

story

Itsuki Mizuho

art

Nekobyou Neko

To
Another World...

with

LAND
MINES!



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C O N T E N T S

TO ANOTHER WORLD...
WITH LAND MINES!

Prologue

Chapter 1 Operation Increase Party Strength

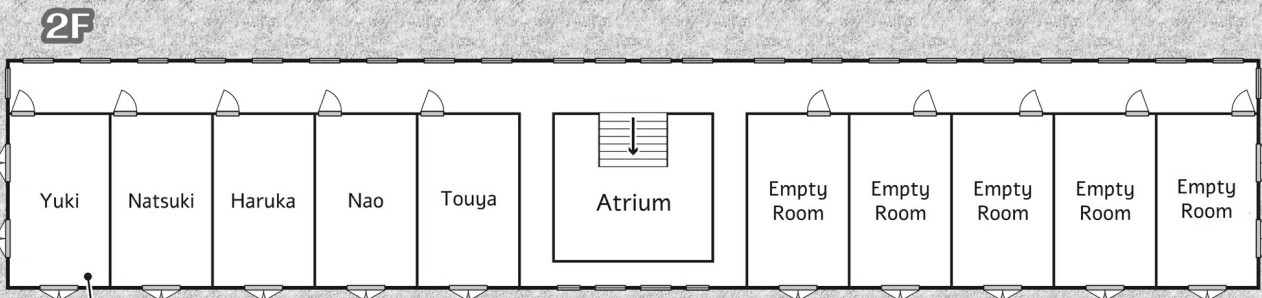
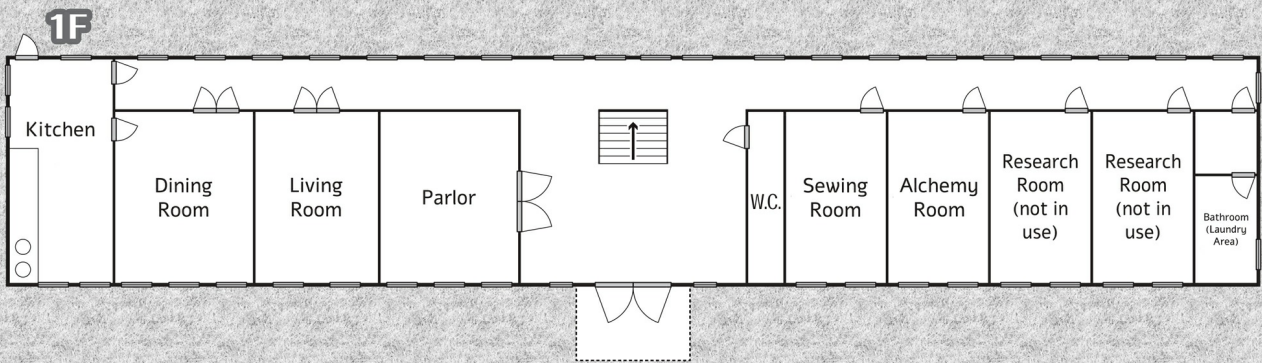
Chapter 2 Exterminate the Orcs!

Chapter 3 Fishing

Chapter 4 Mushroom Disaster

Side Story—Jade Wings: Episode Two

Floor plan for the new house
that Nao's party pays for



About 30 square meters

House is about 10 meters by 55 meters

Prologue

Our party had survived an intense battle with an orc leader and ten regular orcs, but I had suffered a serious injury, so in the aftermath of the battle, we had realized that we needed to become stronger. It was pure luck that none of us had died.

The tool that we chose to strengthen our party was a simple one: the power of money. When the evil god had first transported us to this world, he hadn't given us much money, so it was a huge relief to have more now. However, strengthening our party by hiring other adventurers would be a waste of money. There was only one logical way to spend it.

"Hello."

"Welcome."

We'd earned a lot of money from that pack of orcs, and we took it with us to Gantz-san's store. Contrary to our expectations, the person who granted us was a middle-aged lady. *Who's this? Did Gantz-san hire someone to deal with customers in his place while he's teaching Tomi blacksmithing?*

"Oh, hello, Sybil-san," said Touya.

I looked to Touya for an explanation, and he told me that this was Gantz-san's wife. *I never knew Gantz-san was married. I guess that's normal for someone with a stable job. Men like that are probably in high demand, so it would be weird if Gantz-san were still single at his age.*

"Um, is Gantz-san free?" Touya asked. "We have something we want to discuss with him."

"Oh, you're looking for my husband? Please wait a moment. I'll go and ask him to come see you." Sybil-san gave us a light bow before heading to the back of the store.

When Sybil-san was out of earshot, Haruka said, "I'd never seen Gantz-san's wife before now. I always assumed he was single." She sounded quite surprised.

“Yeah, I didn’t know about her either until just recently,” said Touya. “They seem to be pretty close.”

According to Touya, Sybil-san was in charge of dealing with customers whenever Gantz-san was busy smithing. Coincidentally, we’d always visited his store when he was unoccupied.

“It seems like the type of men who are considered desirable partners in this world are the ones who have a consistent income, so I guess it makes sense,” said Yuki.

“Wait, does that mean men like me would get written off as the worst kind of useless bums?” Touya asked.

“‘The worst kind’ would probably be going too far, but yes, as far as the ordinary woman in this world is concerned, most adventurers are probably one step removed from useless bums,” said Natsuki.

“Ugh. Does that mean I need to look for a normal job to have a chance at getting a cute wife with animal ears...?”

“Mm, either that or you’ll need to become a high-rank adventurer,” said Haruka. “A woman might consider an adventurer a potential husband *if* he reaches that level.”

We continued to chat while we waited, and eventually Gantz-san appeared, wiping sweat from his brow. “Oh, you guys. What’s up?”

“Sorry for bothering you during working hours, Gantz-san,” said Touya. “Can you help us choose a new spear for Nao and some new weapons for Haruka and Yuki?”

Gantz-san looked surprised. “Hm? Didn’t you guys buy a spear for Nao the other day? Don’t tell me you broke it already.” His eyes fell on Natsuki, and he seemed to comprehend; he nodded at us. “I see that this lass is using that spear now. Would the same kind of spear work?”

Gantz-san took out two different spears to show us. One of them was the same model that Natsuki was using now, but the other one looked extremely different. It was completely black all the way from the butt of the shaft to the tip of the blade.

“This first one here is made of yellow iron and ironwood, just like the one you already have. As for this other one, it may look like black iron, but it’s magisteel. Tougher and sharper!”

