her.

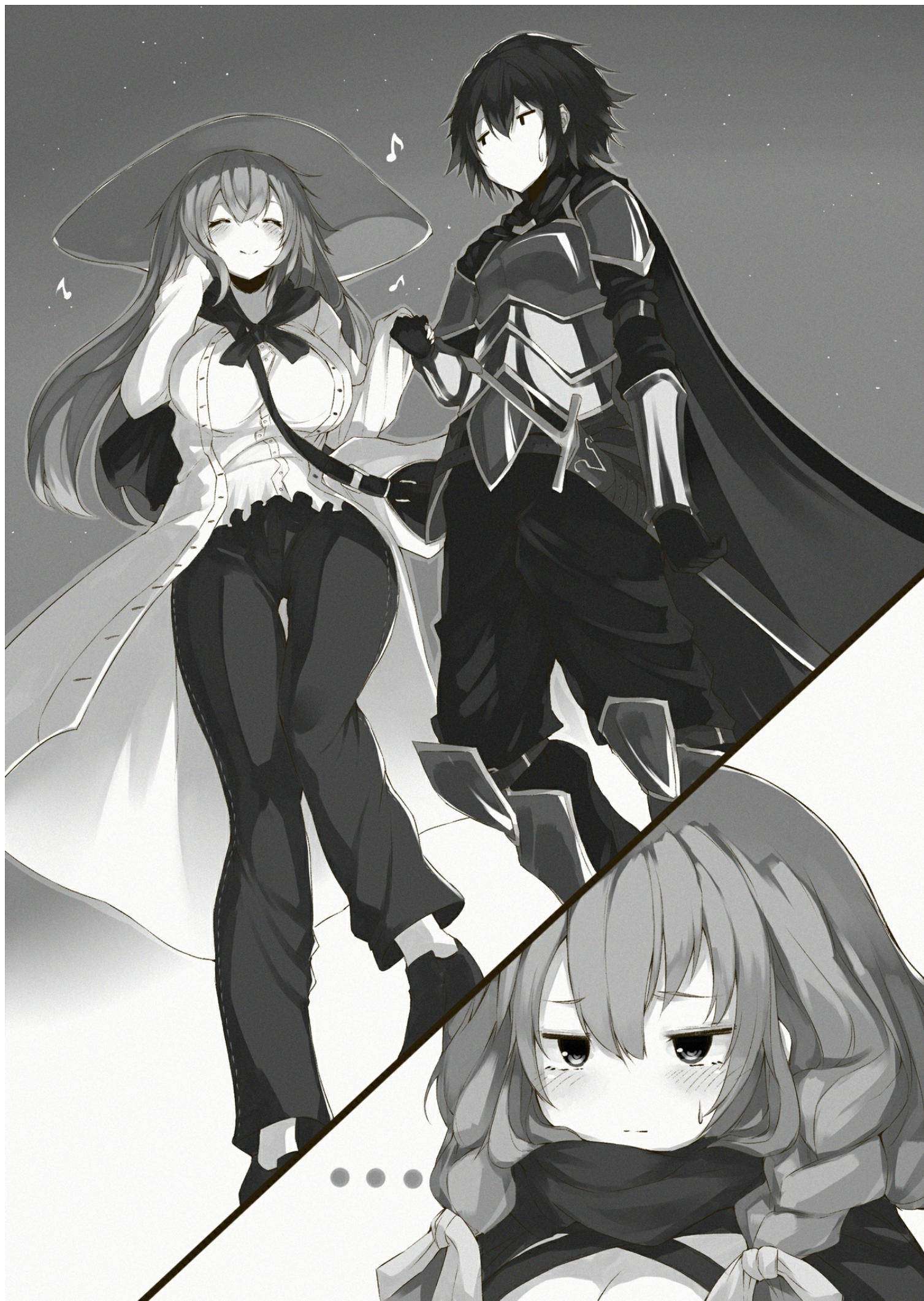
Still, I can’t believe something as simple as knocking can disable Stealth... I don’t get how this works.

“I thought I was dreaming when I saw you at my window, onee-chan...” Akiha said.

“Me too! I felt all fuzzy and warm just like in a dream!” Haruka answered.

“I’m sure you did,” she answered with a strained smile before turning to me. “And you are? I’ve never heard of flying magic before.”

I’m not surprised that even Akiha finds her free-spirited sister hard to deal with. She seems pretty used to handling her, though.



“We’re running out of time so I’ll give you the short version for now. I’m trying to get you two out of here. I’ll bring you to the Sentdrag Kingdom. You don’t want to stay here doing the empire’s bidding, do you?”

“Of course not! But...what about this collar?” she asked, pointing at her neck. “That and...I’ve shot countless Sentdrag soldiers until now. Can you guarantee they won’t seek revenge the minute I get there?”

“I know how to get rid of your slave collar. As for your safety, I’ve already talked it out with the prince of the Sentdrag Kingdom. He promised me you’d be well treated if you came over to our side. I even have a handwritten letter to prove it. Do you wanna read it?” I asked, handing her the letter.

“Y-Yes,” she agreed. She took the letter and scanned its contents. “Is all of this...true?” She was in disbelief. “Onee-chan...does this look legit to you?”

“It definitely does!” Haruka answered immediately after looking at the letter. “I remember eeeeeevery single one of the books the imperial soldiers forced me to read! I’m a hundred percent... No! A thousand percent sure! This is the prince of Sentdrag’s signature. You can trust your big sister, he he.”

They were both staring at the piece of parchment with surprised faces.

Haruka remembers the content of every single book...? She’s not to be underestimated either...

“I know I can trust your memory, but...I wish you would learn to be a little warier of others...” she let out with a sigh.

“I know, right? Your sister’s so carefree,” I chimed in.

“You have no idea how happy I am to hear someone agree... Anyway, I have more questions for you. Why would you want to help us? Since you managed to sneak into the fort undetected, I’m sure you could just take us both down if you so wished.”

“Well... The thing is... I was summoned by the empire too and almost got my head chopped off, so I can sympathize. Though to be honest, I don’t think I need a reason to save pretty girls from a grim fate.”

I promise I’ll also save dudes if I can. Just...less enthusiastically. Isn’t it normal,

though? Anyone would feel more motivated to help ladies. Even with two (prospective) wives waiting at home. Right? ...Right?

“Wh-What do you mean by cute...?”

“Oh my! My little Akiha, your face is all red,” Haruka teased.

“O-Onee-chan!” she exclaimed.

“Can the two of you please stay quiet...?” I sighed. “Akiha, let me remove your collar.”

“We’re on a f-first-name basis?”

Her face flushed even redder. She’s even blushing about that? People usually just call me Masaki, so I don’t make a big deal out of first names... Though I guess I might freak out if someone called me darling or something... Anyway, I’m getting sidetracked. I should focus on her collar. And... Done! I’m getting the hang of it.

“It really came off! I’m free...” Akiha said in awe.

“All right, now that it’s off, you’re just a regular prisoner I saved. The prince agreed to these terms so don’t worry.”

“Now we just need to get out of here!” Haruka said.

Uh-oh. The map’s showing a bunch of marks getting closer to this room... On further inspection, I noticed that the two guards I had tied up weren’t in the same spot anymore. They must have warned the rest.

My face tensed as I pondered over the situation. Almost simultaneously, Akiha seemed to notice something and her expression turned serious. I suddenly understood why she had been nicknamed the Sniper Princess. She looked like a war veteran ready to head into battle.

“You noticed too, didn’t you?” she asked me. “Impressive. I didn’t think you’d sense them before me.”

“I’m using a skill for that,” I quickly explained. “Haruka, Akiha, give me your hands. We’re taking off!”

“Suuuure!” Haruka said cheerfully, as she climbed on my back.

“What are you...?!” That’s not really what I was asking... Ah... They feel so plush and soft against my back.

“Onee-chan! What are you doing?!”

“It’s fine, isn’t it? Akiha-chan, you can hug him from the front, hee hee.”

“What do you mean ‘hug’—?”

“Just hold my hand!” I cut their banter short and grabbed Akiha’s hand.

Right as I activated Stealth and took off with Wing, soldiers stormed into the room. *Phew... By a hair’s breadth.*

“There’s no one here?! I swear I heard voices a second ago!”

“They must have gone through the window! Check below!”

“No way! How high up do you think we are?!”

Unbeknownst to the soldiers, we had indeed managed to slip away through the window right before they opened the door.

Daaaamn, that was close!

“Incredible! We’re really flying!” Akiha couldn’t contain her surprise.

“It’s amazing, right?! Hey! Hey! Can you do a backflip midair?” Haruka asked excitedly.

“We’re not here to play! We have to hurry back to the garrison!” I shouted back.

“You’re no fun!” they both whined.

“We don’t have time to have fun!”

And there’s no way I can do acrobatics with Haruka on my back! I thought.

Akiha seemed to love flying too... Somehow, the two sisters were more alike than I had first thought.

On our way to the garrison, I recounted what I’d learned about this world. I told them about myself and explained that we’d meet up with another person from our world, Jirou. They were happy to hear that fellow otherworlders had cooperated to help them.

They sounded so thankful and joyful that I couldn't help but feel happy too. Saving them had been more than worth it.

With the Kisaragi sisters in tow, I entered my Room after reaching the garrison and introduced them to everyone.

The prince was also hanging out here, and he waved at them casually.

Prince Leon...Jirou...I can still see the beer foam on your lips.

We weren't planning on attacking the fort until two days from now, but that didn't mean it was a good time to drink beer in such a carefree way.

"Prince Leon, I've successfully rescued the Sniper Princess, along with her sister who was being held hostage."

"Good job. I didn't expect the Sniper Princess to be such a lovely young lady and—" he suddenly stopped talking and cleared his throat.

Oh ho! Did he just wipe his face and put his clothes back in order after seeing Haruka?

"Please excuse my rudeness," he started again, looking prim and proper this time. "I'm Leon El Sentdrag, the crown prince of the Sentdrag Kingdom. May I ask for your names, my dear ladies?"

"My name is Kisaragi Haruka. So you're the prince? Nice to meet you," Haruka said with a soft smile.

"L-Lady Haruka...pleased to make your acquaintance," he said, blushing slightly. I was pretty sure it wasn't because of the alcohol. *Does someone have a crush?*

"Jirou," I whispered after stepping closer to him. "Is the prince single? Don't you think he looks...?"

"He's single, indeed. And he once told me his ideal partner was a gentle lady with ample breasts... To be honest, most women are pretty strong-willed in Sentdrag. My wife is no exception..."

Jirou's wife seems to be a handful too, huh? And to think the prince was a boob man... I'll be honest, they did feel nice against my back, and— Wait. I can

feel someone shooting daggers at me. Ah. It's Youko and Adel.

"Masaki. You haven't done anything you shouldn't have, right?" Adel asked, clearly not amused.

"We're not married yet, but that doesn't mean you get to play around, you know?" Youko continued.

"I haven't done anything! I swear!"

All right, I didn't expect them to blow up at me like that. I forgot my girls were pretty strong-willed too...

"Hmm... I... May I introduce myself too?" Akiha suddenly spoke up. "I think everyone knows me as the Sniper Princess, but my name is Kisaragi Akiha. Thank you so much for saving me and my sister!"

"Don't mention it. We're from the same world, so we should help each other. It's only natural I'd save you when given the chance."

"I agree. We should help each other... But still, thank you! Hmm... What will you do with us now?" she probed, anxious.

Akiha still couldn't bring herself to trust the letter.

There's no need to worry. Look how smitten the prince is already.

"Do not worry, Lady Akiha. I, Leon El Sentdrag, promise to protect you and your sister. I will put my life on the line if I must!"

See, the prince is very motivated. I can't believe he was slouched on the couch chugging down beer a few minutes ago.

"Your Highness, I'd rather you didn't pledge your life so easily," Jirou admonished him. "You need to inherit the throne, so please take care of yourself first."

"How nice of you!" Haruka exclaimed. "I'm rather inexperienced, but please take care of me from now on..."

"Onee-chan! Why do you have to say it in such a misleading way?!" she yelled before turning to the prince. "Thank you for being so kind to us."

Anyway, that's how we got Kisaragi Akiha, the Sniper Princess and

cornerstone of the stronghold's defense, and Kisaragi Haruka, the farmer, to abandon the empire and join the Kingdom of Sentdrag.

After that, Jirou and I used our abilities to get rid of all the traps on the way, and the fort—with its defensive strategy having more or less relied on Akiha doing all the work—swiftly fell into our hands.

It was especially easy thanks to Haruka and the sleeping pollen she had been developing in secret. After dusting it all around the place, the soldiers dropped like flies. The stronghold's biggest advantage was that it was almost airtight, but that ended up becoming its downfall. Adel and Youko—with her army of golems—who hadn't had a chance to shine until now also went to town, clearing out the whole fort in one sweep. It ended up being so easy for them that they were in a bad mood the following day.

Chapter 6

A few days after Masaki and his comrades retook the Sniper Princess's former stronghold...

Inside the throne room, the king of the Sentdrag Kingdom and his chancellor, Albert, were engrossed in a discussion with a young man. He was wearing a school uniform—a white shirt under a standing collar jacket and baggy matching trousers. A wooden sword was hanging at his hips.

All in all, Kiryuu Hayato looked like a high school gang leader.

"Hayato, you've done well on the northern expedition. I'm sorry for sending you there right after promising you a vacation," King Laurent said.

"Please do not worry, Your Majesty. I understand why you had to put me in charge. To be honest, I was curious about this too, so it worked out quite well."

In spite of his rough appearance, Hayato politely bowed to the king.

Before being summoned to this world, Hayato used to be an avid player of a VRMMO called *Gang Town*. In the game, he was one of the strongest players, a leader to all the other wannabe delinquents.

He had led his gang and defeated dozens of other teams, turning their members into his own underlings, until, eventually, he was left at the top of an organization that encompassed every single group in town.

Naturally, Hayato had the strength and the guts to match his position. He'd stand right back up even if someone hit him with a baseball bat, shot him, or tried to run him over with a car. His foes feared him and his allies revered him, respecting him as their absolute leader.

In *Gang Town*, players could pick up skills that fell into three main categories: fist attacks, kicks and footwork, and general stamina. Hayato had focused on stamina, defense, and agility, and had ended up with a very defensive build.

He was a born leader and was incredibly good at enduring long battles.

For instance, when a raid event ended up lasting forty hours due to a bug, Hayato was the only player able to power through without falling asleep or getting incapacitated by another player. He managed to take control of the situation, swiftly give orders to the leaders of other groups, and rally them under his banner to protect every player in his town.

After that event, he didn't log back in for almost a day, but that didn't stop the other players from referring to him as the most OP player ever from there onward.

However, Hayato suddenly disappeared from the world of *Gang Town*.

It came as a shock to his hundreds of underlings and some even tried to look for him in real life.

When they finally discovered his real identity and asked his relatives, they learned that he had disappeared altogether without a trace. No one knew where he was. Hayato's disappearance became the trigger that brought the stories of other gamers suddenly vanishing to light. It made a lot of noise and eventually helped form the urban legend that Masaki and Jirou had heard about while they were still on earth.

As for what had happened to Hayato after transmigrating... Well, he survived countless battles and eventually reached the position of military commander in the Sentdrag army.

"I'm sure you both know why I requested you here today," the king started. "I want to talk about Masaki."

Masaki was currently the talk of the town and they all hailed the new hero of Sentdrag. The nobles and aristocrats of the kingdom couldn't ignore him any longer. Criticizing him wasn't even an option anymore, as it would guarantee getting on the bad side not only of the common people who adored him but also of the nobles and rich merchants who tried to curry favor with him.

His popularity had even led to the creation of a play titled *The Azure Hero and the Crimson Knight Princess*. While Masaki had been reluctant to let it happen

at first, the king had personally called in a favor, telling him that the people were starved for entertainment in these times of war. Masaki had eventually backed down.

The play had been a resounding success and had helped raise Masaki and Adel's popularity in the other cities of the kingdom.

"I received a report from Jirou," the king continued. "He saved the Sniper Princess and her sister using strange abilities. One allows him to become invisible, the other to fly."

"They must have been wearing slave collars... Does that mean he managed to unlock them?" Hayato asked.

King Laurent nodded.

It was well-known that slave collars could not be opened without their respective keys. If anyone tried to destroy them or remove them by force, the slave would die on the spot.

"Masaki owns a magic item called the Pick of the Bandit King. He apparently relied on it to unlock the collars," King Laurent explained.

"With that..." Hayato trailed off.

"Yes." The King understood immediately what he was getting at. "The rest of the otherworlders being forced to do the empire's bidding could be saved too."

"Your Majesty." Albert, who had listened silently to their exchange until now, stepped in. "Sir Masaki holds terrifying powers. He even fought neck and neck with the Leviathan itself... Could anyone stand up to him if he were to turn his blade against our land?"

Albert's fears stood to reason. Otherworlders were usually strong, but there were usually limits to what they could do. On the other hand, Masaki was strong enough to face the Leviathan—a being that could single-handedly drag the entire continent under the seas if it so wished. As an ally, Masaki was reliable indeed. However, the idea of having him as an enemy would send shivers down anyone's spine.

"Albert, calm down. I gave him a noble title and asked Count Alan to

encourage him to marry Adelheid, my dear brother's orphaned daughter, for this very reason. Thankfully, Adelheid seemed to like him a lot," King Laurent said with a smile.

"I see. You created ties for him in the Sentdrag Kingdom to prevent other countries from poaching him... Your foresight impresses me as always, Your Majesty," Hayato answered, forcing a smile too.

Countries couldn't be run on agreeable ideals only. It was vital to prevent assets from being stolen away. For that sake, King Laurent hadn't hesitated to use his own kin, Adelheid. If she hadn't been saved by Masaki, he surely would have offered up his twelve-year-old daughter, Princess Hildegard, without batting an eye.

"Besides, Masaki came to us himself looking for backing," the king continued. "While he does have the power to destroy countries on his own, he does not wish for senseless massacres. As long as we do not stray from the righteous path, he has no reason to turn against us."

"I must say, I feel a little bad for the empire. Sure, he concealed his abilities, but for them to throw such a talented individual in a cell and then let him escape and destroy a good portion of their fleet... They lost countless men and ships, *and* managed to turn him into an enemy," Hayato remarked. "Well, it *is* just retribution considering their egregious invasions."

King Laurent and his chancellor nodded in agreement.

The empire had no way of knowing how everything would turn out. What bad luck.

Until now, they had used forceful methods to subjugate people. They were haughty and only regarded other people as tools to be used. In the end, you reaped what you sowed, and they had gotten their just reward. They had lost a powerful asset and driven him to join the enemy instead.

"Now that we have regained control over the stronghold, our next target should be the Great Plains of Grandt..."

"Indeed. I received word that the empire has sensed the danger and is strengthening its troops there. According to the Sniper Princess's sister, around

forty percent of the empire's food goes through the city of Lurf located beyond the Plains."

"Forty percent?! That is a lot! How is that even possible...?" Albert exclaimed.

It was perfectly normal to stock foodstuffs in large cities after gathering harvests from the villages and towns surrounding it, but forty percent of the empire's resources being concentrated within a single city was ridiculous.

"It appears that the farmer girl—the sniper's sister—planted a large number of special crops there using her ability. They only take one month until they can be harvested. Masaki unexpectedly picked up another treasure."

"I see. The empire just lost the Sniper Princess. If we can take this city and its special crops, they will be in a precarious situation."

"Then our next step has to be..."

"Naturally, we will take Lurf," the king concluded. "Hayato. I'm sorry, but I will have to ask you to reschedule your vacation once more. You'll set out as soon as the preparations are complete. I know I'm asking a lot from you in spite of your young age," he added with an apologetic look on his face.

"Your Majesty, I want to pay you back for helping me when I had nowhere to go, and I really like this place, so please do not worry. I will do whatever I can to bring back peace to this land as soon as possible. My men are all of the same mind," Hayato reassured the king.

His bright smile clashed with his delinquent appearance. However, anyone who had seen Hayato in battle knew the truth. While Hayato was a gentle and well-mannered man, he turned into a warrior more ferocious than any beast as soon as he stepped onto the battlefield.



At the same time, a war council was being held in the empire.

The emperor, his generals, and other key figures within the empire were gathered in the room when a knock on the door interrupted the heavy atmosphere.

“Enter,” said the emperor.

The messenger opened the door. The oppressive mood inside the room made him falter for a moment, but he steeled himself and stepped in.

“I apologize for disturbing your meeting. I have just received word that...the stronghold to the northeast of Lurf fell to the enemy. The whereabouts of the Sniper Princess and farmer are unknown. We are not sure whether they were killed or taken prisoner...”

The messenger’s tone was very unsure, as though he himself couldn’t believe what he was saying.

The emperor sighed before answering. “I see. Get out.”

“At once!” the messenger exclaimed, walking away as fast as he possibly could.

He did not want to spend one more second in this place. He was just a messenger. A foot soldier. He didn’t feel like he could bear the pressure that emanated from the people sitting in that room.

“Damn! Disgusting northern barbarians... How dare they stand up to the empire?! They deserve death!” General Barry yelled, his voice filled with hatred and arrogance as he banged his fist on the long table.

He was the very same person who had once visited Masaki in prison wearing a luxurious set of armor.

“Words are easy. How do you plan on going about it, though? I don’t know how that impregnable fortress fell, but it means that they have someone skilled enough to make it happen... Just like that time...”

“Indeed. We faced a similar situation when the otherworlder we couldn’t bind with a slave collar escaped. We still have no idea how he managed it. He even destroyed our fleet before vanishing... What happened this time is just as confusing.”

“I knew we should have cut his head off immediately!” Barry all but screamed. “Useless otherworlders are the worst kind of trash.”

“Hey, hey. I wish you’d be nicer to my fellow otherworlders,” someone cut in.

“You’re the ones who dragged us here against our will in the first place.”

“How dare you?! Bastard!”

“I became a count yesterday. That means I now rank higher than you, Viscount Barry. How about you show me some respect?”

“Wh—?”

“Silence,” said another man. He was wearing full armor and had a large spear on his back. He glared at Barry, stopping him right in his tracks. He hadn’t raised his voice, but his tone was strangely domineering.

“Now is not the time to fight among ourselves,” he continued. “They will come for Lurf next.”

“If Lurf falls, our food supplies will be drastically affected! We need to stop them, no matter what.”

“Wei General Tatsuma, how many men can we gather in Lurf?”

“Fifty thousand soldiers are already stationed there. We can bring in up to another two hundred thousand men from the north, five hundred thousand from the south, and around a hundred thousand from the west. Our western troops are still engaged in battle, so I’m afraid they may not be able to send reinforcement right away, though. Not that it can be helped, since you went and started a fight with the demon tribes. Honestly...” Wei General Shidou Tatsuma sighed. He’d reported all those numbers without needing to look down at any documents. “It would have been much smarter to wait for the other fronts to calm down first. Anyway, new sailors are still in the process of being trained, but if you ask the Great Admiral, he might find you ten thousand prisoners that can take arms.”

Tatsuma had been opposed to the offensive on the demon tribes as he deemed the Kingdom of Sentdrag to also be a threat. However, Barry was brimming with self-confidence and had decided to attack the tribes anyway. He had managed to sway some nobles and generals who hoped a few distinguished feats during the war would give them something to boast about. They really didn’t think it through.

“The demon tribes are nothing! If we go all out, we can just get rid of them in

one clean—”

“We haven’t succeeded though, have we?! I don’t need you blurting out ridiculous ideas! The next time you bring shame to this empire, I will have your head! Get out!” the emperor roared.

“Y-Yes!” Barry squealed, running out of the room with his head hung. It contained only a single thought. If he failed again, he would lose his life.

“I believe negotiating a ceasefire would be good for us. We can return their prisoners and provide some supplies as an incentive,” one of the advisors proposed.

“Who’s to say they’ll accept? Well, you can try,” Tatsuma answered casually.

Tatsuma always acted like this, even when he was addressing the emperor himself. However, he always brought results and was a born commander. That was how he had managed to climb the ranks to reach his current position as a count. The emperor recognized his abilities and valued Tatsuma enough to forgive his offenses. As such, he was never reprimanded for his lack of formality.

“Moving on to the main issue. How do we set up our defenses? The Sentdrag Kingdom has that gang leader and that ninja master. They may have even gotten their hands on the Sniper Princess and the farmer. On top of that, the guy who escaped must be working with them. He might be the most dangerous of them all. Thankfully, I think it’s unlikely he’ll blast his ridiculous magic all over a city at least.”

“We will put together a plan,” the emperor said. “In the meantime, I want you to find the hunter and Chogokin. The three of you are to head to Lurf.”

“Got it. I’ll make sure the citizens evacuate when I get there,” Tatsuma answered, getting up from his seat and waving casually at the emperor before exiting the room.

Tatsuma was good at fighting battles, but absolutely hopeless at devising strategies. He simply went wild on the battlefield. Nonetheless, he was worth a thousand men. He had fought the Sentdrag Kingdom before and even defeated smaller nations’ whole chivalric orders by himself.

As Tatsuma closed the door behind him, the second part of the meeting began. It was time for the empire to decide how to handle the Sentdrag Kingdom.

In another room, a general who had lost his honor and his position in the blink of an eye was currently lamenting his misfortune.

“What the hell should I do now?! Fuck... If I don’t find a solution, my dream of marrying the princess and taking the throne will go up in flames... It’s all the fault of these disgusting otherworlders!” Barry screamed, slamming his fist violently upon his desk. “I need to find a way...”

Barry had been driven to the wall, and, at the moment, his life hung by a thread. But he couldn’t afford to stop planning. If he was unable to come up with a way to redeem himself, his head would roll.

Just as he was about to give in to despair, someone approached him.

“I know exactly what you should do.”

“Who are you?!” Barry yelled in surprise.

No one should have been able to enter his chambers.

Although the person who had just spoken was standing right in front of Barry, their face was completely shrouded in darkness, covered by their hood. Strangely enough, when they had spoken, it sounded as though two voices simultaneously came out, and it was impossible to tell whether they were a man or a woman.

Nonetheless, Barry didn’t seem to pick up on these details. He just assumed that he couldn’t see the stranger’s face because the room was dimly lit. There was no way for him to notice something that even his brain could not process.

“Does my identity really matter?” the strange double voice asked. “You need strength to show that you can be useful, don’t you?”

“That is it! If I had powers too, I could get rid of those dirty otherworlders! I’m a noble, I’m nothing like those insects!”

“Would you like to obtain abilities that are far superior to those of the

otherworlders?”

“What are you...? Do such abilities exist?!”

“Of course they do. To overcome them, you just need... Let’s call it God’s medicine. With that in your grasp, nothing will stand in your way...” the mysterious voice continued.

The stranger stepped closer to Barry and handed him an envelope.

“With this, I...”

“I shall prepare the stage for you. I’ll tell you what to do. If you just follow my instructions, you’ll become a hero.”

“A hero! Yes... Ha ha ha! I will become...a true hero!”

“I will be counting on you...Hero Barry.”

“Yes, yes. I understand. HA HA HA HA!!!”

Barry just stared at the drugs contained inside the envelope and did not notice the hooded figure disappearing. There were no traces of the door or window having been opened.

Barry was left alone in the room laughing like a madman and repeating the word “hero” over and over again. He stood there in the middle of his furnished room. There was a desk, a couch, dozens of books, and a single houseplant that swayed softly as if to mock him.

“I’ve finished planting the seed of foolishness. I hope you will entertain me,” the voice whispered somewhere, far away.



A few days after the fall of the stronghold to the north of Lurf...

We introduced Kisaragi Akiha, the Sniper Princess, as a victim I saved from the grasp of the empire’s otherworlder, and she was currently staying with us at the garrison as a guest. The main reason we had decided to go with this story was that many soldiers had suffered and lost limbs—or worse, their lives—because of her.

Thankfully, only the soldiers of the empire knew about the Sniper Princess.

Here, no one had ever seen her face or heard about her nickname. After discussing the situation with Jirou, we decided to make up an imaginary otherworlder.

The story went as follows: I found myself at the top of the stronghold and met an otherworlder called Gorn Heil. After a difficult fight, I managed to strike him down. I just happened to find Akiha hiding in a corner, so I decided to save her. As far as the soldiers were concerned, the empire's sniper that had been terrorizing them was already dead.

As for Kisaragi Haruka, the farmer, she was treated as a very important guest because of the prince's affection for her.

As usual, she was a bit of a weirdo, but her abilities were incredible. After she heard a group of soldiers complain about the food shortage, she decided to take the matter into her own hands.

"Oh my! I should make something then..."

"Make something?" one soldier asked.

"Lunch!" she answered, taking out a seed from her pocket and planting it.
"Light of Plenty!"

She used her skill on the ground and the seed grew into a tree in a matter of seconds. It looked like a palm tree and it bore fruit immediately.

This was already amazing in its own right, but she wasn't done yet.

"I can already tell this one is going to be tasty, hee hee. Akiha-chan! Come help me out! Shoot it down!"

"All right but... Hmm... Mister Soldier? Could you please stand ready under the tree?"

The soldier looked confused, but he listened to her and moved to stand at the base of the tree. She used Quick Draw to shoot the fruit down and have it swiftly fall right into the soldier's hands. The soldier was surprised by its weight, almost dropping it to the floor.

"Excuse me..." the soldier started. "What is this?"

"It's a curry fruit!" Haruka answered cheerfully.

She took the fruit, cut it up masterfully, and indeed...it was full of Japanese curry!

Haruka had just created something absolutely unbelievable in front of our eyes.

Obviously, its contents were cold, but it still smelled like proper curry and the fragrant smell of spices wafted in the air. We made an open-air fire on the spot and heated up the curry to enjoy it for lunch together.

We didn't have any rice to eat it with so we decided to go for naan made from wheat flour. I wrote down the recipe, handed it to one of the soldiers, and had him bring it to the cooks. There was no way I could make enough for everyone by myself even if I tried.

"You also grew those fruits for the empire, right?" I inquired.

"Yes! Everyone loved them so much. They won't grow without my powers, though. I also used to make super big fruits, and I grew rice and wheat plants that produced tons of rice and wheat too, hee hee."

As I was downing my curry, I realized all over again how amazing the girl I had picked up was. Any country would be desperate to get its hands on someone like her.

This tastes amazing. I'll admit I was a little worried when I saw it coming out of a fruit, but it's great. Even the spice level is perfect.

"Lady Haruka, I'm sorry to bother you, but may I ask for seconds...?"

The prince was already eating his third serving of curry. *He's just like the little prince on the packaging of that famous curry brand... I guess Leon is the real deal, though.*

"Of course! Please eat a lot so you'll have the energy to work afterward, my prince," Haruka said with a soft, almost maternal smile, as she handed another heated-up fruit to Prince Leon.

Look at him blushing and averting his gaze... He's so gone.

"I'm glad to see Prince Leon found someone nice," Adel said.

"Right! Wait, my mouth's burning... I need water," Youko whined.

Adel looked warmly over at the prince, who was basically an older brother to her, while Youko seemed to be struggling with the spiciness of the curry.

“You should drink this instead,” I said, handing her some milk. “If you drink water, it’ll hurt even more.”

“Is that how it works? Thank you.”

Good thing I asked for milk to be brought as soon as I saw we’d be having curry.

I was sitting between Adel and Youko, and the three of us were enjoying the food and taking it easy in front of the stronghold. The garrison’s soldiers also seemed to be having the time of their lives as they were finally able to eat their fill.

“Prince Leon, what do you intend to do with the Kisaragi sisters from now on?” I asked the prince when we moved to my Room after lunch.

We were treating Akiha as a kind of freelance general and Haruka as a personal guest of the prince for now, but bringing them to the battlefield again so soon after rescuing them wouldn’t do.

They’d be safe if they just stayed inside my Room, but, while it may be a comfortable place to be, they’d still end up completely confined.

“To be honest, I’d love to send them to the royal capital but...”

“I don’t think it’s a good idea, Your Highness. I’ve gotten word that Hayato, the gang leader, is currently leading an army here,” Jirou explained. “They will be joining our forces to take Lurf. If one of us were to bring the sisters to the capital, we’d be lacking in manpower and end up delaying the operation. Moreover, if we were to leave Lady Haruka and Lady Akiha alone there, they might be targeted by nobles with bad intentions. We won’t be able to protect them from here.”

“If anyone touches Lady Haruka, I’ll have their head...” His hand flew to the holy sword of Sentdrag.

“Prince Leon, please calm down,” I said in an attempt to pacify him. “This is nothing more than speculation.”

Phew...

That being said, he only brought up his dear Lady Haruka. *He's not even trying to hide it anymore, is he?*

Haruka seemed as carefree as ever while Akiha seemed somewhat annoyed not to have been included.

"Akiha, you're really cute too. I'm sure even the soldiers are full of bad intentions. I'm also against sending the two of you to the capital," I said firmly. "Even if you're an amazing marksman, if they manage to catch you in a situation where you can't use a gun, who knows what'll happen?"

"He's right. There is no country in which every soldier is an upstanding person," said Adel.

"I'm sure it's the same in the empire," added Youko. "And there must also be good people there. For instance, I once heard about a soldier helping little kids escape discreetly in the past."

Both of my fiancées seemed to agree with me. And Akiha was stealing glances at me while blushing. *Why?*

"The best course of action might be to have the two of you stay in Sir Masaki's Room."

"You might get bored, but there's plenty of food and you can sleep in comfy beds here."

There'd be no risk of being attacked or kidnapped if they stayed here, and it had great amenities. I even had a few flowerpots, so Haruka would be able to grow her food seeds and they'd be able to enjoy a wide variety of meals.

Just when I thought our conversation had reached its conclusion, Akiha raised her hand.

"Hmm... Actually, my sister and I talked about it and...can I say something?"

"Of course, go ahead."

"The thing is... If possible...we'd like to join you."

"Yes! Akiha-chan and I had a looooong conversation about it," Haruka added.

They were both very powerful, and having them as allies would be great, but...

“Are you sure about this? You’ll have to fight your former comrades if you join our fight against the empire.”

“I don’t mind. I only worked with them because they took my sister hostage. I’ve never thought of them as comrades.”

“The truth is... I’m very, very, very mad about them attacking Akiha-chan! I want to pay them back! Would that be okay, my prince?” Haruka pleaded with puppy eyes, leaning against the prince’s shoulder.

“YES! OF COURSE!”

“Prince Leon, please don’t agree so hastily. And Lady Haruka, do not lean against His Highness,” Jirou warned.

Haruka didn’t seem to have any qualms about using her charms as a weapon. And they were super effective on the prince.

“Onee-chan! Come on!” Akiha reprimanded, pulling on Haruka’s arm to get her back into her seat.

Poor Akiha.

They seemed hell-bent on standing against the empire.

“Then, taking your eagerness into consideration... How about you join my personal troops? We can’t really send you to someone else, and you may be confronted by jealous onlookers if you suddenly end up under the prince’s direct command.”

“I guess that’s the only way...” the prince said with a sour face.

Try to think about your own position sometimes, Prince Leon!

“What do you think about that?” I asked again, ignoring the prince.

“I’m good with that,” Akiha agreed. “I owe you so much, Masaki-san. And I’d be more at ease working under a fellow otherworlder.”

“Well then... I’m rather inexperienced but—” Haruka started.

“Onee-chan! I already told you to stop saying it like that!” Akiha cut her off.

Yeah, I wish you'd stop too. I can feel the prince drilling holes into the back of my head.

"It's a joke! You have no sense of humor, my little Akiha-chan."

"Onee-chan..."

"Anyways! I want to thank you all once again for taking such good care of me and my sister!"

"Yeah..." Akiha sighed at her sister's antics before adding, "I'm looking forward to working with you!"

"The two of you are such interesting people," Youko said with a little laugh. "I'm sure we'll work great together."

The Kisaragi sisters bowed politely, and we officially welcomed Kisaragi Akiha, the Sniper Princess, and Kisaragi Haruka, the farmer, as our new comrades.

Honestly, if someone had told me I'd end up with four beautiful ladies as retainers, I wouldn't have believed it... *This being said, I sure hope the prince manages to woo his sweetheart when the war ends so he can take her off my hands. I'm sure Akiha would be thankful too.*

Later on, as we sat in the briefing room to discuss our next moves, a soldier knocked on the door.

"Prince Leon, Sir Hayato has just arrived!"

"Got it. You are dismissed."

"Yes, Your Highness!"

He had come to inform the prince of the gang leader Hayato's arrival. Hayato had brought along provisions and an army of around two hundred thousand men.

Not that we were wanting for more food, however. Thanks to Haruka's overpowered abilities, the fort was surrounded by fields of wheat, rice, and vegetables. The area looked more like farmland than a garrison at this point.