According to Gantz-san, magisteel weapons wouldn’t suffer a single scratch if you struck one against a weapon made of yellow iron, but the weapon made from yellow iron would probably get chipped. I decided to try holding the magisteel spear to get a feel for it, but...

“Ugh, this is way too heavy!” I exclaimed. “I can’t wield something like this!”

“Figured as much. It’s a good weapon for those that can wield it. Oh well.”

Magisteel seemed to be roughly as dense as yellow iron, but this spear was much heavier due to the fact that not only the blade but the shaft was metal. Gantz-san told us that it would cost about five times as much as the yellow iron spear. That would put the price at the equivalent of six million yen. Only national treasures would come close in value. It was intended for use in combat, but I’d rather get it appraised as an antique on a TV road show.

“To be honest, I might buy this spear if only the tip was magisteel,” I said.

“The kind of adventurers who use top-quality spears like this can handle the weight just fine,” said Gantz. “With something like a goblin, you don’t even need the blade. You can smash and break its head with one blow from the shaft!”

That sounded plausible for a spear this long, hard, and heavy. Touya could probably pull off the same feat with an iron baton. This spear could potentially work for me in the future, but for the time being, I decided to go with the more realistic option, the yellow iron spear.

“Next up is a weapon for you, right, Haruka?” Gantz asked. “You aren’t giving up on the bow as your main weapon, are you?”

“No, I’m not,” Haruka replied. “I just want a weapon that I can use for close combat when necessary.”

“Any specific kind of weapon you’re looking for?”

“Not really. Something like a rapier might be nice.”

“A rapier? In that case, something like this would do. But if you aren’t going to use it most of the time, it could end up a burden.”

The weapon that Gantz-san had brought over for Haruka to inspect was a heavy sword with a blade over one meter long. Even Haruka, petite as she was, could probably swing it around, but it would definitely weigh her down and prevent her from nimbly climbing trees, and it would probably get in her way when she was using a bow too.

“Mm, this doesn’t look like a good choice for a spare weapon,” said Haruka.

“Right. Personally, I’d suggest something like this shortsword here,” said Gantz.

The next sword that Gantz-san produced was about fifty centimeters long including the hilt. It didn’t appear to be anywhere near as heavy as the rapier. Haruka picked up the shortsword and swung it around for a bit before placing it near her waist to see how it would fit on her belt. She must have agreed with Gantz-san’s assessment, because she nodded at him.

“This may be my most realistic option for a spare weapon,” said Haruka.

“There are weapons you wear over your fists. Good option if you can throw a punch,” said Gantz. “But you obviously can’t. Something like a knife wouldn’t get in the way, but it wouldn’t be much use against monsters.”

Haruka paused in thought for a moment and then picked up a different sword and brought it over to Gantz-san. “Do you have any weapons in stock that are similar in size to this sword and of similar quality to Nao’s weapon?”

Gantz-san had an awkward look on his face; he scratched his head. “Uh, sorry to disappoint after recommending that kind of weapon, but I don’t have any in stock. Well, I have some in stock, but they’re too expensive—too expensive to use as a backup weapon, got it? And that sword you’re holding is way too cheap.”

The sword in Haruka’s hands was made of normal iron. It was a cheap weapon meant for rookies; the price was only a few thousand Rea. It wasn’t sturdy enough to use even as a spare weapon. If you tried using it against an orc, you’d end up dead for sure.

“Does that mean the only option I have left is to order a weapon made to my specifications?” Haruka asked.

“That’s right. Oh, you want Tomi to make a weapon for you?” Gantz asked. “The practice would be good for him. All you’d have to pay for is the materials. He can’t yet make a weapon that’s good enough to display out here, but he can make one that’s serviceable—and worth more than the cost of the materials too.”

According to Gantz-san, Tomi couldn’t make a better weapon than him even with the same materials. However, high-quality materials could compensate somewhat for Tomi’s inexperience. If we agreed to pay for the cost of the materials, then we’d get a big discount on a high-quality weapon, and Gantz-san would be able to save on the materials he needed for Tomi’s training. It was a deal that would benefit all of us.

“Sure, that sounds like a good idea,” said Touya. “It’d be more convenient for us to order weapons directly from Tomi.”

“Huh? What do you mean by that, Touya?” Gantz asked, glaring. “Any complaints about the weapons that I made for you?”

“O-Oh, that’s not it at all! It’s just that, you know, Tomi shares a culture and background with us!”

Touya was hastily making excuses, but he wasn’t exactly lying. The one big advantage that Tomi had over Gantz-san from our perspective was that Tomi would be able to understand our requests better. If we asked Gantz-san to make something similar to a weapon from some anime, he’d probably be baffled, but there was a chance that Tomi would know what we were talking about. Even if he didn’t know it offhand, it would be easier to explain to him.

“Hm? All right, then. So flood him with orders! Staying busy is good for an apprentice!” Gantz-san was grinning and laughing.

Touya responded with a thumbs up and a grin of his own. “Leave it to me! I can play the unreasonably demanding customer if that’s what it takes to get a good weapon!”

“That’s going too far, Touya!” I exclaimed. “Well...maybe if you went right up

to the edge of unreasonableness..." *Haruka is going to be trusting her life in that weapon, so it won't necessarily hurt if Tomi has to go through some painful*

—

Haruka interrupted me mid-thought. "Drop that idea right this instant," said Haruka. "Make sure you provide clear instructions. No sudden changes or ambiguous ideas, okay? Haruka Co., Ltd. is a good company that treats its employees well."

Everyone else in our party had awkward expressions on their faces.

"Since when did we become a company?" Natsuki asked. "And you say you're the owner, Haruka?"

"And the company's only 'employee' at the moment is Tomi," said Yuki. "If Haruka's in charge, the workload will probably be hell too, even if instructions are clear."

"So is it the kind of company that treats its staff well and abuses its clients and business partners instead?" Touya asked.

"How rude! Haruka Co., Ltd. is a company that operates on the principle of coexistence and co-prosperity with its clients and business partners," said Haruka. "The workplace has a cozy, homey atmosphere too!"

We all responded with silence. *Why do terms like "cozy" and "homey" make a company sound more exploitative? It's not just me, right?*

Gantz-san shrugged and then nonchalantly resumed the conversation we'd been having. "Eh, nothing wrong with giving Tomi difficult orders. A blacksmith gets better at his work in proportion to the amount of blood, sweat, and tears he puts into it—and the number of burns and blows he gets from his master's fists."

Gantz-san's statement was perfectly normal in the context of this world's system of apprenticeship, but it would have sparked outrage back in modern-day Japan. *I'm glad there's no such thing as social media in this world!*

"Well, you guys are Tomi's customers. Do whatever you want," said Gantz. "Now then, what kind of weapon are you looking for, lass?"

“Me?” Yuki asked. “Well, I was thinking of getting a knife, but are knives actually useless against monsters?”

“Depends. You’d either have to aim for lethal spots or just inflict a lot of little cuts, bleed it dry. With a larger monster, a knife may not reach deep enough if you want to stab it in the heart, say.”

The way that Gantz-san had phrased it, trying to kill monsters with a knife sounded like trying to kill an elephant with a knife. Their thick hide and muscles would prevent you from stabbing elephants directly in the heart, and aiming for the carotid arteries in the neck didn’t seem realistic either.

“In that case, what kind of weapon would you recommend for someone like me?” Yuki asked.

“Well, you’re small, so I’d recommend something like a flail,” said Gantz. “Weapons like war hammers, maces, and poleaxes would be decent choices too if you have the muscle.”

“Oh, weapons that depend on centrifugal force? I can’t really wield heavy weapons...”

It was fairly common in games to see petite characters swing around large weapons like war hammers with ease, but even Yuki’s Enhanced Muscles skill wouldn’t solve the problem of a significant difference in mass; Gantz-san was right that she’d definitely need to weigh more to use weapons like that. On the other hand, a smaller weapon like a flail would probably work fine for somebody like Yuki. Flails could even deal damage through thick armor. However, she would probably have to practice a lot to get the hang of using one.

“Bulking up isn’t a realistic option for me at all, so I guess a flail is my only option,” said Yuki. “Flails aren’t cute, though...”

“Cute? There’s no room for cuteness in combat!” Gantz-san started yelling, but he was kind enough to offer an alternative choice. “Well, you could use a shortsword like Haruka if you aren’t mainly a close combat fighter...”

“Oh, I think I mainly use magic in combat.”

Gantz-san started yelling again when he heard that ridiculous answer.

Honestly, he was completely right to do so. “What do you mean ‘I think’?! Isn’t that iron baton your weapon?! You dare to call yourself a mage using that kind of weapon?! Use something like a mage staff instead!”

According to Haruka, mage staves were a type of conduit for magic; their primary purpose was to improve the potency of a mage’s spells, but they could be used as blunt weapons to a certain extent as well. The only risk was that if you whacked somebody too hard with a mage staff, the magic would short out, and you’d end up with just a regular stick. Mage staves also weren’t that powerful relative to their worth, so they weren’t exactly at the top of our list of potential purchases, even though we had enough money to afford one now.

“Would there happen to be any cheap and high-quality mage staves in stock here?” Yuki asked.

“Of course not! I don’t have any mage staves in stock! What mage do you think would visit my store?” Gantz-san dashed Yuki’s hopes right away with a blunt answer, but again, he was completely right. “If you really want to get your hands on a mage staff, I can introduce you to somebody I know. However, if you plan to keep fighting with that iron baton of yours, there’s the option of using some other kind of magic conduit. Any kind of conduit is expensive, though.”

According to Haruka, mage staves were widely used among mages, all the way from novices to experienced sorcerers. On the other hand, other types of magic conduits like rings and amulets were not affordable for most mages. Using rings or amulets as conduits allowed mages to keep their hands free so that they could wield weapons at the same time. These conduits would scale in power and effectiveness depending on how expensive they were. However, that scaling wasn’t very good compared to the amount of money that a mage would need to invest. Haruka told us that the price for an effective ring or necklace as a conduit for magic would be enough to pay for a house, so such things weren’t something that we could afford to purchase.

“Hmm. In that case, I guess I’ll order a normal weapon from Tomi as well,” said Yuki. “Is that okay with you, Gantz-san?”

“Didn’t you say that you mainly use magic for combat?”

“I mean, yeah, but it doesn’t sound like there’s any point in me buying a

magic conduit.”

“If you say so. I’m not a mage myself, so I don’t really know much about it. But I don’t mind you placing orders with Tomi. It’ll be good practice for him. I’m gonna go check on him, so wait here a bit.”

Gantz-san stood and muttered to himself that “He should be done soon...” as he lumbered towards the back of the store. After Gantz-san departed, we went over to a bench in a corner of the store and sat down to take a break.

“Well, it looks like we’ll be able to get our hands on some decent weapons,” I said.

“Mm. I’ll need a lot of practice to get the hang of using a shortsword, though,” said Haruka. “Touya, Natsuki, I’m counting on both of you for help.”

“All good. You can always rely on me for advice about swords!” Touya exclaimed.

“I hope my knowledge will be of some help, but all I know is how to use a kodachi. A shortsword will probably be somewhat different,” said Natsuki.

“Hmm. In that case, I guess we could just have Tomi make something similar to a kodachi,” said Haruka.

“Mm, it shouldn’t be too hard to explain—Tomi probably knows what a kodachi is,” I said.

Of course, that wasn’t the same as knowing how to make a kodachi, but it still gave Tomi an edge over Gantz-san. He’d just have to give it his best shot.

We had been waiting for about thirty minutes when Gantz-san appeared again with Tomi in tow.

“Hello, everyone,” said Tomi. He was covered in sweat. “I heard you guys want to order some weapons from me?”

“Yes,” said Haruka. “We have some special requests that we hope you can fulfill. We’d like you to make a shortsword for me and one for Yuki as well.”

“Considering what we’re going to be using them for, we’d like something like a sturdy kodachi,” said Yuki. “Is that doable?”

Tomi paused in thought before responding. “Even with the Blacksmithing skill, I don’t have the expertise to craft a true Japanese sword...but I’ll give it a try. What do you want me to prioritize—sharpness, sturdiness, or weight?”

“Well, we’re going to be using them for adventurer work. It would be nice to have weapons that didn’t require routine maintenance, but I realize that would be asking for too much. At the same time, weapons that require maintenance after every single battle won’t work for us,” said Haruka. “If you forge a pair of swords that can endure a few battles in a row without being sharpened, that would be ideal.”

“Sharpness would be nice, but I think sturdiness is the most important,” said Yuki. “We’ll die if the weapons break mid-battle, after all. As far as weight, I don’t really mind if my sword is a bit heavy since I have the Enhanced Muscles skill.”

“I see. So I can basically do as I see fit?” Tomi asked.



“Sure, as long as the final product meets the criteria that we mentioned,” said Haruka. “Just try not to go overboard experimenting so that we don’t end up with weapons that are awkward to wield.”

In spite of Haruka’s warning, Tomi sounded quite happy. “Okay, understood! Oh yeah, what’s your budget?”