We had also taken to hunting the large lizard-and cow-looking monsters that

popped up nearby and enjoyed a variety of different meats from them. The morale of the troops was at an all-time high thanks to the delicious meals being served every day.

“Your Highness, I have just arrived. Greetings!”

“The long trip must have tired you out,” the prince welcomed him before gesturing in my direction. “Hayato, this is Masaki, the Azure Hero.”

“Nice to meet you. I’m just regular old Toudou Masaki. Nothing heroic about me. These two ladies are my retainers and my fiancées, Adel and Youko.”

“Nice to meet you,” Adel greeted him.

“I’m also glad to make your acquaintance,” Youko continued.

“I’m new here as I used to live in the empire, but Masaki-san saved me and brought me here. I’m Kisaragi Akiha, the Sniper Princess. My sister and I became Masaki-san’s retainers quite recently,” Akiha introduced herself.

“Same here! I’m Kisaragi Haruka, the farmer. I’m sure you’ve seen all my babies on your way here, hee hee. I’m the one who planted them all! Nice to meet you, Mr. Leader!”

“Likewise, it’s a pleasure to meet you all,” he responded.

For a gang member, he sure is polite. Wait... The wooden sword hanging at his hip is red. Does that mean that...? No, I shouldn’t pry.

After merging our forces with the reinforcements Hayato brought, we now had an army five hundred thousand men strong.

Roughly two hundred thousand men were on standby close to the fort. Hayato brought another two hundred thousand, and the last hundred thousand were adventurers and men from surrounding countries that wanted to help fight the empire.

A while ago, I saved a foreign country’s general from one of the empire’s ships. His intelligence service learned about our current plans, and he immediately offered his help. He then reached out to the adventurer’s guild and managed to assemble a hundred thousand men. *As they say, one good turn deserves another, I suppose. I’m really happy that he came to our aid.*

I looked at my map and saw a blue mark approaching us at high speed. A blue mark meant an ally and considering the speed... *Jirou's coming back. I really should add name tags.*

"I'm back from my reconnaissance mission. As I thought, the empire is also preparing for battle. They have gathered hundreds of thousands of soldiers. However, they're still fighting the demon tribes in the west, and it seems like they couldn't bring in any reinforcements from that region."

"I received word that they sent an envoy to plead for a ceasefire. Did they fail to reach an agreement?"

"Indeed. According to what I could find out, they tried to negotiate in the worst way possible. They were as arrogant as ever, stating that they'd 'grant them' a ceasefire and even 'be nice enough' to send back the demons they had captured. They also said that if the demon tribes failed to comply, they'd target women and children without mercy. The viscount is truly foolish."

"What an idiot," the prince commented.

"Naturally, the demon tribes were enraged and are now fighting even more fiercely. Their general has assured me that if possible, they'll push through and advance to join us in Lurf."

There are plenty of idiots in the empire too, huh? I guess their warmongering is finally coming to bite them in the ass.

The empire controlled most of the south, but that didn't mean they could pull away all of their troops. Even the weakest nations would rebel if they saw an opportunity. In fact, even sending their current army had released some of the pressure on occupied nations—they used that opportunity to send their own troops to join our coalition. *On top of that, we may receive help from the demon tribes in the west. This is the perfect chance to take out a lot of imperial soldiers.*

"Even so, I estimate the empire will gather around seven hundred thousand men," Jirou continued. "They will have a slight advantage as far as numbers go. On top of that, I confirmed that several otherworlders will also be joining the battle. The Wei General, the hunter, and Chogokin are among them. I know for a fact that they're on the empire's side out of their own volition and aren't being threatened with hostages like Kisaragi-san was. Winning them over isn't

an option... We've fought them a few times already."

I would have loved to bring them over to our side, but if they had already decided to fight alongside the empire, there was nothing I could do about it. Three more otherworlders to worry about... I had a general idea about the first two thanks to their nicknames, but what the hell was a Chogokin supposed to be?

"Hey... What are the abilities of that Chogokin guy?"

"His abilities are... How should I put it...? He was most likely summoned from a robot-themed MMO."

"For real?!"

I knew players had been summoned from a load of different games, but robots were pushing it! *Everything goes in this world, huh? I guess I'm even worse as a GM, though.*

"Masaki, what's a robot?"

"Ah... How do I explain that...?" I thought aloud. "It's... It's like a big steel golem in a way. Oftentimes, there's a person inside to control it. Jirou, is that the case for Chogokin?"

"Yes, indeed. The robot itself is over ten meters tall. It can launch its fist and fire lasers."

"He's like a damn steel fortress... He'll be a pain to deal with."

I guess I should be thankful that he's not over a hundred meters tall, huh? Ten meters is already plenty annoying, though.

Speaking of metallic monsters...isn't Shou going to show up? Thinking back, he had introduced himself as a Machine Beasts Tamer...

"Is Shou the Machine Beasts Tamer going to be there too? I fought against him on an imperial ship once."

"Ah, so you've faced Shou already. He is a mercenary, but it doesn't look like he's been hired to take part in this fight. If he does, his presence will be a huge disadvantage to us. His invocations can take on a whole army."

I wasn't surprised they'd heard about Shou before. *He can take on a whole army, you say? He really went easy on me, didn't he?*

"Masaki, I think I can handle the steel golem," Youko suddenly said. "My Gigant Golem measures at around eight meters. I used titan bones to make it so it's very sturdy. It should be able to fight a steel golem without any problems."

"So you still had something up your sleeve, Youko... Are you sure you'll be fine fighting him alone?"

"I'm happy to see you worry about me," she answered with a smile. "You don't need to, though. Operating the Gigant Golem is pretty tiring, but I also have to step up and show everyone I'm worthy of being the wife of a hero, just like Adel. There's also something I want to try."

"I'm glad, but don't overdo it, all right?"

"I'll be fine. I won't make the same mistake twice. If I feel like I have to run away, I will."

Please do run away. I don't want to lose my fiancée before the wedding. They can keep that kind of plot for the movies.

You may be wondering what the hell I was talking about since fighting a war was obviously risky to begin with, but I still had every intention to protect Adel, Youko, and the Kisaragi sisters to the best of my ability.

Since Youko volunteered, she would be in charge of facing Chogokin. Hayato would take on the Wei General, and Jirou would fight the hunter. Meanwhile, Adel and I would fly over the battlefield and strike whenever opportunities arose. We'd also support everyone by using our magic and skills with the goal of decreasing the enemy's numbers as much as possible. Akiha's job would be to stand on one of Youko's golems and take down the commanding officers from afar. If the chain of command collapsed, it would be much easier to take care of the rest of the soldiers.

As for Haruka...she'd act as Prince Leon's bodyguard. Or rather, Prince Leon would keep her safe. The prince was supposed to be in the vanguard so I asked Akiha whether Haruka would be okay there.

"She'll be more than fine. She may not look the part, but she's pretty tough."

I didn't know if I believed that, but I was sure that Prince Leon would remove her from any dangerous situation by dragging her back if he had to. I almost felt bad for our enemies, but I stopped that thought in its tracks. *No pity for the enemy.*

Planning out the exact position of every squadron for such a large-scale battle took a lot of time, but it must have been the same for the other side too. Military men prized speed, but there was a limit. If you tried to move troops too quickly, you were bound to make mistakes. *Soldiers that can't cooperate with each other are nothing more than moving targets.*

Although we had fewer soldiers than the empire, each and every Sentdrag soldier was worth at least two of their enemies so we weren't too concerned. They were incredibly skilled and had even learned the modern martial arts used by the Japanese police from Jirou. It was a different story when it came to the adventurers who had joined us. They had very different skill levels. Thankfully, there were quite a few magicians among them, so we had them form parties to balance things out.

We still had some time before we could assemble such a huge force, and I dedicated myself to making High Potions, which I handed to both the squadron leaders and the leaders of each adventurer party. Hopefully, this would raise the survival rate.

I couldn't make High Potions with just regular plants, but Haruka somehow grew a whole field of medicinal herbs for me. They were all of very high quality so I was able to produce great batches.

A few days after our meeting, while I was busy making potions, Hayato came to find me.

"I'm sorry for intruding on you like this. You're Masaki-san, the Azure Hero, right?"

"I'm really no hero. It's no problem, though. I hope you don't mind me making potions while we chat. You're really polite for a gang leader, though. Are you always like this?"

"Yes. I hear that a lot. To be honest, people just started calling me 'leader' out

of the blue.”

“I...actually had the same thing happen to me.”

“Masaki-san, you used to play *Britalia Online* before being summoned here, right? What was your class? You look like a pharmacist right now.”

“Sorry to disappoint, but I can’t really tell you the specifics... I’ll just say that my main job was swordsman. In spite of what I said earlier, I guess you can think of me as some sort of hero...”

I had already let the king put on a play about me being a hero... I wasn’t about to fight the title anymore.

I’d probably need to wear camouflage the next time I planned to walk the streets of the capital. *What should I do about Adel, though...? Maybe I can give her a new outfit as a gift too... Now that I think about it, I’d love to see Youko wearing Japanese clothes...*

“You’re considered a hero even in the theaters so I’ll just leave it at that,” Hayato answered with a smile.

“I’m sure that’s not all you wanted to talk about, right?”

I made enough potions for now so I’ll give Hayato my full attention. If I make too many in a row without taking a break, I’m going to start making mistakes. I’ll take the chance to rest while we chat.

“You found me out. I was just curious... You don’t seem to be looking for a way home. Why is that?”

“To be honest, at first, it was just that I couldn’t focus on that. I was too busy escaping from the empire and surviving. Then I had a talk with Jirou and I gave up on the idea altogether.”

“You don’t want to go back to our world?”

It’s not that I don’t want to go home... I did have a strong attachment to my past world, and I really wanted to apologize to my senpai for all the trouble I had caused him. I also missed my friends and family.

“That’s not it... But no one found a way to go home, right? If it were possible, I’m sure Jirou would have found at least some sort of hint by now. He’s been in

the world for twenty years—there's no way he hasn't looked. He'd at least try to negotiate with the otherworlders in the empire if he had any clue."

Until now, no one had brought up the possibility of going home. Not even those in the empire. If they could send back the people they summoned, they would have sent me back the second they had realized I wouldn't be of any use. The fact that they hadn't only proved that summons were a one-way door. Either that or there was something to be gained from killing me. I couldn't be sure.

"And..." I started again. "I found people who are precious to me in this world too. I've pretty much lost the will to go home. If I could go back and forth, I would want to go back, though. At least once."

"I see... You're right in saying that we have yet to find a way to go home... But I still haven't given up. I left too much behind in our world."

Hayato's reaction was probably the normal one. *I guess I'm weird...*

If the Kisaragi sisters also want to go home, I want to help out, but...I'm not sure the prince would take it well.

"I understand. If I can do anything at all, I won't hesitate to help you. But for now..."

"We need to focus on fighting the empire. As long as the empire exists, this continent won't know peace."

"Exactly. Here you go, Hayato," I said, handing him a stack of potions. "Those are for your men. Give them to every squadron leader."

"Thank you. Let's do our best during the actual fight."

"Yep. I hope everything goes well."

Our upcoming battle would decide the fate of the continent.

I intended to do everything in my power to achieve victory.

The following day, a report from the scouting party arrived. It read: "The empire will strike tomorrow." In other words...the battle would take place today.

As soon as the news reached me, I decided to set my skills. I had been thinking about what to use for a while. I wasn't facing a fleet this time but hundreds of thousands of individuals. I needed attacks that could cover wide areas.

Passive skills: MP Recovery (Medium), HP & MP Recovery (Medium), Physical Reinforcement (Extra High), Close-Combat Mastery (High), Heightened Senses (High), Increased Range (Low).

Active skills: Oversword, Spirit Zone, Thousand Dust of the Six Realms, Dual Casting.

I had kept my staple skills and focused on increasing my attack range.

Spirit Zone allowed the user to create a barrier with a five-meter radius. Defeating an enemy within the perimeters of the barrier would return my HP and MP. I expected I would struggle to keep my meters high enough so this was a must-have.

Thousand Dust of the Six Realms was an active skill that could mold aura into any piercing weapon. Spears, sabers, knives, swords, even halberds or canes—anything went. Those could then be used to take down a large number of enemies at once. The only downside was that it could only be sent in a straight line. *I know it sounds a lot like the technique of a certain golden robot, and it's honestly not that good in game as it's really easy to dodge.*

It wouldn't be the same on the battlefield, though. If there were soldiers all around, dodging wouldn't be an option, and I should be able to take down plenty of soldiers even if I just fired around haphazardly. It didn't form the best of combinations with Oversword, but I had used it quite a lot in guild fights.

Finally, Dual Casting would let me cast two spells at the same time. With that skill, I'd be able to use compound magic on my own, but it would require a tremendous amount of mana so I'd need to pick my moment. Still, it had the potential to become my trump card in times of need.

Chapter 7

On the day of the battle, our forces were lined up in the large open field in front of the fort, separated into squadrons. Alongside the royal army of the king of Sentdrag stood adventurers, the men sent by several smaller countries, and roughly fifty thousand demons who had hurried over from the west.

In total, five hundred fifty thousand men had been gathered under the leadership of Prince Leon with the assistance of the commanding officers of the allied forces and of the demon tribes' soldiers. I was quite surprised when I noticed that the commanding officer of the allied forces was the general I had once saved with my crew. As for the demon tribes, they had sent a beautiful and dignified woman.

"The time has come to stand up to the empire!" the prince exclaimed, addressing the troops. "They have brought the perils of war to our doors, mercilessly slaughtering and enslaving the people of this continent. Time and again have they brought nations to their ruin, and they will not stop until every single country falls under their dominion! We cannot permit their hateful warmongering any longer! Our loss today would allow them to spread the sorrow of war even further! So I would like to once again express my deepest gratitude to our allies for rushing here to support us in this fight!"

"My men and I have been saved from the clutch of the empire by Sir Masaki, the Azure Hero. I know full well how much the adventurers have suffered at their hands too," the general of the allied forces started. "With this battle, we will deal a heavy blow to the empire! Let us take our revenge on behalf of the Valentine Empire and all other fallen nations!"

"We, the demon tribes, are of the same mind," the demon general said. "We bear nothing but hatred toward the empire that has enslaved hundreds of our brethren. Thank you for allowing our troops to join your coalition on such short notice. Let us become one and exert every effort to bring peace to our lands!"

The soldiers cheered at the words of the three representatives. The roars of a

five-hundred-fifty-thousand-strong army were kind of overwhelming and they sent a shiver down my spine. *I'm pretty sure that even the ground shook.*

That being said...I really wished they'd stop bringing up my name all the time. *I guess it's fine if it brings the morale up, but yeah...*

Several soldiers looked around, probably searching for me in the crowd, but I wasn't there.

I was currently...above the empire's army. In fact, I had only heard the officers' speeches through Telepathy. I was using Stealth, Invincibility, and Wing to conceal myself and observe the empire's troops from the sky.

Although our goal was to deal a large blow to the empire, the reality was that roughly twenty percent of their troops were slaves. They had been forced to enroll and would have to spill the blood of their fellow countrymen. Everyone in our coalition had already sworn to avoid killing them if possible. Naturally, no one would blame a soldier for killing in a situation where their own life was in peril, but we still hoped to save as many slaves as we could. This rule also applied to enemy soldiers if they surrendered.

I now had a pretty good understanding of the enemy's formation and used Telepathy to report back to the magician in charge of relaying the information.

<No surprise here, but the vanguard is almost entirely made up of slaves. They're using them as cannon fodder. I'll break up their formation, you guys follow up according to our plan.>

<Understood. Let us know if anything happens.>

<Yeah, I'm keeping an eye out.>

Soldiers riding griffins and wyverns kept flying past me. *Thanks to Stealth, they'll never notice me, though.*

As I looked around, trying to gauge whether the enemy was about to make a move or not, something huge entered my line of sight—a dragon. While it wasn't as big as the Leviathan, its large wings were impressive enough. I reached out to ask about it through Telepathy and was told they were wyrms—a subspecies of dragon with no arms or legs. Several such limbless beasts were posted in front of the enemy's headquarters.

Nonetheless, the dragons weren't the most impressive being in the enemy camp. The ten-meter-tall robot took the cake. *So that's Chogokin. I wonder what kind of guy the pilot is...*

Its armor was a rather light shade of gray, making it look like a silver-colored fortress.

The enemy's headquarters was located within the city of Lurf. The civilians had been evacuated and, by now, only soldiers were left inside the city. I finished looking around and reported my findings through Telepathy once more.

I was the only one able to get away with such a bold move. Hopefully, the information I gathered thanks to Stealth would help us triumph. But I wasn't here only to spy. I now had to bide my time and wait for the enemy to make a move. We wouldn't budge until they did, and when that finally happened, I'd strike.

After twenty minutes of waiting, a gong sounded and the enemy troops rushed forward at once. The slaves in the vanguard were frantically getting ready to launch their offensive. Behind them, men wielding magical artillery were lined up. *I see... They're planning to sacrifice them no matter what, aren't they? I'm pretty sure these guys won't hesitate to fire even with the slaves in the way.*

<The enemy's on the move! Prepare for battle!>

<Roger that! Stay safe!>

<You guys stay safe too!>

As planned, I continued to observe, staying put in midair above their formation. I had to wait for the vanguard to move away from the rest of their troops.

Not yet... Not yet... A little more...

Now!

"Thousand Dust of the Six Realms!"

I unleashed Thousand Dust of the Six Realms from the sky. My aura

transformed into hundreds of weapons that pierced right through the artillery. The batteries were shredded to pieces while the magicians' bodies fell to the ground, a pool of blood forming under their lifeless corpses.

I hadn't held back at all. They'd brought war to our doors, so I had no intention to go easy on them. I used Thousand Dust of the Six Realms on the next row of soldiers, and a cloud of dust whirled up from the impact, blocking the large army's sight. The pace of the following rows of soldiers immediately dropped as they panicked. Farther back, the soldiers bumped into their unmoving comrades. The army had effectively been stopped.

On the other hand, the slaves were still running forward blindly, ready to fight the prince's troops. If they lost to the enemy, they'd die. If they tried to run, they'd die. They had no other option. Surviving this fight was the only way they'd live to see another day. And so they ran, desperate to survive.

If everything went well, they'd soon be stopped by three of my comrades: the ninja master, Jirou, the farmer, Haruka, and Youko.

Our plan went as follows: I would sneak in and confirm that the slaves were in the vanguard. If that was the case, I'd separate them from the rest and let them advance until a certain point. When they reached that point...