“Hmm. How does one hundred gold coins per weapon sound? Two hundred total, in other words.”

That was a bit cheaper than the price of my spear. However, since we were only paying for the materials, it was possible that the final products would end up being better and more valuable than my spear. It all depended on Tomi.

Tomi glanced at Gantz-san for confirmation, and Gantz-san nodded back to indicate that the budget that Haruka had proposed was reasonable.

“Okay. One last thing: what’s the deadline?”

“The sooner the better, of course, but quality is important, so how about one week from now?” Haruka asked.

“A week? It’ll be a bit difficult, but I’ll do my best!” Tomi exclaimed.

“Don’t push yourself too hard to meet that deadline,” said Haruka. “Just do what you can within reason.”

“Yeah, you can just come chat with us at the inn if you need more time—or if some issue comes up that you need to discuss with us,” said Yuki. “We’re all staying at the same inn, so it’ll be easy to meet up.”

“Oh, don’t worry about it! I’ll stay up all night multiple nights in a row if that’s what it takes! I don’t mind making shovels, but making good weapons is what I consider real blacksmithing!”

Reading between the lines, and in spite of Tomi’s protestations to the contrary, it sounded like he’d gotten a bit sick of making shovels. *This doesn’t count as exploiting someone’s passion for work, right?*

We were done discussing our orders with Tomi, but there was one last thing we needed from Gantz-san. We hadn’t forgotten the difficulty we’d had gutting orcs, so we bought a few heavy knives before leaving the store.

We weren't quite done with our plan to take advantage of the power of money. The next place we headed to was the bookstore that I had visited previously. We bought all of the books we hadn't been able to afford during our previous visit: a volume on the basics of magic and grimoires on Water, Light, and Fire Magic. The total for those four books came to over one hundred gold coins.

We all felt a bit paralyzed in regard to our sense of money after we had bought a bunch of expensive books, so we took the opportunity to look around for any other books that would also be useful for us. We ended up buying an extra five books. One was a grimoire on Wind Magic that the bookstore had just gotten in. Another was a grimoire on Earth Magic, which there was apparently a lot of demand for; the bookstore had plenty in stock. Natsuki found a book on medicine that she wanted, and we also got our hands on an encyclopedia of herbs and an encyclopedia of monsters.

The final cost would have been over two hundred gold coins, but Haruka successfully negotiated a discount since we were buying them all at once. However, that didn't change the fact that we'd paid the equivalent of over two hundred thousand yen per book. Books in this world really were way too expensive. But for us, even that premium was more or less worth it; we'd now have grimoires for all of the most common types of magic. They'd surely help us take our spellcasting to the next level.

So I hoped, anyway. It would be a huge pain in the butt if these expensive books ended up being worthless.

Chapter 1—Operation Increase Party Strength

As planned, we had used the power of money to increase our strength as a party, but that was no reason to skip out on training. Rather, training was the only way to make use of the books and weapons we'd spent so much money on.

With that goal in mind, we set out together for the plot of land that we now owned. That way, no matter how intense our sparring got, we wouldn't cause trouble for anyone in the general vicinity. When we arrived and entered through the open gates, we saw that construction work had already begun; it looked like the foundation had already been laid. The layout that we had all agreed upon was fairly spacious. There were carpenters erecting structural pillars on the foundation. Instead of concrete, the foundations of our house were made of rock that a mage had manipulated with Earth Magic. Even granting that magic made construction much easier, I was still surprised to see how fast the work was progressing.

On a side note, according to Haruka, mages proficient in Earth Magic could earn a lot of money in the construction industry. The durability of a stone foundation would vary depending on the abilities of the individual mage, but as a rule, houses in this country were quite sturdy and well protected against the elements.

While we were observing the work, the foreman came over to speak to us. He was an oldish man with a wrinkled face, but he wasn't frail at all, so he probably looked younger than he actually was. "Hm? Oh, it's you. It's gonna be a while before your house is ready, you know?"

"Oh, hello, Simon-san," said Yuki.

"Yuki, who's this?" I asked.

"Oh, this is Simon-san. He's in charge of the work here," said Yuki. "He's also the one who did the renovations to Aera-san's café."

Oh, I see. The girls must have met Simon when they went to discuss the work order for our house, but Touya and I hadn't been with them.

"Hello, my name is Nao, and this guy here is Touya."

"I'm Simon. I'll see that everything goes smoothly—no need to be looking over our shoulders the whole time!"

"Oh, don't worry, we fully trust you, Simon-san," said Haruka. "Your work on Aera-san's café was quite good, after all. Today we're here to train since there's plenty of space."

Haruka pointed at the plot of land.

"Oh, really?" said Simon-san. He sounded impressed. "I can tell you kids are some real hardworking adventurers. Well, you own the land, so feel free to use it however you like. Just don't get too close to the carpenters—it's dangerous."

"Okay. There's more than enough space, so we should be fine," said Haruka.

There were about ten meters between the gates and the site where our house was under construction, and the empty spaces to the left and right of the house were each spacious enough to fit another two or three-story house. There was room for a wide backyard too. This plot of land was enormous, so Diola-san was probably right when she said that it would have been a good idea for the previous owner to divide it into several plots.

"Oh, yes, it's quite spacious," said Simon. "Good luck to you, then. It would be a shame not to have any residents by the time the house is finished!"

In spite of his ominous words, he laughed loudly and then returned to the construction site. We watched him leave with bitter smiles on our faces, and we headed towards the backyard part of the land.

"Okay, in terms of today's training, I think it might be a good idea to read the new grimoires that we just bought before we start practicing magic," said Haruka.

"Yeah, we spent a lot of money on them, so we should definitely put them to use," I said. "Should we just train with our weapons today per usual, then?"

"I'd like to teach Haruka and Yuki how to use a sword as soon as possible, but

we'll probably have to wait until Tomi-kun's done making the two kodachi that we ordered," said Natsuki.

"Well, I still have the wooden sword that I used to use," said Touya. "It's longer than a kodachi, though."

Touya took a wooden sword out of our magic bag. It wasn't that long ago when he was still wielding this sword in the woods, but looking at it already gave me a feeling of nostalgia; I thought of the time it had bounced off a tusk boar's skull...

Natsuki shook her head when she saw the sword. "The length of a sword is an important consideration in how you wield it, so something like a stick or club would be better for our purposes."

However, Yuki apparently had other ideas; as she had her index finger up in the air. "Oh, why don't we ask the carpenters here to make some wooden swords for us?"

Haruka sounded confused. "Huh? Are you seriously—"

Yuki ignored Haruka's hesitancy, grabbed her hand, and dragged her over to the construction site. I was kind of worried that they'd turn Yuki down or yell at her—I imagined tradespeople as being kind of difficult to talk to—but as I watched from afar, it looked like Yuki was having no trouble winning them over.

I was amazed. "She really went for it, huh?"

"Mm. I'm really impressed by her...communication abilities," said Natsuki.

"She knows how to make the best use of her slightly childish looks," said Touya.

I felt the same way Touya did, but Natsuki was also right that Yuki could pull off the cheerful act. To a certain extent, you expected people to play certain roles based on how they looked. For example, it would be pretty off-putting if a middle-aged man wearing a formal suit begged you for sweets like a child, but it wouldn't be weird at all coming from a young-looking girl like Yuki. On the other hand, it was also obvious which kind of person would be a better fit for a role in a business like dealing with complaints from customers. Natsuki and Haruka could come off as very imposing at times, so Yuki, with her friendly and

endearing demeanor, was better suited for the job of communicating with strangers. In fact, in school, Yuki would often play the role of a buffer between Haruka and Natsuki and the rest of the world; our classmates would usually have to go through Yuki before attempting to talk to Haruka or Natsuki—especially the boys.

“She’s mentioned before that she’d like to look more grown up, though,” said Natsuki.

“Really? I think her childish looks suit her well. It’s just something unique about her,” I said. “She’s cute as she is.”

Natsuki took note of the words that had slipped out at the end of my sentence; she blinked at me for a moment. “It’s rare to hear you say something like that, Nao-kun.”

“Not that rare,” said Touya. “And even if he doesn’t talk about girls out loud all the time, he’s always thinking about them—right, Nao?”

“Touya, you better not push your luck any further... Anyway, uhh, look, it seems like Haruka isn’t having much luck.”

Haruka could talk business even with people she didn’t know well, but that wasn’t quite the same as getting along easily with strangers. In fact, contrary to what you might expect, she was often awkward in that kind of interaction.

Natsuki smiled at my attempt to change the subject. “Heh heh, if you insist. Well, let’s leave the negotiations to Yuki and get started with training. How about we start with a two-on-one sparring match—you and I against Touya-kun?”

“Sure, I’m down. Oh, should we use the wooden sword and the iron baton?” I asked. “Touya, it’d be hard for you if both of us were using spears, right?”

“I’d get knocked on my butt for sure! Natsuki’s Spearmanship level is higher than my Swordsmanship level!”

“Um, I’ll hold back, of course, so...”

“It’ll still hurt when you land blows on me, Natsuki! Anyway, I think it’s about time that we find some proper training weapons. It’s true that we have Light

Magic for healing, but it's still dangerous."

"Yeah, that's true," I said. "It's not that hard to stop before actually inflicting a blow if it's one-on-one, but a sparring match where one side is outnumbered would be a different story."

In past sparring matches, I'd always used the butt of my spear while Touya used his normal sword. His sword wasn't sharp at all, so if I was unlucky enough to get hit, I'd only suffer minor injuries—bruises or at worst a broken bone. However, it would be extremely dangerous to use the blade of a spear while sparring, especially two-on-one.

"You know, up till this point, I've suffered more painful experiences than you have," I said. "You've broken my bones several times."

Touya's Swordsmanship level was higher than my Spearmanship level, after all, and he was more muscular than me. After I sparred with Touya, Haruka routinely had to heal me.

"Come on, it's not completely my fault. The wooden sword is different in size from the sword that I normally use in real combat."

"We can make proper-sized sparring weapons at a later time," said Natsuki. "For now, let's set that aside and just use what we have on us. I'll use the wooden sword, so you can use the iron baton, Nao-kun."

"Sure, that sounds good. Let's beat up Touya together! It's payback time!"

"...Beat me up? Is that seriously the plan here?"

"It all depends on you, my man," I said. "If you don't want to suffer too much, you're going to have to step up your game. Anyway, it's for your own good—this is the only way you'll ever get better at combat. Prepare yourself for a beating!"

"Why do you seem so eager to get payback?! I guess I'll try my best, but the weeds here might get in the way."

The backyard was more than wide enough for sparring, but it had been abandoned for so long that parts of it were overgrown with weeds and shrubs in some places. Touya was right that it was unsuited for sparring in that way.

However, Natsuki shot down Touya's complaint. "It's better than sparring in the woods, isn't it? Just look at the weeds as obstacles that are part of our training session." She held her wooden sword at the ready.

Oh, Natsuki makes a good point. Also, I guess we now have an excuse not to mow our backyard. I held up my baton. "All right, Touya, are you ready to do this?"

"Yeah, whenever you are!"

Natsuki and I started to attack Touya as soon as he held his sword up. Natsuki clashed her weapon against his while I circled and tried to outflank him. I didn't have the Staff Fighting skill, and Natsuki didn't have the Swordsmanship skill, so Touya managed to weather our onslaught. However, Natsuki was still pretty decent with a sword. *Did she learn a bit of kendo as well as how to use a kodachi?*

"I'm impressed that you managed to hold your own against us, Touya-kun," said Natsuki.

"I mean, my Level 3 Swordsmanship skill isn't just for show, after all!"

"Is that so? In that case, let's step up a gear, Nao-kun."

"Yeah, sounds good. Let's cover Touya in dirt!"

"Hold on, don't forget that this is just training, Nao! You don't have to get so serious!"

"Come on, Touya. This is so you'll survive real combat."

As we continued sparring, I would swap roles with Natsuki from time to time. About halfway through the match, I felt like I'd gotten used to wielding the iron baton; I managed to get some hits past Touya's sword and shield. I wasn't serious about trying to break his bones as payback, so I did try to stop myself from landing blows at full force, but I wasn't good at restraining myself completely, so I still ended up slapping him around. Touya complained that my slaps were more like smacks, but he only had himself to blame; he had Level 3 Swordsmanship, while neither of us had skills for the weapons we were using. *Yeah, it's definitely his own fault and not me trying to serve some payback.*

“Hold on! Nao! Your! Attacks! Are! Getting! Faster!”

“Really? I! Guess! You! Could! Say! That! Do your best!”

Apparently he could still find the time to talk in the middle of combat. *I’m not gonna stop attacking you until you let go of your sword, Touya!*

Natsuki and I continued our attacks on Touya for another two minutes. At last, he leaped backwards away from us. “Wait! Let me rest for a bit!” He dropped his sword and then collapsed. He was gasping for air as he rolled around on the ground.

“Are you giving up already?” I asked.

“What do you mean by ‘already’?! You guys are way too good at this!”