"Earth Style: Quicksand!" Jirou exclaimed, as dignified as ever, unleashing quicksand in front of the slaves.

"Linear Pitfall," Haruka said casually, creating a long and rather large pitfall trap.

Apparently, this skill of hers was originally meant to be used to protect crops from monsters.

Jirou had set up his quicksand to lead the slaves right into the hole Haruka had dug. It pretty much worked like a slide, bringing all the slaves to the bottom of the pitfall without hurting them too much. The pit was around three meters tall so some might break a few bones if they fell awkwardly, but they wouldn't die.

Haruka's pit had successfully turned into a trench that separated our two armies while trapping the enemy's vanguard.

At the moment, the enemy soldiers couldn't tell what had happened, still blinded by the cloud of dust caused by my attack. They'd probably be stunned when they finally regained some visibility and noticed that the slaves that had charged forward had disappeared without a trace.

We couldn't send the bulk of our forces against their army in these conditions, so it was time for Youko to do her part.

"I'll make a bridge with my golems, but be careful not to fall, all right?"

She used golems shaped like worms to bridge the gap over Haruka's pit.

From what I'd heard, golems were usually built to look humanoid, but Youko had honed her craft and made them in a wide variety of shapes. Her best work to date—according to her—was a dragon golem.

Youko's bridge—made up of several worm golems—was very impressive. It was almost completely flat, wide enough for several soldiers to stand side by side comfortably, and even had handrails on both sides. Thanks to that, our soldiers were able to cross over smoothly.

Our men ended up walking above the heads of the slaves trapped in Haruka's pit, and, sadly, they weren't about to stay put. I could hear arrows cutting through the air and figured that those who hadn't been hurt by the fall had found a way of resisting.

Thankfully, Haruka had a way of countering that too.

Our men threw down bags full of powder into the trench, which spilled out when they hit the bottom. The slaves collapsed one after the other.

It was Haruka's sleeping pollen. Its effects were incredibly strong and even medium-sized monsters would fall asleep in a matter of seconds if it reached their noses. Haruka had been working to improve it even further after we had used it to take the stronghold effortlessly.

I was deeply impressed. *Her abilities are way too versatile, it's crazy!*

The pitfall had been made deep enough that the pollen wouldn't affect our soldiers on the bridge. At first, we had thought about sprinkling sleeping pollen over the enemy troops from the sky, but we had quickly decided against it. The

wind could very well have blown it back in our own troops' faces.

"Sweet dreams," Haruka said softly in the direction of the pit before addressing the prince. "Shall we move forward, my prince?"

"Y-Yes..." Prince Leon said meekly before clearing his throat and yelling, "FORWARD!!!"

Haruka—who was riding the prince's dragon together with him—sounded as relaxed as ever, even amid a battle.

The first stage of our plan had been a resounding success. My next mission was to wreak havoc on the enemy's troops to draw their attention.

I was hovering in the middle of the enemy lines, and naturally, bullets, arrows, and magic spells kept flying my way, but my trusty Invincibility rendered everything useless. All these projectiles flying around raised another cloud of dust and the soldiers eventually lost track of me.

"Did we get him?!"

Sorry, you really didn't. It wasn't the first time I heard the people of this world blurt out something along those lines. *Come on, my fellow otherworlders, you must know that you're jinxing yourselves like that. You're just asking for it.*

<I'll create an air pocket in the middle of the enemy lines. Make use of that opportunity to break their formation,> I said to a nearby magician.

<Understood!>

He relayed that same message to the magicians in charge of communication within each squadron, and I started concentrating my mana. I had made use of the confusion to disable Wing and head back to the ground so I could go all out.

"Spirit Zone! Leviathan, I'll be borrowing your powers! Water Dragon Invocation!"

As soon as I activated Spirit Zone, a gigantic magic circle appeared around me. Every enemy defeated within this perimeter would restore my HP and MP. I then extended both of my arms in front of me and a water dragon erupted from my palms.

As the dust settled, the enemy soldiers caught sight of me completely

unarmed. Their initial surprise turned into shock as they stared at the water dragon that had suddenly appeared, delaying their assault.

The water dragon, which looked like an enlarged sea serpent, moved according to my will, and it dashed across the plain, mowing down dozens of enemies in the blink of an eye and sending them flying without mercy. Some soldiers tried to retaliate, slashing at the dragon with their swords and spears, but at the end of the day, their target was nothing more than a large puddle of water. Not only did their blades inflict no damage, but they were also sucked in by the current running through the dragon's body along with their weapons.

I then manipulated the water dragon into surging up toward the sky before crashing down on the plain, creating a small tsunami. Many soldiers were knocked down and pushed back by the waves.

Right at that moment, allied soldiers mounting horses and small flightless dragons came rushing from behind me as if to fill the empty space around me.

The enemy's front line was trembling in fear of the water dragon and was in no position to present any resistance. Our mounted soldiers pushed through, cutting down enemies by the dozen. Some found themselves trampled to death while others were knocked down, cracking their skulls open as they fell.

I didn't have the time to stare at this grim spectacle as I jumped—without Wing but instead using my enhanced athletic prowess—to another spot. I had picked a particularly dense area and kicked down the man that looked the most like a high-ranking officer as I landed.

“C-Colonel!”

Oh, I hit a colonel? Nice. I crushed his neck with my foot and activated Oversword. A large aura with a silver glow shrouded Seven Arthur.

I roared to fire myself up and slashed at the men surrounding me. They tried to block me using their swords and shields, but it didn't amount to much in the face of my current attack stats, boosted by my passive skills and equipment. Seven Arthur cut through steel like a hot knife through butter. On top of that, the additional damage sliced through the men, armor included, as blood splattered everywhere. It didn't stop with the few men around me. The effects of Increased Range (Low) made the damage spread. The men dropped like flies,

struck to death by an invisible blade.

With a single swing of my arm, a few dozen soldiers had met their demise. My enemies were faltering as I moved forward, stabbing and slashing as I went. Screams and groans of pain filled the battlefield, but, in the midst of the battle, I couldn't process them. I had no time to think. I simply brought my sword down again and again.

I was using Heightened Senses (High) and could feel someone coming at me way before they even reached me. I twisted my body to evade them, spinning my blade along. It cut right through their abdomen, their viscera spilling right out.

I looked at my map and noticed that my immediate surroundings were the only relatively empty spot. The rest of the area was almost completely red—the color of enemies.

After spinning around a few times, I had trouble pinpointing the direction I was facing. I had to be careful and keep an eye on my map lest I accidentally unleash Thousand Dust of the Six Realms on my allies.

I waited a little more to recover as much MP and HP as possible before using my active skill, Dual Casting.

Two water dragons surged from my palms before jumping at my enemies. Their pale blue bodies gradually took on a red tint, dyed by the blood of the soldiers.

They look more like blood dragons now...

I heard a thunderous roar, and when I checked my map once more, I noticed that another empty area had appeared. I looked up and realized that Adel had used one of the grenades she had borrowed from Akiha. *So that's what happened.*

We wanted to finish this battle as quickly as possible, but we were worried our members would run out of mana before the end. That's why we had asked Akiha to help us by providing this sort of weapon, one that did not use up any MP. Akiha's grenades were also several times more powerful than regular gasoline bombs. Her skill, Ammunition Restock, allowed her to get her hands on

a certain amount of bullets, grenades, and other ammunition. She couldn't transfer her guns to other people, but she could hand out ammo as she saw fit. She had given Adel as many grenades as she could stock, so we had put her in charge of air raids.

Knights riding wyverns and griffins came after Adel and me from the sky, but Adel molded her mana into spears and pierced through the knights and their mounts. They fell to the ground, crushing the unfortunate soldiers that happened to stand below them to death.

I ordered my bloodied water dragons to twine themselves around the mounted knights and smash them to the ground as well. I made sure to crush as many enemies under their bodies as I could.

“Fuck! What are you doing?! The enemy recklessly rushed in alone! Just kill h—”

A pompous guy on a horse tried to say something, but his head fell off before he could finish his sentence.

Urgh... The dude next to him got covered in brain matter.

“AAAAAAAAAH!!!” he screamed in horror.

I mean, I get you. I'd also scream if I had my boss's brain all over my hands.

Fear was contagious, and the soldiers in the area all looked scared shitless. *Was that Akiha just now? I wondered. Her precision is insane.*

Akiha was currently sniping people from a remote location a kilometer away from the battlefield. She was perched on a tall golem, courtesy of Youko. It was able to walk—about as fast as a regular person—so Akiha could change position whenever she wanted. True self-propelled artillery.

She aimed again and turned the soldiers standing around into mincemeat. That one was definitely an antimatériel rifle shot. *This is bad... I'm kinda getting used to seeing this kinda thing. Don't people usually start going crazy after stuff like this?*

I refocused and decided on my next target, charging forward with my bloodred dragons.

“TAKE THIS!”

“ROCKET PUUUUUUNCH!!!”

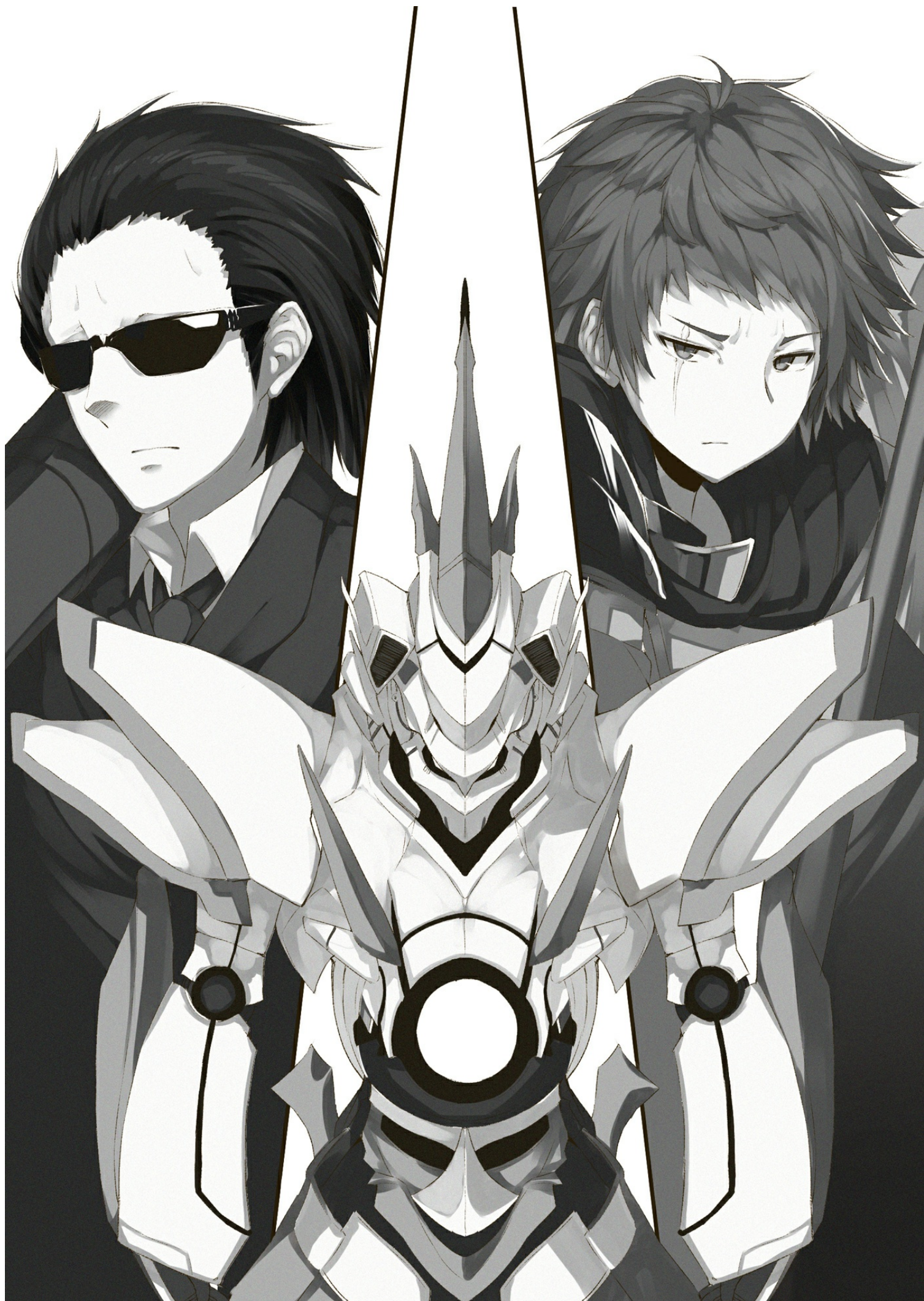
Out of nowhere, a spear pierced through the water dragon on my right side. It went right through its body, cutting it into two halves. The dragon on the left was hit by a large metallic fist and was atomized on the spot, mist remaining in the air. *Are these guys the Wei General and Chogokin? Then where's the hunter?!*

I sensed the danger and immediately changed my stance to a defensive one, raising my sword to block any potential hit. The next second, I felt something crash into me and I was sent flying backward.

Even with Invincibility on, my conditioned reflexes compelled me to block. I didn't have any complaints, though. If I stopped trying to block attacks and, for some reason, Invincibility stopped working, even for a split second, I'd risk dying a pitiful death.

“Damn, he blocked my hit...” a man with slicked-back hair muttered. He wore a black suit and a pair of sunglasses. “You're not half bad.”

Wait! By “hunter” you meant the hunters from that famous reality TV show all along?! I can't believe all that power came from a simple punch, though. The blow felt so heavy... If I had actually taken the damage from that, I... No, I'd better stop thinking about it.



The hunter saw me leap backward and a dim light shone from his hands as he changed his stance.

What the heck? Is that a bazooka?!

He held a bazooka in one hand and a machine gun in the other. For a second, I assumed that he had been summoned from *Commando City* like Akiha. His clothes and the fact that he had tried to fight me hand-to-hand didn't add up, though. The only game I knew where you could fight like that was *Mars Impact*, an MMO in which you were tasked with eliminating aliens. *In that case, he might have stronger weapons than Akiha...*

I had to do something about the bullets and shells he sent flying at me. I tried to dodge them as much as possible so I wouldn't get caught up in the shock waves from the explosions. I then lunged at him in an attempt to cut him down, but he seemed to have enhanced his speed one way or another, and I didn't even manage to scrape him.

While I was focused on my fight with the hunter, Youko reached out with Telepathy.

<Masaki! We're almost here! You really overdid it, huh?>

<Sorry, I couldn't really afford to hold back.>

Apparently, I had gone a bit overboard, which may have prompted the three enemy generals to come out to get me. Luckily, when I checked my map, I noticed three blue marks—representing allies—approaching as well.

<It's all right. You managed to bring out the three generals in the end, so it's a win for us!>

<Glad to hear you don't mind,> I said. <Be careful against Chogokin, Youko. The fist he threw at me was powerful enough to vaporize my water dragon.>

<You're such a worrywart! I have a good feeling about this fight. I won't spoil my plan, but look forward to the results, okay?>

I lost my focus wondering about what Youko planned to do, but the hunter didn't leave me one moment of respite and threw a hand grenade at me. Jirou, who had almost reached my side, was the first to notice it. He stopped it with a

shuriken, making it explode in midair.

The aftermath of the explosion raised a cloud of dust. I took the chance to exchange places with Jirou. My next task was to take care of the wyrms.

As I dashed away, I could hear the sound of blades, bullets, and shurikens cutting through the air, clashing and falling to the ground. Just from the sounds of the battle, I could tell how fast they exchanged blows. *They must be dishing out attack after attack.*

I caught sight of a man wearing a blue set of armor a little farther away on the right. Behind him was a soldier holding up a banner of the Wei Kingdom. *That guy must be the Wei General.*

He was heading my way in a straight line, but suddenly seemed to sense something and stopped at once. His face twisted into a cruel smile. He looked like a predator ready to pounce on his prey.

I followed his gaze and saw Hayato, the gang leader. He was also smiling, but it was nothing like the bright smile he had shown us previously. He looked like a wolf. A ferocious beast holding a wooden sword drenched in fresh blood. *Ah. Now he looks like a proper gang leader. These two love fighting, don't they?*

Behind Hayato, a soldier was also holding up a banner. This one read "Throughout the Heavens and Earth, I alone am the honored one. Susanoo."

Somehow, Hayato's troops all wore Japanese biker jackets. *What a sight. This is the last thing I expected to see in a fantasy world...*

"LET'S GET THEM!!!" Hayato screamed.

His troops immediately answered in kind, roaring.

The armies of Susanoo—the mythical god—and of the Wei General clashed.



Kiryuu Hayato had been summoned into this world from his favorite game, *Gang Town*. He had destroyed the country that had dared summon him with his own two hands and had eventually found his way to the Sentdrag Kingdom. Although he was only nineteen, he had managed to rise in the ranks, becoming a trusted general.

When he crossed over to this world, Hayato had found himself inside the character he had honed in *Gang Town* over the years. He had no problem using the leadership, charisma, and, above all, the OP stamina of his character, and discovered that he was fully capable of fighting in real wars. If anything, he was more useful than most of the adults here.

Hayato smiled as he gazed at Masaki, an individual brimming with incredible power. He was still in awe of his strength and hoped that with him on their side, the war would soon reach its end. At the same time, he couldn't help but want to fight the man himself.

Ninety-nine percent of the time, Hayato was a very mild-mannered and gentle person. However, when the fighting started and blood started flowing, he couldn't stop himself from getting excited and turning into a battle-crazed beast. His subordinates were all well aware of that fact, whether in *Gang Town* or in this world.

Hayato did his best to quell the bloodlust toward Masaki that threatened to consume him and set his sights on the worthy opponent before him.

His fighting spirit materialized into a crimson aura, enveloping his wooden sword. It appeared red, as though dyed by the blood of his enemies.

His aura flew around in the wind, shrouding the bikers in a gloomy scarlet mist.

"Yo," Hayato started. "It's been a while, Tatsuma!"

"Sure has. I'm glad to see you. This battlefield is the perfect stage to finally settle things, wouldn't you say? I'll give my thanks to your Azure Hero for that," Tatsuma, the Wei General, answered, pointing his spear at Hayato.

The two of them had fought each other countless times. They had viciously dug out each other's flesh—sometimes Hayato won, sometimes he lost, and sometimes their battles even ended in perfect draws. They truly were fated rivals.

Hayato and Tatsuma had first been summoned into this world by the same country. However, since the people of that country did not possess the means to enslave people, and since they tried to order the two around, they had only

managed to anger them.