We had sparred for roughly half an hour. Apparently even Touya found it difficult to remain focused on combat for that length of time. Natsuki and I had swapped the main attacker role periodically, whereas Touya had had to defend himself continuously, so we weren’t as tired as he was.

I shrugged in response to Touya’s complaints. “I mean, yeah, what did you expect?”

“That’s not what I mean! What I mean is that you guys are way too good at using those weapons given that neither of you has the right weapon skills!”

“I have some experience wielding katana, so that came in handy,” said Natsuki.

“I applied my experience using a spear,” I said. “Oh, wait, it looks like I managed to learn the Enhanced Muscles skill and the Staff Fighting skill.” *No wonder the iron baton started to feel light in my hands halfway through the match.*

“Wait, seriously?!” Touya exclaimed. “You managed to learn the Enhanced Muscles skill too?!”

Back when he’d been using the iron baton, Touya had learned the Staff Fighting skill pretty quickly, and he’d managed to get it to Level 2 pretty quickly as well. With that in mind, it was probably an easy skill to obtain as long as you put a little bit of time into it. The Enhanced Muscles skill, however, was

different.

“Just so you know, Touya, I’ve been working hard at trying to learn the Enhanced Muscles skill for a while now.”

Based on the explanation that I’d gotten from Yuki, I had attempted to direct the flow of mana throughout my body while holding heavy objects. However, during the battle with the orcs and our sparring match just now, I’d been too focused on other things to think about mana. Still, apparently the Enhanced Muscles skill wasn’t as difficult to learn as we’d initially thought.

“Hmm? It looks like I’ve learned a skill called Katana Wielding,” said Natsuki. She sounded a bit confused. “It seems to be a separate skill from Swordsmanship.”

Natsuki must have checked her own status display screen. She had been using a wooden sword for sparring, so you’d have thought that she would have gotten the Swordsmanship skill instead. *I wonder if it’s because she used the wooden sword more like a katana than a Western sword.*

“I don’t really get how skills work,” I said. “Some are easy to learn and some seem to be very hard. It’s weird.”

Is it all based on the whims of that evil god? It’s hard to take note of which factors lead to you learning new skills. It’s not like we get an alert when it happens.

“I think skills are probably easy to learn when you can apply your experience from other skills you had back on Earth,” said Touya. “For example, you said you have some previous experience with wielding katana, Natsuki?”

“Yes, a little bit.”

Another skill that Natsuki had managed to learn pretty easily was Sewing, which she’d been good at back on Earth, so Touya’s theory made sense. We’d all been through the same character creation process, but apart from that, it seemed to me like it wasn’t so much that skills made you capable of doing something; rather, anything you were good at would get displayed on the status screen as a skill. *Maybe you have to perform a task with your full attention in order for it to turn into a skill.*

We continued to discuss different theories about the nature of skills while we were taking a break from sparring. Eventually, Yuki returned, swinging a wooden sword in each of her hands. Haruka, following behind her, looked a bit tired.

“Natsuki, I managed to get them to make some nice wooden swords for us!” Yuki exclaimed. “Oh, are you guys taking a break?”

“Mm, Touya ran out of energy. Whoa, these swords look nice!”

“Yuki had very specific demands,” said Haruka. “It was all her—I’m nowhere as bold as she is.”

Haruka sighed and muttered something about bringing treats for the construction workers in the future, so Yuki must have made a lot of requests. The two wooden swords that she was swinging around definitely looked like they were well made; they weren’t just sharpened sticks but were close in shape to proper swords. We were only going to use them for training, so it would have been enough for the construction workers to trim two pieces of lumber to the right length, but of course, I wasn’t complaining.

“In that case, let’s make use of these wooden swords and start training you and Haruka,” said Natsuki. “Do you have energy to help out, Touya-kun?”

“Yeah, as long as we’re just doing lessons, not sparring.” Touya got to his feet and turned to me. “What about you, Nao?”

“Oh, I’ll pass. I’m gonna read some grimoires for a while.”

“Is that so? All right, let’s do this, Natsuki,” said Haruka.

I walked away a bit from the others and sat down, then took a grimoire out of my magic bag. It was the volume on the fundamentals of magic. This was the one book that would be useful to everyone in our party apart from Touya, so I decided it would be a good use of time to read it while the others were busy with training. There had been two copies of this grimoire in stock at the bookstore, and we’d bought the cheaper one, which had a slightly damaged cover. The damage was cosmetic and wouldn’t be an obstacle to reading; I just needed to treat the book with care. I lay it open on my lap and slowly flipped through the pages, skimming. Once I was done, I closed the book and stretched

out on the grass.

“Hmm, there wasn’t that much new information in this one.”

Apart from Touya, all of us instinctively knew how to use magic due to our skills. On the other hand, the book on the fundamentals of magic summed up that knowledge in a systematic and detailed way, so it was worth reading through. The closest analogy that came to mind was sports: there was a difference between improving your athletic ability through sheer willpower versus applying scientific theories for better performance—although actually, the difference between the two methods in that example might be more extreme than in the case of intuitive versus intellectual magic.

“There was some new information inside of this book after all!”

The new information that I’d discovered was the fact that a mage couldn’t pass out from using up mana. More precisely, it was theoretically possible but extremely unlikely, just as a runner could theoretically keep running until he passed out, but most people would give up long before that point. Most mages who ended up in a state of extreme mana depletion would simply fail whenever they attempted to cast a spell or else would succumb to counterspells from other mages.

Magic was sustained by a mage’s mana, so spells wouldn’t continue under their own power and suck up mana against the wishes of the mage. There were some exceptions, like magical devices made by alchemists; those would automatically deplete the user’s mana—but only if the user had plenty of mana to spare.

“It’s nice that I don’t have to worry about passing out, but I wish there were a way to measure how much mana you have...”

There was a passage in the book that emphasized how important it was, as a mage, to get a sense of how much mana you had, especially in relation to the kind of magic that you used most often. The book also said it was important to test how many times in a row you could cast your most-used spells and to test how long it would take for your mana to recover afterwards; if you didn’t know, you might get caught off guard during combat.

“Well, I’m glad I discovered that I can increase my mana through training.”

Since I had first arrived in this world, the potency of my magic had increased, as had the number of times I could use spells, but I wasn't sure if that was because my mana capacity had grown or if it was because I had gotten better at controlling it.

"I guess I'll just have to keep working hard to improve at magic." I set my book aside for a moment to watch the others. "Looks like they'll be busy training a while longer."

It looked like they had split into pairs for sparring—Haruka with Natsuki and Yuki with Touya. Dagger Wielding sounded like a cool skill that would more or less fit the ninja role that Yuki wanted. She had also copied the Sneak and Stealth skills from the rest of us. She was petite enough that she'd probably make a pretty cute ninja too, although I wasn't sure if she could pull off a sexy ninja.

"I'd like to learn the Sneak skill myself, but it'd probably be better to focus on the Indomitable skill for now."

Thus far, my efforts hadn't resulted in me learning the Indomitable skill. Unlike the Enhanced Muscles skill, I couldn't really get a feel for it. I'd try to concentrate on the image of a barrier made of mana and then smack myself on my hands and feet, but I felt kind of mixed up trying to attack and defend myself at the same time.

"The best way to do this would be to get someone to attack me while I focus on defense. Hmm, what if I try using magic on myself?"

It was too dangerous to use offensive magic at the inn, but it wouldn't be an issue here. There was a brief delay between the moment I cast a spell and the moment it struck its target; in that split second, I could put all of my mental energy into defending myself.

"Hopefully I only come away with minor burns..."

I would normally avoid this kind of training method, but minor burns weren't an issue since Haruka had healing magic, so all I had to do was endure a little pain. Before I actually attempted to cast magic on myself, I shot some very weak Fire Arrows at the grass nearby. A Fire Arrow that could instantly burn up grass would be too dangerous to use on myself, so I tried to gauge and adjust

the potency until it was weak enough that it would only brown the grass. After a few tries, I was satisfied with the results, so I rolled up the legs of my pants and prepared myself.

“Ugh!”

The heat of the Fire Arrow was intense but more or less bearable. It was like getting scalded by a drop of boiling water. As I continued to attack myself, doing my best to endure the pain, I chanted the word “barrier” in my mind.

“Whoa!”

My legs had long since turned bright red, but suddenly, one Fire Arrow seemed to crash into an invisible wall and disappear. I didn’t feel any residual heat either. It seemed like I had succeeded.

“Hell yeah!”

When they heard me yell excitedly, the others hurried over with confused looks on their faces.

“Nao, what are yo—what happened to you?!”

Haruka dashed to my side and immediately started to cast her healing magic on my red feet. The stinging pain from the burns faded quickly.

“Oh, thanks, Haruka. The burns were actually kind of painful.”

“Tell me, what happened?” Haruka asked. “I assume you didn’t suddenly get into self-harm, right?”

“Yeah, no. See, I finally managed to learn the Indomi—wait, it’s not here! I learned a different skill?!” I couldn’t find the Indomitable skill anywhere in my status display screen; instead, I saw a new skill called Magic Barrier.

“Um, are you really all right, Nao-kun?” Natsuki asked.

Don’t phrase your question like that, Natsuki! It sounds like you’re asking me if I’m all right in the head!

“Well, I was testing something out in an attempt to learn the Indomitable skill, but...”

“Is that why your legs were red from burns? Don’t force yourself to do

anything too reckless, okay?”

“Don’t worry, I made sure to adjust the potency of my Fire Arrow spell so that it wouldn’t be dangerous. But yeah, I tried using magic on myself instead of physical attacks, so that was probably why I ended up with a skill called Magic Barrier.”

“Wait, Magic Barrier?! There’s a skill like that?!” Yuki exclaimed. She sounded quite happy; she was laughing to herself. “Hee hee, it’s time to copy a new skill!”

I glared at Yuki. “Ugh, so you’re just going to copy a skill that I had to struggle to learn?!” *Copy really is useful if you have other party members willing to teach you how to use their skills...*

“Well, Yuki will have to learn the skill from you, Nao, so she’ll have to suffer through a similar experience,” said Haruka.

I grinned. “Oh, right. That means the potency of the spells that I shoot at Yuki is up to me, huh?”

Yuki hugged herself and took a step back from me. “Huh?! Are you planning to inflict scars on a girl’s delicate skin, Nao?! You better take responsibility for this!”

“Don’t worry, Haruka’s healing magic is quite powerful. Right, Haruka?”

Haruka shrugged. “I mean, yeah, I’ll heal the burns, but go easy on her, okay?”

“Ugh! I’d prefer for you to stop him in the first place instead of planning to heal me, Haruka!”

In reality, I was planning to use the same kind of low-intensity Fire Arrow that I had shot at myself. I wasn’t a sadist, after all. It wasn’t possible for Yuki to learn Magic Barrier without suffering some pain, but she would probably be able to learn the skill in a shorter amount of time than it had taken me.

“More importantly, did you guys manage to learn any new skills?” I asked.

“Yeah,” Haruka replied. “We both managed to learn and obtain Level 1 Swordsmanship and Level 1 Dagger Wielding.”

“You too, Haruka? I expected Yuki to be able to learn those skills right away

since she has the Copy skill, but I'm surprised you managed to learn them too," I said. "Should I try to learn the Swordsmanship skill as well?"

If Haruka had managed to get the Level 1 Swordsmanship skill in such a short time, it felt like it would be worth my while to learn it too. Swords were easier to use than spears in tight places, and they were also easier to carry around all day. They would be perfect for the purpose of self-defense. Haruka was probably much more talented than I was, but I hoped I could learn the Swordsmanship skill after about half a day of training. *I should be able to, right?*

"If you want to try to learn the Swordsmanship skill, I can teach you, Nao," said Touya.

"Sure, hit me up sometime soon—but on another day. Right now I want to focus on learning the Indomitable skill." The fact that I had learned the Magic Barrier skill instead was effectively an accident.

"If you're going to try to learn Indomitable the same way you learned Magic Barrier, then do you want me to smack you around some?"

"Well, Touya, you've already gotten results training the girls, so sure, let's go with that."

Touya held up a wooden sword. "All right, let's do this!" He looked eager to start.

I made sure to remind him of something. "After I'm done, I'll help you learn the Indomitable skill too, Touya."

He responded with a dry laugh. "Oh, ha ha, that sounds great!"

Touya laid his wooden sword on the ground and then went over to a nearby shrub and brought back a stick. *Wise choice, Touya. I was planning on hitting you exactly as hard as you hit me, so going easy on me will be better for you as well.*

"In that case, let's split into two groups for training," said Haruka.

"Mm. It's important for us to learn the Enhanced Muscles and Indomitable skills for the sake of survival," said Natsuki. "It would be nice to learn the Magic Barrier skill as well if possible."

“It’s time for me to play the role of teacher!” Yuki exclaimed.

The girls went off on their own to train together, chatting as they walked. Touya and I were left alone.

“Okay, what should I do?” Touya asked. “Do I just smack you with this stick?”

“Yeah. I should be able to learn the Indomitable skill after a while if you do this.”