They had looked down on otherworlders, failing to understand how dangerous these beings were, and their meager troops had been taken out by Hayato and Tatsuma in no time. The surrounding countries had jumped at the chance to finish the nation off and it soon disappeared without leaving a trace.

Tatsuma was a little older than Hayato, but they weren't the kind to pay attention to such things. Age... Gender... None of that mattered. They only cared about strength.

"Your luck ran out when you decided to side with the empire, Tatsuma. I'll destroy every last one of you fucking bastards myself!" Hayato all but roared at Tatsuma.

"I'd love to see you try! The Wei General will show you how to fight!" Tatsuma yelled back.

They both dashed forward at the exact same moment. As Hayato's wooden sword and Tatsuma's spear clashed, the ground shook.

They were equally matched, and both groups of soldiers had their breath taken away by their might. Every soldier was fully aware that stepping too close would mean getting caught in the cross fire, and they chose to fight the enemy while maintaining a safe distance from their leaders.

"Archers! FIRE!!!"

"Vanguard! Raise your shields and block the arrows! Rear guard! Ready the bombs!"

Hayato and Tatsuma's adjutants gave orders in place of their generals. Usually, the generals were meant to lead their troops into battle and direct them themselves, but when the two lost themselves in their battles, paying attention to such things would only hinder them. As such, their trusted adjutants didn't need to be told anything, and immediately took over their generals' duties in times of need. They each tried to preserve their forces while forcing as many casualties as possible on the other side.

Hayato's vanguard raised their shields to protect themselves from the arrows. The imperial soldiers tried to break their stance, throwing spears and axes at

the long shields in an attempt to break their formation. However, the next moment, gasoline bombs rained upon the imperial soldiers, and they caught fire one after the other.

“Magicians! Use your weakest water spells to extinguish the flames! Archers! Intercept the bombs! Vanguard! Divide yourselves! Double envelopment maneuver!”

“They’ll come at us from both sides! Circle formation! Don’t let the bombers die!”

There weren’t many magicians in Hayato’s army, but he made up for it by using gasoline bombs and other weapons. The people of this world had gotten used to magicians doing most of the work in ranged warfare and were surprisingly weak against such tricks. However, Hayato’s army had crossed paths with Tatsuma’s unit time and time again. Both forces were fully aware of the other’s strengths and weaknesses and a relentless back-and-forth started. The exact same was true of their respective generals.

“TATSUMAAAAAAA!!!”

“HAYATOOOOOOOOO!!!”

Hayato and Tatsuma traded blows. Once. Twice. Three times... Their weapons clashed again and again. No ordinary person would even dream of stepping close to their tumultuous exchange.

Tatsuma’s spear was as swift as the wind, relentlessly thrusting at Hayato. Hayato evaded each blow at the very last moment, trying to close the distance between them.

Making use of a second of downtime in Tatsuma’s attacks, Hayato attempted to stab the man. Tatsuma immediately let go of his spear, grabbing the wooden sword with his bare hands instead. The Wei General pulled on the gang leader’s sword, breaking Hayato’s balance and bringing him forward as Tatsuma threw a punch right at his rival’s face. In turn, Hayato threw away his sword, readying his own fist. Both cross counters went through, their fists connecting with each other’s faces.



“Tch.”

“Hmph.”

Blood trailed down their bruised lips as they threw back their respective weapons to one another.

“Are you for real? Letting go of your weapon like that... And you say you’re a warrior...” Hayato trailed off before adding. “You’re as monstrous as ever.”

“My fists are more than enough to deal with a delinquent like you,” Tatsuma spat out. “And aren’t you the same? How the hell did you even react in time to throw a punch too?”

In the middle of the battlefield, both men wore brutal smiles more reminiscent of savage beasts than humans. Tatsuma, the mighty dragon, faced Hayato, the ferocious wolf.

“TAKE THIS!!!”

“AAAAH!!!”

Once more they exchanged blows, directing all their killing intent and fighting spirit at one another. The intense fight in which no one could interfere just kept going...



“THUNDERBOOOOOOOLT!!!” a strange voice echoed as electricity was released from the little protuberances located on the robot’s shoulders.

Destructive thunderbolts struck the ground around Chogokin.

“GYAAA?!” a soldier screamed in fear as he saw the thunderbolt threatening to strike him.

He was certain his last moments had come when...a large shadow suddenly blocked the electricity.

“Wh-What just happened? I... Am I still alive?”

“You’re quite the golem, are you not? I’ve never seen one use magic before!”

One of Youko’s golems had arrived just in time to rescue the soldier. Golems

were usually considered impressive enough when they were over four meters tall. However, the monster that Youko had brought was over eight meters tall. Its name? Gigant Golem.

“Take your wounded comrades and get out of here! You should have potions, right? If you don’t hurry, you’ll get caught up in our battle!” Youko yelled at the soldier from her spot on the Gigant Golem’s shoulder.

She supported herself with a bone that was sticking out of its shoulder. When ordering golems from afar, the actions would be delayed proportional to the distance. However, if you were in direct contact with your golems, you could control them with virtually no delay.

Most golem users would never attempt something so dangerous, but Youko was a pioneer. Her guts and courage had made her a master golem user, and she’d used this strategy to escape from countless dangerous situations.

The Gigant Golem moved according to Youko’s will, thrusting a large sword made out of bones at the robot. The pilot of Chogokin was taken aback. He had never expected a golem to deliver such a quick and precise blow. As such, he was unable to dodge and took a hit to the chest before taking a step back.

“Damn! You’re a fucking cheater! Golems shouldn’t be able to move that fast!”

“Behold my arts,” Youko answered, before asking, puzzled. “What’s a cheater anyway?”

“Shut up! You only deserve to be crushed under my sole! I’ll kill every man! As for the wome— Hang on... Heh heh heh, you’re hot. You’ll make a pretty toy with that killer body,” echoed the salacious words of Iiyama Tadashi, Chogokin’s pilot.

Although Youko couldn’t see the man’s face, her expression soured. She felt incredibly uncomfortable as she relayed her next orders to her golem.

“Sorry, but my body already belongs to someone else! Even if it didn’t, I don’t let disgusting men touch me!” she retorted coldly, as her Gigant Golem delivered a kick with its right leg.

No one could have expected such speed from the gigantic creature. This time,

Tadashi used the shield attached to Chogokin's left arm to block, a loud thud filling the plains as steel and stone collided. Under normal circumstances, stone would most definitely lose to steel, breaking into pieces, but the golem's fists were reinforced with strong bones and were just as sturdy as steel.

"Like I care! This is a game, and I'll do whatever the fuck I want, you bitch! You're just a damn NPC, so shut up already and let me do you!"

Even after being summoned to this world and bound with a slave collar, Tadashi was still under the impression that he was simply playing a game. A perfect game in which he could do just about anything he wanted. He could go around killing players with no consequences whatsoever. His motto had become: "Kill every man I meet, fuck every girl I see."

Unlike his fellow otherworlders, Tadashi was convinced this world had been created for him to enjoy himself, and he conducted himself in the most inhuman of ways. Even when he was still on Earth, he used to play games with this exact mindset, incurring the wrath of every other player. He had been banned many times over, but he always made a new account, going back to his old ways without reflecting on his actions. Here, though, no one could stop him, and he relished in thinking that he was the strongest.

"You keep blurting out nonsense. I'm starting to feel bad for this poor child who has to listen to you..." she sighed. "Gigant Golem," she started again, her tone softer. "Let's save it, shall we?"

Youko gave up on getting through to Tadashi and gently petted the shoulder of her golem. Gigant Golem nodded as if to answer her before taking a step forward and lowering its stance, lunging at the robot in front of it, its strong fist at the ready.

Tadashi once again tried to block with his shield, but with the golem having lowered its center of gravity, the punch packed even more power and Chogokin was pushed back. Gigant Golem didn't relent and delivered another punch from the left. It connected with Chogokin's body, sending it flying back.

"AAARGH!" Tadashi's robotic voice echoed again.

The soldiers on both sides had retreated farther back to avoid getting caught in the fight. As such, Youko assumed she didn't have to worry about involving

anyone when...

“FUCK! FUUUCK! I’LL SLAUGHTER YOU ALL!!! BURNING BEAAAAAM!”

Hiroshi only moved the upper part of his robot, releasing a scalding ray of light from Chogokin’s eyes. He didn’t bother to aim and simply fired at the whole area. Even the imperial soldiers that were standing a few meters behind Youko were caught up in the attack, vanishing without a trace under the burning rays.

“Hey! Couldn’t you at least confirm where your allies are standing before doing something like that?!”

“Shut the fuck up! Why would I care about NPCs?! I can kill as many as I want, they’ll be replaced in no time!”

“Replaced...? No life can ever be replaced...”

Since the war had started, Youko had seen countless people die before her eyes, allies and foes alike. And yet, the man in front of her seemed to have absolutely no regard for human lives. She felt anger well up inside her.

“Gigant Golem...let’s do this.”

The golem seemed to feel Youko’s cold wrath and nodded in agreement. She didn’t want anyone else to lose their lives in vain and moved closer to Chogokin.

“You’re the only one getting done here, bitch! I’ll fucking rape you!” Tadashi roared, getting his robot to dash in Youko’s direction.

The two giants collided with a loud bang.

Gigant Golem was roughly eight meters tall. Tadashi’s robot—at over ten meters—towered over it. As far as weight went, Youko’s Gigant Golem was slightly heavier, but Tadashi made use of his robot’s larger build to try to overpower Youko and push her golem down.

Under the weight of both giants, the ground sank. Gigant Golem was forced to bend its legs until its knees hit the ground.

“Gigant Golem! Hang in there!”

“Worthless struggles!!!”

Youko tried to infuse her golem with more mana to strengthen it, but Tadashi had his robot headbutt Gigant Golem. The uneven surface of Chogokin's head crushed into its enemy.

Youko groaned, holding on to her golem's shoulder with all her strength.

Tadashi noticed he had her on the back foot and delivered several more headbutts. By the end, only half of Gigant Golem's head was left.

"I'm done playing, bitch!"

Youko couldn't do anything but hold on to dear life as the steel hand closed in on her. Tadashi let out a vulgar laugh, grabbing Youko's slender body with the robot's gigantic fingers.

"Argh... Damn...!"

"HA HA HA!!! Now, now, let's have everyone enjoy the show, should we? I feel like doing it in public today!"

Tadashi reached for Youko's clothes with the precise mechanical fingers. However, right as he caught the hem of her top, something unexpected happened. Youko's body turned brown and started crumbling down. A lump of soil remained where she had once stood.

"What?! Was that a fucki—? Where's her real body?!"

"I'm here! It took me longer than expected to get this to work on something from another world."

Youko's voice came from her golem's abdomen—the very place in which the golem's core was contained. Since it was such a crucial part, it was always protected by barriers. Youko had made sure to use the sturdiest bones at her disposal when she built Gigant Golem, but if the enemy had focused his attention there, she would have lost her life along with the golem.

To divert Tadashi's attention away from the golem's core, Youko had created a golem in her own image as a dummy.

"Longer than expected? What are you even talking about...? What the fuck?! Why isn't it moving anymore?!"

"This poor child was crying, you know?" Youko asked. "It doesn't want to kill

anyone. It's been built to protect people and yet..."

Youko opened up the hatch and came out of her golem's abdomen. She raised her hand to pet the head of the immobile robot. She was wearing her battle clothes, an *onmyouji* outfit called Seimei's Robe. Her outfit wasn't the only thing that was different, however. While Youko had always had a tail, she now had three instead.



While she fought Tadashi, Youko had used a thread made out of raw magical energy to reach Chogokin and appraise whether she could control it.

Anyone with a basic understanding of magic would have been able to see the thread, but Tadashi had never bothered to learn any and only looked at the battlefield through cameras. He had completely failed to notice it, and Youko had successfully overridden his control over Chogokin.

“It’s crying? What kind of bullshit is that? A robot is nothing but a tool.”

“You may only see it as a tool, but this child has a soul. And it decided to give me its trust. Thank you, Exmizer.”

As Youko said the robot’s true name, Exmizer’s eyes started to glow, as if to answer her.

“H-How do you know that name?!”

“It told me.”

The light in Exmizer’s eyes flickered as it let out little sounds. It truly seemed to be weeping.

“FUCK! MOVE! MOVE!!! YOU’RE MY TOOL! MOVE, YOU FUCKING PIECE OF JUNK!!!”

“This child isn’t your tool anymore. It’s my friend now,” Youko said calmly, taking out a talisman from her pocket and placing it on Exmizer’s forehead.

“Rin. Pyou. You. Sha. Kai.” Youko enunciated each syllable clearly while making hand gestures.

This was a technique native to Youko’s homeland used to activate spells. Exmizer’s whole body started glowing with each syllable, its very existence gradually growing fainter.

“Wh-What the hell are you doing?! HEY! STOP! I’M TELLING YOU TO STOP!” Tadashi screamed.

“Jin. Retsu. Zai. Zen!” Youko continued chanting without paying Tadashi any mind.

As she pronounced the last syllable, the ten-meter giant shone one last time

before being absorbed by Youko's talisman.

"Shikigami: Exmizer... Contract complete," she said.

Chogokin's pilot, Iiyama Tadashi, was left sitting on the floor, wearing a full bodysuit and matching helmet.

He didn't quite understand what had just happened but one thing was clear to him: Youko had just stolen his robot. He flew into a terrible rage.

"You bitch!" he started screaming at her. "You fucking took my Exmizer! Cheater! Thief! Give it back! Give it back right this instant!"

"How noisy," she let out, staring down coldly at the man still sitting on the floor.

She took out another talisman, infused it with her mana, and a bell-shaped golem materialized itself, trapping Tadashi. No sound would reach the outside anymore.

"You'll still be able to breathe, so don't worry, all right?" she said. "I guess I can't hear your answer. Oh well." She turned back toward her golem. "Gigant Golem...I pushed you to your limits today. I'm sorry."

Her expression shifted dramatically. She looked at the wounded Gigant Golem with the same soft smile she always wore in the presence of Masaki and the others, caressing the stone monster with a gentle touch.

"I know you're hurt, but you can't rest until the battle is over. Please lend me your strength," Youko asked.

The golem rubbed his stones together, letting out a small sound of approval. They left the bell-shaped golem in which Tadashi had been trapped behind and moved forward, once more heading into battle.



Swift as the wind, Jirou evaded the bullets that rained down upon him. The machine gun could only hit his afterimage and Jirou remained unscathed. As he dodged, he threw a bo shuriken aimed at the cannon of the hunter's gun. The hunter reacted immediately, dropping his weapon to the floor and switching to his bazooka. He fired a missile at Jirou, and the ninja was enveloped in a large

explosion. The imperial soldiers were certain that the battle was over, but the hunter's expression didn't budge. He didn't miss a beat, and he reached for the lightsaber hanging at his hips and swung it behind him.

The sound of two blades clashing resounded through the battlefield. Naturally, the one the hunter had locked swords with was Jirou.

Jirou kept pushing, pinning the lightsaber in place. A regular katana would have melted on the spot when faced with the futuristic weapon, but Jirou's blade wasn't a regular katana. It was a fine weapon forged by ninjas: the blade of darkness, Yami.

In *Sengoku: Samurai War Chronicles*, there was a hidden world of spirits that served as endgame content. Yami was a sword you could obtain after killing the boss of that realm, although the drop rate was incredibly low.

The ninja sword had incredibly high attack stats and was able to cancel the destructive powers of any other weapon. On top of that, it basically ignored the defense stat of every mob besides bosses. To put it in a nutshell, the sword was pretty much broken. It didn't weigh anything and thus could be wielded at such high speed that most players complained about it completely breaking the balance of the game.

Well, *the* Yami was currently in Jirou's hand and clashing with the hunter's lightsaber.

"You predicted my attack...!" Jirou said.

"I knew you wouldn't die from something like that," the hunter retorted.

The two men traded words without showing any expression on their faces. However, they were putting their whole strength into their respective swords.

The first to break this contest of brute strength was Jirou. While they were locking swords, he had finished preparing his next move.

"Fire Style: Raging Fire!"

Jirou used ninja arts, not spells, and as soon as he finished chanting the name of his technique, a fire pillar erupted from beneath the hunter's feet—a fire strong enough to consume him.

However, Jirou—in spite of having been the one to launch an attack—was the first to retreat, jumping back. The next second, a bullet fell from the sky, right in front of him. He looked up and saw the hunter. The man had jumped high enough to evade the fire pillar.

He was able to read Jirou's moves and dodge them. While Jirou's fire was stronger than he had expected and the soles of his feet ended up being burned slightly, he didn't take much damage from the attack.

While still in midair, the hunter swung his lightsaber at Jirou vertically, the blade cutting swiftly through the air.

Jirou dodged, but the hunter immediately followed up with a horizontal blow. Jirou deflected it with Yami, killing the momentum of the lightsaber and responding with a sharp thrust. The hunter kicked Jirou's arm, stopping his motion.

"Having you read my moves so far ahead is a bit annoying," Jirou said calmly.

"It's pretty hard to read you. If anything, I'd say you're the annoying one," the hunter answered, his tone just as even.

The speed of the two master fighters was unparalleled, and the soldiers around them couldn't meddle in the slightest. If they tried to intervene in such a fight, they risked ending up dead in a matter of seconds.

The space around the two was like a little world of its own right, fully removed from the messy battlefield. Only the occasional clashing of their blades broke the silence.

Around them, soldiers swung spears and swords around, spilling blood as bodies hit the ground with huge thuds, but none of that even entered the sight of the ninja master and the hunter.

The blade of darkness and the blade of light clashed as the two men swiftly alternated between attack and defense. They both bided their time, waiting for the other to reveal his trap card.

They sometimes managed to graze their opponent, sending droplets of blood flying around them. Every time they brought their swords down, one of the two would suffer another wound or the metallic clank of their swords colliding

would fill the air. They cared little that their bodies were getting gradually covered in blood and dust as they waited for the perfect opportunity to strike. After a particularly violent exchange, the two jumped back, creating some distance.

Their breathing was barely ragged as both stood silently, swords at the ready. Cries, roars, and explosions resounded all around them, but they paid it no mind. They did not even hear them. Each was entirely focused on the enemy standing in front of him.

They stayed in that stalemate, unmoving for who knows how long, when suddenly, the hunter made a move.

His stance was completely different this time as he completely threw away the very idea of defense. He had transformed into a blade that existed solely to slay the foe before his eyes. His sword reached Jirou faster than ever before, its impact so strong that it could not compare to any of the previous hits.

Jirou was puzzled at his opponent's new stance. He didn't understand why he had dropped his guard to this extent. Still, the hunter's sword came at him so fast that he couldn't afford to think. He immediately stepped back to dodge before preparing to counter when, all of a sudden, the lightsaber grew longer, cutting through his flesh deeply.

With the hunter's sudden extra reach, Jirou's shoulder was badly wounded. He only managed to mostly dodge the follow-up attack, getting away with a light graze as drops of blood scattered in the sky.

The hunter turned up the intensity of the lightsaber and dashed at Jirou, refusing to give him any time to recover. The ninja was forced to defend as he waited for an occasion to use his trump card—a secret weapon that would give him a chance to turn the tide of the battle.

The hunter was still alert even while he kept slashing at his opponent's body. Jirou's blood splattered all over the ground. In the eyes of the bystanders, the battle was already lost. Maybe it was the blood loss or simply the weight of the years piling up on him, but Jirou eventually grew weak and finally dropped down on one knee.

“Time for the finishing blow!” the hunter cried out, looking down at Jirou as

he brought down his glowing sword.

Jirou was waiting for that moment. He jumped at the sword himself, letting it dig into his flesh.

“What?!”

Even the ever-calm hunter was taken aback by Jirou’s actions and stiffened. When he finally noticed that the feeling of Jirou’s body under his blade was off, it was too late. The man—or rather the thing—in front of him wasn’t Jirou. It was nothing more than a clone. The hunter’s sword was momentarily stuck in the clone’s body, and, as he tried to pull it back, a bright light and scalding heat started oozing out of the sword.

“Tsk...!”

The hunter clicked his tongue, trying to pull away, but it was too late. The clone exploded, and he was swept up in it.

Jirou had used two techniques to build up to his attack: Shadow Clone and Fatal Dispersion. The first allowed the user to create a clone to use as bait. The second worked by sacrificing one’s life to deal a large amount of damage to the opponent and was mostly used as a desperate killing blow. In the original game, using Fatal Dispersion with a clone was impossible. Luckily for Jirou, he wasn’t playing that game at the moment; he was in a whole other world.

After years of experimentation, Jirou had succeeded in creating a Shadow Clone with a physical body in exchange for a portion of his HP. The clones created this way were much weaker than Jirou himself, but they could still use ninja arts.

Fatal Dispersion dealt damage proportional to the user’s remaining HP. It was strong enough to deliver a fatal blow even when used by a clone that only possessed around thirty percent of Jirou’s total HP.

With his blade stuck inside the clone’s body, the hunter didn’t have any other choice but to let go of his lightsaber to dodge. Still, he hadn’t been fast enough and had been caught in the explosion.

Jirou watched the cloud of dust intently from a few meters away as he tried to catch his breath.

A soldier of the empire noticed him and figured he may have a shot at slaying the exhausted Jirou, but the ninja didn't even look back as he delivered a rotating kick, slamming the soldier's head into the ground.

Even with wounds all over his body, he could still muster a frightening strength, and the other soldiers could only watch from a distance, too scared to approach.

When the smoke and dust had finally settled, Jirou caught sight of the hunter. He was clasp his flickering lightsaber—most likely damaged in the explosion—and was down on one knee. His body had been lacerated all over and he was bleeding even more profusely than Jirou.

"You transferred your own stamina to your clone... Are you insane?"

"No sane person could be a ninja," Jirou answered, walking silently toward his wounded opponent.

He brought his blade down. It cut through the wind with a *whoosh*, severing the hunter's head in a single motion.

The hunter's subordinates looked at the grim spectacle and lost all will to fight, dropping their weapons and surrendering. Jirou's men accepted their surrender, picking up their weapons and leading them to a facility designed to hold the prisoners of war.

Jirou looked down at the remains of the hunter and let out a huge sigh. Only a black suit was left. His body had disappeared, leaving a black stain in its wake.

"He got away... I didn't think he'd emulate my technique after seeing it once. Still...the hunter shouldn't have this kind of power..." Jirou stopped himself from getting lost in thought. "I'll think about all this later. Messenger, get in touch with Sir Masaki. Tell him that the hunter has withdrawn. And that I'm counting on him to clear the way to the enemy's headquarters."

"At once!" the magician nodded, contacting Masaki through Telepathy to relay the message.

Jirou couldn't help but feel like something about the hunter wasn't right as he dashed in the direction of the headquarters.



<I have a message from Master Jirou. He successfully got the hunter to retreat. He also hopes you can open up the way to the enemy's headquarters for him.>

<All right. I'm done with the wyrms. Let him know I'll go clear the way now>

<Understood.>

I was standing over a wyrm's carcass as I answered the messenger. I raised my head and saw the last living beast flapping its wings, writhing in pain as it was engulfed in fire. I threw a Flame Javelin at it to finish it off. The last wyrm let out a loud shriek before perishing.

I haven't expected the wyrms to have such strong regenerative powers. Thankfully, when faced with the Flame Javelin's inferno, they were utterly powerless. Their bodies burned down faster than they could regenerate.

Chogokin had fallen into Youko's hands and Jirou had forced the hunter to withdraw. He hadn't been able to capture or slay him, but just getting him out of the way would greatly turn the tide of the battle in our favor. As for Hayato, he was still in the middle of fighting the Wei General. Still, as long as he managed to hold his opponent back, we shouldn't have any issues forcing our way into their headquarters. *Not that Hayato seems to be trying to hold him back. I can hear them trying to kill each other from here.*

Now that I was done with the wyrms, the soldiers were so scared of me that they didn't even try to approach anymore.

I took a step in their direction and...

"HYA!!!" I yelled.

Their reaction was immediate. They started screaming and cowering, opening up a path for me. *I'd be a monster if I did anything to these guys.*

As far as I was concerned, this worked out perfectly. I had no intention of killing people who had lost the will to fight, and I could just move forward without anyone obstructing my path. I figured I might as well use these guys to warn their comrades to let me pass.

Even if I tried to use the Shout function, I didn't think my voice would reach all that far. To get them to truly understand who the boss was... My best option would probably be the System Message function. I still hadn't used it, but it would allow my voice to be heard throughout the battlefield. *Oh! Looks like there's a way to set up the target... Then I want it to be delivered to all enemy units... All righty!*

<Throw down your weapons and make way! I'll cut down every man I find in my path!> I yelled using System Message.

An uproar started as most soldiers skedaddled, leaving their weapons behind.

"How?! I can hear a voice in my head?!"

Oh my, looks like my message was delivered right into their heads. They must have been scared shitless.

"What do you think you're doing letting go of your weapons like this?! Do you not have pride as sons of the empire?! Shame on you!"

One of the only officers left, riding on horseback, didn't seem so scared actually. His horse *was* visibly frightened though, and it frantically tried to step back. *They do say animals sense danger faster than humans.*

I ran through the empty path left by the soldiers and jumped at the officer, decapitating him on the spot. I didn't bother turning back to look at his corpse and kept going. The headquarters was finally in sight.

Now that I thought about it, I felt like I had missed a wyrm earlier. When I had first looked at the headquarters from above, I could have sworn there was one more...

I opened my map to check and saw a large mark. The strange thing was...this mark was in the middle of the city. The moment I noticed this and thought about how weird it was, the ground shook and a thunderous roar came from the direction of Lurf.

"What the hell just happened?!"

"Did the Sentdrag Kingdom do this?!"

"Check the headquarters at once!"

Soldiers screamed all around me. I couldn't help but have a very, very bad feeling about this, and a shiver ran down my spine. *It feels just like that time with the Leviathan...*

The men around me tried to organize themselves, asking people to go see what had happened, when suddenly, a soldier came flying from the city in a very neat parabolic trajectory.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAH!!!" the poor man screamed at the top of his lungs.

He might know what this is all about, I thought.

I used Wing to leap up and caught him before he fell to his death. He had been blown away by a very powerful force considering the state of his armor. *His ribs are definitely broken.*

He panted before asking, astonished. "I-I'm alive?"

"Hey," I started.

"No! Don't kill me! Please!"

"Chill. I'm not going to kill you. I get that you're scared, but I need you to tell me what happened."

"I... I remember now! At the headquarters... Barry, he... He suddenly turned into a monster!"

"A monster?"

"Yes! He was inside a cell, but he started screaming, and the next minute, he became unbelievably strong! He blew up the whole prison and...when people tried to stop him, he started... He started eating them!" he screamed in horror.



Even before Masaki had gotten close to their headquarters, strange events had already started transpiring.

While Masaki was distinguishing himself on the battlefield, taking on foes from all sides, Barry was locked up inside a cell in Lurf. He hadn't even been allowed to step foot on the battlefield. You may be thinking that this was no way to treat a viscount, but Barry had already been stripped of his title and was

now nothing more than a commoner.

And yet, even bound by cuffs, he was far from giving in to despair. Instead, a gleam of madness shone in his eyes.

“Perfect...” he whispered from the confines of his cell. “I did everything he told me to. The perfect sacrifice has been prepared.”

When talks of a ceasefire with the demon tribes had come up, Barry had volunteered to become an envoy. The battlefield there was his responsibility, he explained. Under normal circumstances, his request would never have been approved. Strangely enough, it was. Someone or something must have had a hand in it as no one seemed to oppose the idea. If anything, several voices rose to recommend him for the job.

Barry executed the next step flawlessly by failing to negotiate. The demons were furious and channeled all of their rage into the fight. They destroyed the empire’s troops and made their way here in time for the battle.

“You’re satisfied, right? Go on, now! Start the hero ritual!” Barry exclaimed as he stood up, his hands still bound in front of him.

His eyes were fixated on a corner of the cell. There stood a hooded figure, their face shrouded in darkness.

“All you have to do is take the medicine I gave you and kill the civilians, the soldiers, and the prince. Then you shall become a true hero,” the double voice, which didn’t quite belong to a man or a woman, answered with an even tone.

The lips of the hooded individual curled into a warped smile. Their words and voice seemed to somehow corrupt the mind of the people who heard them.

“Yes... A hero... I will become a hero!” Barry rejoiced, mixing the drugs with water and gulping it down.

BA-DUMP. BA-DUMP.

Barry started experiencing strong palpitations. However, they did not bring him any discomfort. He was exhilarated, feeling his heart beat in this way.

“I can feel it... The power welling up inside me! HA HA HA HA HA!!!”

“This is the power of heroes,” the double voice explained. “If you wish to

unlock all the powers of a true hero, you must first offer an appropriate sacrifice.”

“Of course... Heh heh heh... HA HA HA HA!!!”

Barry roared in laughter as he pulled at his handcuffs, breaking free with newfound strength. Having regained his freedom, he walked toward the door of his cell.

“What is going on here?!” A guard who had heard Barry’s manic laughter came running in.

Just as he reached Barry’s cell, the prisoner destroyed the door with a loud crash.

“How wonderful... So this is the power of heroes... I love it!”

Barry was ecstatic. He’d always dreamed of these powers, and now they were welling up inside him. *This is only just the beginning*, Barry thought. He couldn’t stop laughing.

“Barry! What the hell are you doing?!” the soldier yelled. “Get back to your cell! It’s your fault if—”

Barry closed the distance separating them in an instant, grabbed his head, and slammed it against the wall. It exploded as easily as a tomato would have in its stead. Barry didn’t stop there, swinging at the wall with his strong arm. It crumbled down immediately.

The soldiers stationed nearby all came rushing to the prison, alarmed by the noise. Barry carelessly swung his arm again. The simple movement somehow created a storm that easily blew away what was left of the building, to say nothing of the soldiers. One had withstood the strong wind and bravely jumped at Barry, but he was sent flying over the defensive walls.

“I’m starving...” Barry said. The former general casually strode over to the closest remaining soldier, grabbed him by the shoulders, and took a bite out of his head.

“AAARGH!” the soldier yelled. “HURTS! IT HURTS! STOP!”

The soldier was slowly eaten by Barry, one bite at a time, while the others

screamed in fear. Those with the means started running away as fast as they could.

“I’m getting stronger... Heh heh heh... I need more... MORE!!!” Barry exclaimed, slowly making his way to the injured imperial soldiers who had been left behind. He couldn’t stop. He ate soldier after soldier to satisfy his hunger and grow his powers. He was certainly the furthest thing from a hero.

Suddenly, a large shadow cast over him, interrupting his meal. “GRAAAAH!”

“How noisy! You trash!”

“GRAH!”

One of the wyrms had noticed that something was awry and attacked Barry. However, it lasted but a few seconds in the face of Barry’s overwhelming strength.

“Ha ha! Even a wyrm is nothing but a bug for me to crush... I want more... GIVE ME MORE POWER!”

Overcome by madness, Barry ran to the evacuation shelter where the people of Lurf—people he ought to be protecting—were hiding.

“Protect the people! The dignity of the empire is at stake! Protect the people from this monster!” the officer yelled, snapping the soldiers out of their terror. They’d been through harsh training and knew how to pull themselves together.

However, their struggle soon proved to be futile as Barry turned them into a pile of corpses, ready for a hefty meal. By filling his belly with human flesh, he continued to strengthen his powers before running to his next target.

Barry would not stop until no soldiers... No, until no one at all remained in Lurf.



“Eating them”? Eating people?! That’s something only a beast would do.

The soldier in front of me looked even more frightened than when I saved him. He was shivering with his arms wrapped around his body. Upon closer inspection, I noticed he had indeed broken a few bones when he was flung away. Still, he seemed to be overcome by fear rather than pain. I wasn’t sure he

had even noticed.

Something weird was definitely happening at the enemy's headquarters.

Suddenly, I heard a thunderous roar for the second time, and the ground shook once again. I turned to look in the direction of the city. Black smoke was rising, and I saw something fly out of it. It was a wyrm.

The wyrm was flying around in strange patterns. It looked as though part of its body had been forcefully torn off. Even though they were known to have great regenerative abilities, it was missing flesh all over, left with almost nothing but bones. Its whole head was missing too. ...*It's already dead.*

"No... Let me go! Please! I'll get killed! Barry will kill me! We'll all get murdered by that monster!"

The soldier started thrashing about in my arms with no regard for his broken arm. Right at that moment, the same thunderous roar sounded again. This time, the ground shook so hard that anyone would have assumed it was an earthquake.

On both sides, the soldiers stopped fighting to look at the city of Lurf.

I shoved a potion into the hands of the man I had been helping and went to get the attention of another soldier standing nearby.

"His arm is broken. Help him drink that potion and run away immediately," I ordered.

"Wh-What?" he asked, puzzled.

"Stop thinking, just do it! Something dangerous is coming this way! All of you, get out of here!" I shouted at all the soldiers standing between me and the headquarters.

They most likely understood the urgency in my voice as they hurried to scramble away.

Heightened Senses (High) kept sending me bright red signals. I'd never seen pop-ups that red. I had Invincibility to protect me, but I still got goosebumps and felt cold sweat run down my back.

The situation was truly dire. It wasn't time to fight anymore. I used the

System Message function to contact both armies.

<This is a message for every fighter! There's an emergency in Lurf! I repeat! It's an emergency! All generals and otherworlders must gather in Lurf immediately!>

The battle was halted, and Adel, Jirou, Youko, Haruka, and the prince joined me in front of the headquarters—Youko riding her Gigant Golem and Haruka and the prince riding together on the latter's dragon. Akiha reached us soon after on the back of a golem shaped like a tiger. A little bit later, Hayato and the Wei General arrived, followed by their men and officers who had survived the battle. The sudden alarming situation had unsettled those on both sides.

"Hero of the Kingdom, are you the one who spoke just now? What happened? And why is the atmosphere so...tense?" the Wei General asked.

"A crazy monster appeared in the city... Just look at that," I answered, pointing at the wyrm's remains—a pile of bones. "This is what's left of a wyrm that tried to get inside the city."

They stared at the gruesome sight, speechless, while I tried to explain what had happened in the city. Akiha in particular seemed to have a hard time handling the view and she brought a hand to her mouth, averting her eyes almost immediately. Haruka noticed that she was feeling sick and hugged her in an attempt to calm her down.

"I heard all that from one of the soldiers of the empire, but to put it in a nutshell, a guy called Barry turned into a monster," I said matter-of-factly before adding. "One that apparently eats humans."

"What?! Barry did what?!" the Wei General exclaimed, astonished.

Right as he finished speaking, yet another thunderous roar resounded through the plains. We all turned to look at the city and were shocked to find that...the famous walls of Lurf were crumbling down.

Among the rubble stood a lone silhouette, shrouded in a deep-red aura. It was carelessly dragging the body of another man who was draped in what appeared to have been splendid and luxurious clothes. The lavish outfit—along with the man's flesh—had been mercilessly torn in several places, and his bones

and viscera were visible.

“Prince Alfred?! Wh-What happened here...?”

The body that the man was grasping was that of the prince of the empire... And judging from what seemed to have happened to him... *He’s a lost cause, huh?*

Akiha seemed to be getting gradually more overwhelmed by the intimidating atmosphere. Haruka and Prince Leon tried to soothe her as they moved back, getting her away from the terrible spectacle.

“Barry? Do you comprehend the gravity of what you’re doing?!” the Wei General screamed.

“Ah, Tatsuma. I just finished dealing with our useless prince. A proper sacrifice is needed for a hero to be born, you know?”

“What the hell are you talking about? You... No way!”

“It’s exactly what you’re thinking. Here, look... Look at this mountain of sacrifices!”

We looked in the direction Barry was pointing and finally noticed that the pile of rubble he was standing on wasn’t actually made up of the collapsed wall... They were bodies... A mountain of dead bodies. It wasn’t just soldiers either. Small children, couples holding hands—he’d been indiscriminate. These poor people would not be able to move or utter another word ever again... *This guy... He’s fucking insane!*

“Sacrifices? And you call yourself a human?!”

“I’m not a mere human anymore! I became something more! They should be honored. They got to sacrifice their puny lives for a being as noble as me... Behold my power! I’ll start with you! I’ve always hated your guts, Tatsuma!”

Barry crushed the head of the imperial prince in his hand and dashed forward with a loud noise, lunging rapidly at Tatsuma, the Wei General.

He was much faster than I expected! Barry was face-to-face with the warrior in a split second. He roared, transforming his crimson aura into claws.

The former general leaped toward him, and while Tatsuma had raised his

spear in an attempt to block the strike, the strength of Barry's hit was too great. The floor cracked and sank under the Wei General's feet. A regular soldier would have died on the spot, but, as an otherworlder, Tatsuma was able to stand his ground. However, he needed both of his hands to clutch his spear and hold off just one of Barry's fists.

"DIE!!!" Barry screamed, using his other hand to strike at Tatsuma's torso with his claws.

If this keeps up, he'll die!

I tried to stop him, but before I could even get close, a wooden sword blocked the hit. Hayato, the one who had been standing the closest to Tatsuma, had stepped in.

"AAAAH!!!" he yelled as he pushed forward with his sword, pinning Barry in place.

Even Hayato's brute strength isn't enough to push him away?! He's giving everything he has and can only block. How strong can that guy be?

"HA HA HA HA!!!" To think I can face otherworlders like this! Wonderful! This power is indeed befitting of a hero! Befitting of my noble being!"

Hayato and Tatsuma were both top players in their respective games. Their equipment and stats had to be pretty fucking strong and yet, Barry was able to overwhelm them both at the same time.

If this continues, they'll lose.

"While they were locked in a stalemate, I dashed forward as fast as I could and unleashed Oversword before swinging my blade at Barry."

"Tch! How impertinent! How dare you oppose a true hero, you fake!"

His senses had gotten much sharper and he managed to dodge. *If he bothered dodging, it must mean that he can be hurt. He doesn't seem to be invincible like me.*

Isn't he embarrassed to call himself a hero like this, though?

"Who cares about who's a fake or real hero?" I answered before addressing the other two. "Hayato and... Hmm...Tatsuma, right? Leave this guy to me."

“What?!”

“Didn’t you already notice it when you blocked his attack? He’s bad news. And there might be some survivors in the city. Please go help them instead.”

“Who are you to decide as you please?” Tatsuma grumbled.

It might not have been my place, but if he kept going, he’d end up in Barry’s belly as well. And, to be honest...I just couldn’t stomach this monster. He killed people that didn’t need to die. Even in the middle of a war, there was no need to implicate civilians, but he had gone and murdered even the women and children.

“Tatsuma,” Hayato spoke up. “Masaki’s right. Letting people die when you can help...it’s against your principles, isn’t it?”

“You were stationed here so you must know much more about the layout of this city than we do, right?” I added, spurring him on further.

“Tch,” he finally let out before heading toward the city with a disgruntled face.

I hope there are at least a few survivors... Though I don’t have the time to worry about that. First, I need to take care of this self-proclaimed hero.

“I won’t let you get away!” Barry roared as he started to go after Tatsuma.

“You took the words right out of my mouth, Mr. Self-Proclaimed Hero!”

I used my sword to block Barry’s path. If I let him move about as he pleased, everyone would be in danger. I had to pin him down and deal with him myself.

“Damn it... Oh well. I’ll kill you first, Hero of the Kingdom!”

“I never asked for that title, you know?”

Barry brandished his sharp claws and lunged at me.

If I let him notice that he can’t scratch me thanks to Invincibility, he might give up and run back to the city. I should block and dodge as much as possible. Of course, if I got an opening, I’d strike back.

His attack patterns were fairly repetitive. He only had his brute strength and speed going for him. *That’s already scary enough, though.*

I felt like I was fighting a wild beast.

Tatsuma and Hayato could probably have beaten him if they'd gotten used to his speed, but they'd risk dying on the spot if he managed to get a proper hit in.

I continued to observe Barry and figure out his patterns. *Should I throw in a few taunts so he gets desperate?* I wondered.

"Are you being that predictable on purpose? It's kinda embarrassing for someone who calls himself a hero. How about trying a little harder?"

"YOUUUUUUUU!!! INSOLENT TRASH! You deserve nothing more than death! DIIIIIIIE!!!"

Well, that was easy. I wouldn't have to worry about him redirecting his attention to other people now. As Barry threw himself at me, I dodged his claws, grabbed one of his arms, and went for a shoulder throw.

"ARGH!" he whined.

Barry's momentum made my throwing technique all the more powerful and he seemed to have taken a lot of damage in his fall. I slammed him against the ground so hard that a fissure appeared.

I immediately followed up with another attack before he could get up. I struck him in the torso while the additional damage-over-time hits opened up cuts in three other spots. However, the four wounds closed up before my eyes in a matter of seconds.

He also has regenerative abilities... He's recovering even faster than the wyrms. Can he get any more annoying?

Barry obviously didn't intend to stay grounded and let me do whatever I wanted. His aura took the form of a horn around his feet and he used it to retaliate. It was easy to dodge. Since he was slower than usual thanks to being in between stances, I simply jumped out of the way of his kick.

"DAMN YOU! DON'T DODGE!" he screamed

"You're asking for a lot," I casually answered.

I didn't actually *need* to avoid his hits, but who in their right mind wouldn't step back when seeing a foot fly at their face?

Barry clamored to his feet and promptly started swinging his claws at me yet again. My cloak got torn into pieces, but Invincibility prevented my actual body from taking any damage.

I easily dealt with Barry's never-ending flow of monotonous attacks and sliced at him with my sword in return. It ended up being the same as when I fought the Leviathan. His aura tanked most of the damage, and I couldn't get any good attacks in.

With Barry's unrelenting assault, it was hard to find a chance to cast magic, and our fight slowly turned into a war of attrition. I'd slash into him repeatedly, forcing him to use his stamina to regenerate.

Barry also tried to answer in kind with a desperate offensive, but my eyes had gotten used to his speed, and I had no trouble evading every slice or kick.

"WHY?!" he screamed, breathing heavily. "Why can't I hit you?!"

He was staring at me, his eyes bloodshot as he swung his claws over and over again. He may have lost a bit too much blood and was starting to get slower.

He was able to close up his wounds by regenerating, but it seemed to work like healing magic and did not replenish his lost blood. His strength was still monstrous, though. He'd opened up plenty of craters throughout our battlefield.

"I know!" he suddenly exclaimed. "It's... It's because I haven't become a complete hero yet! More! I need to eat more!"

Uh oh. He suddenly changed targets and rushed at one of his own men!

Now that he was starving for flesh, Barry was faster than ever before. I need to try my utmost to catch up to him.

"AAAAAAH!" the soldier screamed in fear.

"Your blood... Your flesh... GIVE THEM TO ME!!!" he roared, drooling as he pounced.

BANG.

A bullet hit him and he was sent flying instead. The next second, a spear formed from mana pierced his abdomen, pinning him to the ground.

Akiha and Adel! They'd been busy helping the survivors evacuate near the city's entrance, but they had managed to stop Barry in time.

"Looks like we made it," Akiha sighed in relief.

"We did. Good thing I prepared a spear in advance," Adel agreed. "Everyone! Get back while he can't move!"

"Y-Yes! Thank you so much!" said the lucky soldier before running off.

I immediately returned my attention to Barry. The spear had gone through his body just like a skewer. He looked like the prey of those butcherbirds that impaled their food on spikes for later consumption. He was still alive, but he was acting a bit weird.

His body was convulsing, and the red aura that had been surrounding him until now was turning black... *Why does this feel so threatening?*

"Meat... Meat... Hungry... Need... Blood... Lives... POWEEEEER!!!"

The next moment, Barry—if I could still call him that—started growing and growing until he had become a monstrous muscle-bound giant. *How did he turn into a titan?!* He must have been at least ten meters tall—roughly the size of Chogokin.

On closer inspection, what I had thought to be muscles looked more like tree bark that just happened to move and act like actual muscles.

Yeah, that thing definitely isn't Barry anymore... It's a monster. In his attempt to become a hero, his arrogance and thirst for power had consumed him, turning him into the disgusting figure before us.

He grabbed the spear impaling him and broke it as easily as a child would a twig.

Drool escaped his mouth as he turned its eyes in the direction of...Adel and the others! I had a terrible feeling about this and immediately used Wing to get to eye level with Barry's monstrous face. Without missing a beat, I swung my sword vertically using Oversword.

"Like hell I'll let you!"

I put all of my strength into wielding Seven Arthur. While Barry's new plant

muscles weren't as tough as the Leviathan's scales, his regeneration speed was astounding. Thankfully, this was enough to draw Barry's enmity.

"GRAAAAAH!!!" Barry let out a feral roar as he tried to grab me with his gigantic hands.

Becoming bigger had greatly affected his speed, though, and his attacks were even easier to dodge.

While he failed to seize me, the wind pressure produced by the swing of his arms was enough to create a powerful gust of wind that quickly turned into a storm. The power of his hits was plain to see. If he hit me, I'd be sent flying pretty far away.

"GRAAAAAAAH!!!" he roared again, even louder this time, as vines erupted from his back and extended toward me.

He can grow vines now? What's next?

I cut down the vines and slashed his body as well, but despite my triggering seven additional hits—the highest possible number—he still managed to heal his wounds almost instantly. Next, I tried to burn him down with my magic, and I even threw a Flame Javelin—albeit a rather weak one—for good measure, but it did little more than scorch the surface of his bark.

"He's pretty damn annoying to deal with..."

I tried to focus on channeling mana to cast a more powerful spell, but he kept breaking my focus. I could deal with the vines easily enough, and I wouldn't get hurt no matter what, but if I was hit by his fist, the mana I'd been gathering would scatter away in a heartbeat. In between dodges, I channeled mana little by little until... *SWOOSH! BANG BANG!* The vines that were coming at me were either repelled or destroyed.

<Masaki-san, can you hear me? Adel and I will support you now!> Akiha said, using the Whisper function to reach me.

Thanks to Akiha sniping from far away with her antimatériel rifle and Adel cutting off the vines with a circular mana blade, I started having an easier time.

I seized the opportunity to get down to the ground and focus on drawing in as

much mana as I could. Adel and Akiha blocked most of the attacks coming my way which allowed me to finish preparing without getting blown away by the titan's strikes.

I planned on using a spell much stronger than Flame Javelin. Even in *Britalia Online*, it was one of the most powerful magical attacks. Players usually relied on it to lay siege to castles during guild wars. I never had anyone to try it on until now, but this was the perfect opportunity. After all, I didn't really mind if Barry ended up vanishing without a trace as a result.

Rays of deep red light started gathering in between my hands as I got ready to cast the spell.

"Destroy him...Crimson Nova!" Red lasers started to emit from my hand, and I pointed them directly at Barry. Swirling flames engulfed him, burning down his plant armor. It was a spell strong enough to burn down a castle's gates. *Try and regenerate this time, fucker!*

"GAAAH! AAAAAH!!!" Barry screamed until his voice faded away.

Guess his throat is finally charred, huh?

Using such a massive spell made me feel light-headed, but I gulped down a High MP Potion to recover. I was certain it wasn't over yet. Using Crimson Nova still wasn't enough to quell my uneasiness.

I felt like I needed to add a finishing touch and decided to put into practice a plan I had been thinking about for a long time now.

After entering this world, I learned that the strength of a magic spell could be greatly influenced by your mental image. For instance, that was how Paddle and his brother controlled the winds to guide our ship.

It got me thinking. What about the skills, then? The technique that Adel used, Mana Coagulation, wasn't a spell, it was a unique skill. Yet, she was able to mold her mana into a wide array of weapons with it. To do that, she also had to focus on an image of the weapon she wished to use before materializing it.

If Adel could do that, I figured that I might also be able to change the way my skills worked by visualizing them in a different way.

I planned to use Oversword and Thousand Dust of the Six Realms, two skills that were known to combo poorly. As for what I intended to change...I'd picture Thousand Dust of the Six Realms being unleashed just like Oversword, with the hundreds of weapons merging into a single katana—a giant *tachi* that could pierce all the way through the stratosphere.



You have learned the composite skill: Overtachi. You have learned the skill: Skill Fusion

A message went through my mind, and I suddenly gained two new skills.

What the heck? I've never seen these before.

I checked my skill list and noticed that they had indeed been added. I read the descriptions. Apparently, they would automatically appear if the necessary skills were currently set. *I'm such a genius! ...I can pretend, right?*

I removed Dual Casting and equipped my new skill, Overtachi, in its stead.

I pointed Seven Arthur at the sky and activated Overtachi. Using it cost both HP and MP, so I could feel my stamina and mental strength draining at the same time.

Hundreds of spears, swords, katanas, polearms, arrows, and lances appeared, forming into a glowing aura that surrounded my sword before merging into a single blade.

I somehow knew exactly how I was supposed to move to use it, and my body executed the motion for me. I cut right through the blazing inferno that had engulfed Barry, my sword reaching all the way through the giant. *It's so powerful. I can still feel some resistance, though.*

Barry's gigantic body had been split in two. Both parts started to crumble away in the flames.

I continued to watch as his plant body slowly turned to ashes.

When the flames had finally calmed down, not a single part of the plant giant was left. Instead, Barry's scorched original body lay on the ground.

"Ah... Ah..." he breathed weakly.

He's still alive, but...there's no coming back from this. He was clearly paying the price of the monstrous powers he had somehow received.

Still, I couldn't have him die so soon. I had some questions for him first.

"Hey! Where did you get those powers?" I asked.

“Ah... Gi...ve... Power... I... He...ro... Hurts... I... Power... Hero... Ki...ng...”

This is hopeless. His mind is shattered. If I can't ask him, I'll ask his past instead.

Log Analysis.

I touched Barry's body and tried to figure out what had happened to him by looking into his past. So long as he still breathed, it should still be possible.

As I peered into Barry's memories with Log Analysis, I noticed a suspicious person. To be honest, I wasn't sure it was a person at all. I couldn't make out their face. It was hidden by a mosaic. *What's up with this guy?!*

I went farther back and watched the ceasefire negotiations with the demon tribes, the meeting during which he had volunteered to go and... *This is it.* I saw Barry receiving something that looked like some sort of medicine from the hooded guy. I wanted to properly see what he had received...but video noise suddenly blocked my view.

I brought myself back to the real world and saw that Barry had taken his last breath. What was left of his body was crumbling away, leaving behind nothing but a pile of sand.

His remains were soon blown away by the wind, scattering across the Great Plains of Grandt.

Thus the battle between the empire's army and a coalition led by the Sentdrag Kingdom came to an end. The empire's headquarters had been annihilated, and their commander-in-chief, Prince Alfred, had lost his life. It was a victory for the Sentdrag Kingdom.

Still, I couldn't bring myself to rejoice. The black cloud of that hooded individual lurked over me, even as I walked over to the city of Lurf to join my cheering comrades.



While Masaki and his comrades gathered in Lurf, the pilot of Chogokin, Tadashi, was still stuck inside Youko's golem. He couldn't do anything but wait, surrounded by darkness and unable to hear any noise from the outside.

“Fuck her... Why the hell is this bitch bugging out like that?! I’ll fucking rape and impregnate her... Hey! GMs! Fix the fucking bugs!”

Tadashi was still under the misconception that this world was a game and thought that he could get a redo if he wanted. Then he’d be able to act however he liked all over again. But now that he had been caught, the only thing he could do was scream endlessly.

Under normal circumstances, no one outside the golem should have been able to hear his screams. But there was one person listening.

“How unsightly, Tadashi,” a man admonished. “I’m here. I couldn’t just leave you behind.”

The hunter suddenly appeared next to him. He’d managed to dig a tunnel through the ground and into the golem. He had a sturdy drill in one hand, and his black suit was covered with mud.

“You’re so loud, hunter...” Tadashi let out. “If I just try again, I can destroy a small fry like her in a second.”

Even when addressing his savior, Tadashi was as rude as ever.

“Whatever,” he continued. “Let’s get out of here and retaliate. It’s time for the main character to save the day.”

“I don’t think that’s going to happen,” the hunter answered.

“What did you just say?!”

“I told you already. I couldn’t just leave you behind.”

Covered by a cloak of darkness, the hunter closed the distance between the two of them in a split second. He used his bare hand like a blade and pierced a hole in Tadashi’s lungs.

“Argh...! You... What the...fu...ck...are...you...? We... Allies...”

“I’ve never thought of you as an ally, you trash.” The hunter sneered, and he drew back his hand from Tadashi’s chest. He opened his fist and, after carefully removing the flesh and blood covering it, a little seed, glowing dimly in the dark, was left in his palm.

“As I was saying, I couldn’t leave you behind without retrieving this. Without Exmizer, you’re of no use anymore. I need this little thing for the next summon.”

“Wh-Why...? Please...save... Can’t...breath... Air...” Tadashi whined. He could inhale, but exhaling was impossible.

As more and more air entered his lungs, his ribs started to creak. It was only thanks to his game character’s body that he was able to stay alive. However, this only ended up prolonging Tadashi’s suffering.

The hunter didn’t even bother looking back at the man writhing on the floor. Youko’s golem had served its purpose, so he destroyed it easily with his bare hands and disappeared.

Tadashi struggled until, eventually, he could not breathe at all anymore. He foamed at the mouth, suffocating, and soon passed away.

It was a lonely death in a world where no one would mourn him, with no one by his side to witness his last moments.



As time went by, news of the empire’s massive loss and the death of the crown prince spread like wildfire. It had left those in the imperial capital shaken. Some of the nobles fled the capital in a desperate attempt to survive, while others proclaimed they were ready to die with the empire if need be, gathering their private armies around the city walls.

Emperor Aldebaran was kept occupied with calming the nobles, while constantly wondering to himself, *How did things turn out like this?* But he had no time to dwell on the matter. As the emperor, stability came first.

He stopped the nobles and generals that were ready to head into battle once more and ordered them to guard the capital instead. Although the allied army was regrouping and reorganizing itself in Lurf, he feared they would next march on the imperial capital. There was a direct road between the two, and with fast horses, it would only take two days for a traveler to arrive. Of course, a marching army wouldn’t be that fast, but given five days, they very well could be at the capital walls.

In this short time, the emperor had to put together a proper defense.

The issue was that among the otherworlders he had been relying on, the Wei General, Tatsuma, had been taken prisoner; Chogokin and Tadashi had died; and the hunter was nowhere to be found. The only one left was the Great Admiral, but he had been sent far away on a mission and couldn't be reached. There was no hope of getting reinforcements from anywhere.

Alone in his office, Emperor Aldebaran lamented. "If only I had a seed..."

Back in the days before he had started waging wars, Emperor Aldebaran had been visited by a sorcerer who told him how to summon otherworlders. He had also provided him with the means to create technology that would turn them into slaves and bind them to his will, the slave collar. He made use of these gifts, enslaving otherworlders to start wars, overthrowing his neighbors, and taking over their territories. He had easily defeated the small nations of the south before turning his sights on and defeating his powerful adversary, the Valentine Empire. Borrowing the sorcerer's powers, he even put the Leviathan under his control. The large southern countries were on the verge of falling, and with this, the only thorn in his side would be the Sentdrag Kingdom to the north.

However, the empire's strongest asset, its fleet, was destroyed, and the Leviathan had been released.

Now the empire had lost a crucial battle, and the enemy was at the capital's doorstep. Without the Admiral, it was impossible to resume the mass production of ships. Only the bare minimum of troops had been left behind to guard the city. On top of that, there was no way to summon someone else without one of the seeds contained in the bodies of the current otherworlders. Over the years, the emperor had put a lot of resources into researching those seeds, but he hadn't managed to learn anything.

"Grandfather..." a voice suddenly spoke up.

While the emperor was lost in thought, worried sick, his granddaughter, whom he held very dear, entered the room.

He had carefully raised this girl, all he had left of his late son, without telling her anything about his warmongering policies.

“Is it true that my brother passed away?” she asked.

“Yes... It’s true. Alfred fought valiantly,” he lied.

He knew that the prince had been mercilessly slaughtered by Barry, but he didn’t want his granddaughter to hear the harsh truth. At the very least, he wanted her to think that Alfred had been brave in his last moments. Reality would be too much for her to handle. Even when it came to the war, she had only been told that it was to protect the empire from foreign powers, and she knew nothing of his conquests. Emperor Aldebaran had even made sure that every noble she could come in contact with knew better than to tell her the truth, threatening them with the death penalty if they dared to disobey.

“So he was valiant until the end... He will join mother and father now...”

She was doing her best not to cry, but her small hands still trembled. The young girl was only fifteen years old and must have been overcome. Yet, she was still a princess. She knew full well that she shouldn’t let her tears flow in front of the emperor himself.

“Philia, the empire may fall. I will have knights I can trust help you flee. If you leave now, you should be able to escape.”

“Grandfather?!”

With the few tens of thousands of soldiers he had left, holding the castle would already be difficult enough, let alone defeating the enemy. If victory was not an option, the emperor wanted his beloved granddaughter to escape at the very least. It was the first time he had ever shown Philia any sign of weakness, but he did not regret it. He was already old and didn’t have much longer to live. At this point, he only wished for Philia to enjoy a long and happy life.

“Grandfather... I can’t escape alone. You will—”

A knock on the door cut Philia’s concerns short.

A man entered the room. “Excuse me, Your Majesty. A representative from Pavarria has arrived.”

“Wh-What?! Prime Minister Iiro, bring them to me immediately!” Emperor Aldebaran exclaimed.

“At once, Your Majesty.”

Emperor Aldebaran hadn't been able to conceal the smile that curled his lips from hearing the word “Pavaria.” His demeanor changed drastically and a glimmer of hope flashed in his eyes.

Watching her grandfather's sudden change in attitude surprised Philia. But more than that, she felt anxious.

After a short while, another knock sounded. Emperor Aldebaran uttered a simple “enter” and the massive door opened.

A hooded individual whose gender was impossible to discern entered the room. Prime Minister Iiro closed the door behind them without a word.

The person in the hood was always very elusive, and it was hard to predict the exact timing of their visits. No one knew where they had come from, but as the one who provided the seeds needed to summon otherworlders, they were very important to the empire.

“Emperor Aldebaran,” the double voice started. “It's been a while. You appear to be in a rather precarious position.”

“Indeed. We lost the battle...” He paused for a moment. “And the empire is on the verge of collapse. Please! Give me a seed! I'll pay you however much you desire!” the emperor begged. He stood up from his chair with a fervor one wouldn't expect from an old man, knocking it over, and proceeded to bow to his visitor.

“Grandfather?!” Philia let out, surprised. “Who is this person?”

“This person is...someone who often comes to the aid of our empire in dire times,” he answered.

“Is that so? But... I... They're scaring me...”

Philia had never felt this way before. The hooded person somehow did not feel human to her. Fear overcame the princess. Her legs were paralyzed and had Prime Minister Iiro not stepped close to support her, she would have fallen down. Her face soured, but Iiro didn't seem to notice and simply asked her whether she was all right. She immediately reverted back to her usual mild-

mannered expression and nodded.

“Your Majesty, please raise your head. I have something even better than a seed to give you. With this, you will soon rule over the entire continent.”

“Impressive! Such a thing exists?”

The entire continent... The emperor had long dreamed of unifying the continent, and this person was about to give him the means to achieve his goal! He didn't doubt their words for a second and rejoiced. Philia looked at her grandfather, astonished. To her, these words only evoked fear. She had always been kept as far as possible from the war, and the existence of such a power filled her with dread.

“Hmm... Grandfather... I-I think I'm in the way of your conversation, so I will excuse myself,” she said, her voice shivering.

She forced her trembling legs to run toward the door. Her grandfather might admonish her for her lack of decorum later on, but at this moment, she only wished to get away from the hooded person and Prime Minister Iiro as soon as possible.

“You can't run away, child. You suit flowers the most, after all,” the double voice spoke up.

“Please excuse my rudeness, Princess,” Prime Minister Iiro said. His arm morphed into a tentacle and pierced through Philia's body.

A sharp pain assaulted the girl as her lithe body was raised into the air. Before she could understand what was happening, a single flower bloomed on her chest. Thorny vines started growing from there, and soon, Philia's body was entirely covered in thorns. The vines continued to grow, reaching every corner of the room.

“PHILIAAAAAA?! IIROOOOOO! YOU BASTARD!!!” the emperor screamed, reaching out for the sword—a national treasure—hanging on the wall behind him.

He dashed at Iiro and brought his sword down. The speed, power, and vigor of his hit were remarkable, and no one could ever expect such prowess from a man with so many years behind him. He was still as swift as when he faced King

Laurent, the ruler of Sentdrag, in a struggle to the death back when they were both in their prime. His blade could easily cut through the most tempered of steels.

However, the hooded individual stopped it with a single finger. The emperor brought forth all of his power, ready to squeeze out every last drop of vitality left within his aging body, but his opponent did not budge.

“I told you I would give you the power to rule over the continent. This flower feeds on life force and grows by devouring the soil. In the blink of an eye, it will grow enough to cover the entire continent. Now, now, Your Majesty. I think your role is over. Don’t worry, Iiro will take care of the rest,” they said.

“Naturally,” added the prime minister. “I’ll take Philia’s hand in marriage, so you don’t need to worry about her, Your Majesty. Or maybe ‘Your Former Majesty’ would be more apt? Please enjoy your rest.”

“Stop talking nonsense! Let Philia go!”

“Sadly, we can’t comply with your demands. You will soon become food anyway. Iiro, as the new emperor, please help me bid farewell to your predecessor,” the double voice spoke again.

“Certainly. Well, goodbye, Your Majesty,” Iiro said. A dozen thorny tentacles grew out from his back, lit with a silver glow, and pierced the emperor’s body.

“Argh... I-Iiro... Bas...tard...”

The tentacles started to wrap around the emperor’s body, tightening slowly, as though they were feasting on it. When they finally let go, only the sword, which they couldn’t absorb, was left. It fell to the floor with a loud clang.

The hooded individual turned toward the new emperor. “You seem to be more stable than Barry. You did well.”

“I owe it all to you. With that bothersome Aldebaran gone, I’m finally the emperor, both in name and substance!” Iiro exclaimed, roaring with laughter as he sat on his predecessor’s black leather chair.

The hooded individual looked on, a smile on their face.

“No way! I think being an emperor is a little much for you! Disappear!

Prismatic Missile!” A frivolous voice suddenly echoed in the room as a shining shell went through the ceiling and flew at Iiro.

Right before the missile could hit Iiro, the hooded individual raised their right hand, creating a wall of thorns to protect their new emperor. It exploded on impact, sending a shock wave through the office.

“Wh-Wh-What’s happening?!” Iiro asked, surprised by the sudden chaos.

The hooded person simply sighed, raising their hand upward and materializing a spear of black thorny vines before throwing it. As it was about to pierce the ceiling, a flash illuminated the room. The spear had been cut in half along with a few of the roof beams. Planks fell down, revealing a girl with striking blue hair. She wore a uniform that did not belong in this world and clasped a double-edged glowing sword. Colona jumped down, landing in the emperor’s office.

“My lord, we arrived too late. Emperor Aldebaran is dead. Princess Philia is trapped by thorny vines.”

“Noooo! Damn! We didn’t make it.”

Her lord, a young man wearing a black-and-blue robe, casually came down from the attic as well.

“And here I wondered why there were weird monsters hiding out in the attic... I knew you were involved, No Face.”

Shou’s clothes were damaged here and there, a reminder of the battle he had just been through. Still, there wasn’t one drop of blood on him. He had managed to come all the way here unarmed.

“I didn’t want to be interrupted, you see. I didn’t think you’d be able to summon anything in such a confined place, and yet you managed to claw your way here. Let me congratulate you, Shou.”

“You can keep your lip service. You knew I would come, didn’t you?”

Shou let out a sigh as he glanced at the princess imprisoned by thorns.

“Didn’t anyone teach you how to treat ladies, you fake emperor?!” Shou continued, glaring at Iiro and reaching for the jet-black sword that hung at his hips.

The blade—Shou's unique weapon, the Cursed Sword Gram—emitted a black aura.

He pointed it at Iiro, but he didn't react at all. He simply slowly stood up from his chair and laughed.

"Contrary to what you may think, I am always very attentive when it comes to women. She may be suffering now but she'll start feeling good soon enough. And when the largest flower finally blooms, she'll become the perfect bride for me."

"If you want a girl who'll obey your every order, just get a doll! Colona! How long do you think you'll need to rescue the princess?"

"I require five minutes, including time to analyze data."

"All right. I'll reward you if you finish early so give it your best shot!"

"I'll pass on the reward."

"You're so cold!"

"I see you're making plans." The double voice interrupted their banter. "Did you think I'd let you?"

No Face raised one of their sleeves, and more than a hundred black vines crawled across the flooring, approaching Shou and Colona like a tsunami.

A whittling sound echoed inside the room and the tsunami of vines disappeared in an instant. Buster Megalo Chimera came lumbering from behind Shou. Smoke was pouring out from the cannon on its back. Buster Megalo Chimera got rid of the vines by using an ability that allowed it to nullify an opponent's attack altogether. The downside was that it could only be used once.

No Face didn't seem surprised that their attack had been blocked. Instead, their lips curled into a smile.

"You managed to block that," they said with a little laugh. "This'll be tedious alone. Emperor Iiro, assist me."

"At once!"

At No Face's order, Iro started growing dozens of glowing silver vines from his back.

Shou didn't falter or retreat. He still wore his trademark carefree expression and simply materialized a deck of cards.

Dozens of iron beasts appeared. Giga Siber Lion, Chainsaw Mantis, Gear Leech... They filled the room to the brim.

The iron beasts and the grotesque thorny vines faced off. Flashes of light and loud noises added to the chaos inside the office. The impact of the battle could be felt from the outside—the imperial castle shook with each shock wave.

The capital was steadily getting overrun by thorns, and little did its citizens know, this battle would decide the fate of the empire.

Side Story: Adel's Thoughts

My name is Adelheid Bernstein.

I'm the only daughter of a ducal house serving the Valentine Empire and a viscountess in my own right. Or rather, I was. I lost everything when my nation fell to the Granfang Empire...

After getting bombarded by a large ship, I ended up heavily wounded, and the empire's soldiers took advantage of my weakened state to capture me. They brought me to a slave ship where silver stakes—the most effective weapon against vampires—had been carefully prepared. They plunged them into my aching body and forced me to watch the Valentine Castle burn down. The pain made me feel delirious, and at that moment, I fell into a deep despair.

I couldn't protect what I had sworn to, and I lost the will to live. I was about to be turned into a sex slave...or perhaps into a subject for their experiments. I didn't know which, but either way, every path was grim. I spent my days in lassitude, wasting away inside the monster cage that bound me.

But one day, the slave ship was raided by pirates.

I wondered if I would just end up in the pirates' custody instead, but my cage would make even that much difficult. Rather than metal bars, I was trapped within a monster. I didn't let myself hope that I could be taken out of it. On top of that, I was heavily wounded. Unless someone offered me fresh blood, I wouldn't get better. But their price to pay would be to become a vampire themselves.

This was one of the reasons why everyone outside the Valentine Empire considered us vampires to be frightful creatures. Even though I was an inheritor and did not fear sunlight, foreigners would be terrified when they found out I was one of those monsters they'd heard about.

However, the man clad in blue that appeared in front of me defied everything I thought I knew.

He handled the monster cage with his bare hands and destroyed it with a single spell. The monster's body was made of steel, and even the most dexterous of magicians would struggle to defeat it, but he got rid of it so casually, as if it weren't a big deal at all.

Even more astounding was another of his magics—his Room. I had never heard of a spell that could recreate a room before. It was just so...otherworldly.

Still, the surprises didn't stop there. As soon as he learned that feeding me blood was the only way to cure my wounds, he grabbed a knife, cut his own arm with no hesitation whatsoever, and offered it to me.

Even though Youko, the magic scholar who had been kept prisoner on the same ship as me, warned him about the consequences, he still shoved his bleeding arm into my mouth. My sharp teeth pierced his skin, and a sweet and rich flavor filled my mouth.

One gulp after the other, I kept on drinking until I became light-headed. My vampire instincts took over, and I wasn't able to stop myself from feasting. Even when my deepest wounds had already been healed, I continued to drink.

When I finally looked up at him, I saw him gazing gently at me as he held my head. When our eyes met, he smiled.

For the first time in my life, my heart skipped a beat. I didn't understand my emotions at all, and I removed my fangs from his arm, lost. He drank a potion and the holes I had left closed up immediately. It was a waste, but I still licked his wounds clean.

After that, I couldn't stop thinking about him—Masaki, the otherworlder. I wanted to get to know him better, so I joined his pirate crew. Before I'd met him, I would have never done something of the sort.

I soon learned that Masaki was a very strange but interesting person.

Until then, I had always believed that only vampires and members of races born with wings, such as harpies, could fly. Technically, regular people could ride dragons to fly, but that was more riding a mount than actually flying themselves.

Masaki had no wings, but, nonetheless, he could use a spell called Wing to fly.

He told me he wanted to train so I agreed to help him. I was pretty confident in my flying abilities, but Masaki spoke about a strange concept called “flight dynamics” or something and soon learned to fly even faster than me.

To be honest, I wasn’t all that frustrated about him surpassing me so fast. I was too busy being amazed to care. He wanted to learn everything about this world and studied not just magic but also the sword techniques we use here.

At first, his swordsmanship was pretty rough around the edges, but his natural athleticism was truly outstanding, and he was able to unleash astounding powers. I only taught him the basics and mostly just sparred with him so he could practice.

Among the knights, I was always one of the most skilled at swordplay. And yet, despite his unrefined technique, every sparring match with Masaki was intense.

As I got to know him better, I noticed something. He was hiding a part of himself, and he seemed afraid that someone would find out about it. Everyone has a secret or two, but Masaki seemed particularly desperate to protect his.

I wanted to know what it was. But at the same time, I was scared that he would distance himself if I ever found out.

That was when I finally realized that I was attracted to him. I had never fallen in love before, so I didn’t know how to act. It was more or less around the time we reached Schutzwald, a city under the control of Count Alan.

The count had been a close friend of my parents for as long as I could remember, and I had played with him a few times when I was a child. I knew I could place my full trust in him. I didn’t think Youko would be able to give me any sound advice, so I went to him instead.

I told him about my feelings and explained that I wanted to give up on my titles to stay by Masaki’s side. I told him how much I wished to become his w-w-w...wife.

When we walked together through town, my face was so red and hot that I worried it might catch on fire. Masaki was so engrossed by the sights of the city

that he didn't notice anything amiss. As for me, I kept looking at his profile, and my heart throbbed with every step we took.

I want to become his strength. Even if Masaki secretly holds powers that scare everyone else away, I want to be his ally for as long as my long vampire life continues. I'll happily give him my heart and my body.

Standing under the soft rays of the sun, a vampire's natural enemy, I resolved to live true to those thoughts.

Afterword

Nice to meet you. I'm Akatsuki.

Man! I never thought the web novel I started posting on *Shousetsuka ni Narou* using my years of online gaming experience would eventually turn into an actual novel!

I felt like I was dreaming for the longest time. This is all thanks to your words of support, comments, and reactions!

To be honest, creating a book has always been my dream, and I was secretly hoping to turn my work into a *doujin* or publish it one way or another.

Thanks to you, my dream came true!

This is a story about players from several games getting summoned into another world. Every otherworlder has powers worthy of a main character, but even among them, Masaki, as a Game Master, is a little special.

I put a lot of thought into what to do with my main characters. I wanted Masaki to have unusual powers. I know about gamer characters with a ton of different powers, but I had never read about a Game Master character before, so I decided to start my story with this concept at its core.

There are new characters that did not appear in the web version of this book: Shou, the Machine Beasts Tamer that was summoned from the online card game *Metallic Monsters*, and his partner, Colona.

With their appearance, the story will eventually unfold in a different direction compared to the web version. Shou isn't quite Masaki's rival, but more of a second main character in a way.

Merontomari-sensei and Yuui-sensei took care of the illustrations included in this book. They're both amazing artists that can draw huge mechas and pretty girls alike!

I think the way they drew Exmizer is amazing, but my personal favorite is Akiha. I must admit, I stared at the illustrations again and again when I received them. They gave me the energy to keep writing.

I want to give all my thanks to everyone involved in this project. My editor at GG Novels, I-sama, who happily discussed the novelization with me time and time again, and Merontomari-sama and Yuui-sama, who put great care into drawing the illustrations. Thank you so much.

Finally, I want to thank every one of my readers who faithfully followed the web version of my story and helped me make my dream a reality. It's thanks to you that this book was published.

From the bottom of my heart, thank you!

I hope you enjoy this new version of *The Game Master Has Logged In to Another World*!



•THE.

GM
GAME MASTER

HAS

LOGGED IN TO •
•ANOTHER
WORLD

01

AKATSUKI

ILLUSTRATORS
MERONTOMARI/
YUUI



WHOOSH.

A bullet cut through the air,
a few centimeters away from my arm.

*Did she notice me?! At this distance?!
With Stealth on?!*

A weak roar came from behind me,
and I immediately looked in that direction.
A wild griffon had been hit and was falling
to the ground, whimpering.

So that's what you were aiming at, Sniper Princess...

As expected, her aim was fearsome.









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The Game Master Has Logged In to Another World: Volume 1

by Akatsuki

Translated by Rymane Tsouria Edited by Callum May

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