“That’s kind of like in old games where you would attack your own party members to increase their stats. We don’t have a health stat that we can increase, though.”

“Yeah, I also remember how it would cause problems in the late game if you increased their stats too much in the beginn—wait, you’ve played those types of games, Touya?!”

“Hmm? Yeah. Some of them got ported to modern consoles too, so I’m not sure if it’s right to call them old.”

“Yeah, now that you mention it, I’ve mostly played the modern stuff, so I guess they’re not that old.”

Life in this world would be much more chill if it were that easy to level up our stats. *I’m glad that we have a status display screen we can check, but still...*

“All right, you ready?” Touya asked.

“Yeah, let’s do this! Don’t hit me on the head, though!”

“Relax, I know!”

Touya looked slightly happy as he walked around me and smacked me all over my body with a wooden stick. I glared at him and tried to imagine a barrier that would deflect his blows. It was more or less the same method that I had tried earlier with magic. I didn’t have any other ideas.

“Uh, Nao, what’s with that scary look?” Touya asked.

“Don’t worry about it. I’m just really focused right now.”

I *was* kind of irritated that he seemed to enjoy hitting me, but I didn’t feel actual hatred towards him. The thought of inflicting payback later was an aid to

concentration, though.

A while into this humiliation session, the blows started to feel lighter. I immediately called a time-out so I could check my status display screen. I pumped my fist in the air when I saw the words Level 1 Indomitable.

“Hell yeah!”

Touya looked quite surprised. “Huh? Did you learn it already?”

“Yeah. I think it helped that I already learned Magic Barrier. It’s possible that they require similar forms of mana control.”

It felt like Indomitable had taken about half as long to learn as the Magic Barrier skill, although it was also possible that my previous training efforts had somehow counted towards Indomitable as well.

“Seriously? Uh, in that case...do we swap roles now, Nao?”

“Yeah. What skill do you want to start with, Indomitable or Magic Barrier?”

“Well, I could probably try to learn Indomitable indoors if needed, so let’s go with Magic Barrier first.”

“Sounds good. Roll up your sleeves or the legs of your pants, then. We don’t want your clothing to get burnt, after all.” I grinned as I delivered that warning. Healing magic could cure burns, but it couldn’t repair burnt clothes.

Touya grimaced in response and then rolled up his pants.

“Okay, you ready, Touya?” I asked.

“Yeah, let’s do this! Hit me!”

“All right, I won’t hold back!”

I aimed a Fire Arrow at Touya’s bare legs. I made sure to be careful when I adjusted the potency, but judging by Touya’s response, it seemed like my control wasn’t as good as usual, maybe because of the pain I’d suffered earlier. *Don’t blame me, Touya.*

“Argh! Were you really blasting yourself with Fire Arrows that were this strong, Nao?! It’s really hot!” He glared at me with disbelief in his eyes.

“Yeah...more or less!”

Sure, the ones I'm using now might be a bit stronger than before, but it's not a huge difference. It's also just a coincidence that I'm aiming for the soft part of your legs, ha ha!

"Well, go easier on me, please!"

"Fine, fine."

I decided to be more serious and aimed for his kneecaps instead. The skin was thicker there than on other parts of the leg, so it would probably be less painful.

"Argh! Okay, it still stings, but I can endure that!" Touya exclaimed.

"Good to know. I'm going to continue lobbing Fire Arrows at you, so do your best to take the hits," I said. "You'll get the Magic Barrier skill if you do!"

"Do you have any advice for me?!"

"Don't think! Feel! Feel the mana coursing through your body!"

"I don't get what you're saying at all! What is mana supposed to feel like?!"

I ignored Touya's complaints and continued to pelt him with Fire Arrows. I couldn't explain what mana felt like—I myself only had an ambiguous feeling for it—so I didn't really have any other advice for him. All I could do was hope that he would get a feel for it eventually if I kept blasting him with magic. *Good luck, Touya. I wish you the best, but well-wishes are pretty much all I have to offer. In fact, sadly enough, the only thing I can really do to help you is make sure I don't hold back too much when I blast you. Ha ha!*

Our training session came to a close when Touya finally managed to learn the Magic Barrier skill. Both of his legs had turned completely red by that point.



"Man, that was a painful training session..."

I did my best to explain myself. "Dude, I was forcing myself to be merciless for your sake."

We were back in our room at The Slumbering Bear. Touya was rolling around on his bed while he complained. He'd learned the Magic Barrier skill and Haruka had already healed his burns, so I didn't think there was any reason for him to

be dwelling on the past.

“Is it just me, or were you actually pretty gleeful earlier, Nao?” Touya asked.

“You’re imagining things. Well...it was satisfying, but I got bored after the first few Fire Arrows.” Controlling my Fire Arrows required enough concentration that the process had quickly turned into work.

“Huh?!”

“It was actually pretty hard for me to keep the Fire Arrows low potency, Touya. A Fire Arrow at normal potency would blow your legs off, you know?” Even a slight slip up on my part would have caused Touya serious burns, so it had been stressful for me as well. “Basically, it would have gone better if you’d learned Magic Barrier faster.”

“I mean, can you blame me? I started off with no idea of what mana feels like.”

“Does that mean that you know what mana feels like now?”

“Kind of, I guess? I just had to use my full willpower to get a hang of it!”

That sounds really ambiguous. Whatever works, I guess. “You should do the same thing learning the Indomitable skill.” I stood up and grabbed the wooden stick, which we’d brought back with us, and then walked over to Touya’s bed and slapped the stick across his butt.

“Ouch! Wait, are we actually gonna continue training?” Touya asked. “We’ve already produced some results today, right, Nao?”

“Yeah, we both worked hard today. But can you really say that we worked hard compared to the girls?”

“Well, uh...I guess I’ll do my best to keep going.”

Both Haruka and Natsuki had learned Magic Barrier, Indomitable, and Enhanced Muscles in the same amount of time that it had taken me to learn Indomitable and for Touya to learn Magic Barrier. As for Yuki, she’d copied Magic Barrier from Haruka and learned how to use it without any help from me. What that meant was that Touya was the only one among us who didn’t have both Indomitable and Enhanced Muscles yet.

“Did the girls manage to learn those skills easily because they knew what mana felt like and how to use it?” Touya asked.

“Maybe, but I’m not sure if it was actually easy for them. Haruka and Natsuki can use healing magic, after all.”

By the time we had finished our training session and headed back to the inn, I had bruises all over my body while Touya had burns on his legs, but the girls hadn’t suffered any visible injuries. However, it was possible that they had healed their own injuries before they healed us. In any case, they had all managed to learn new skills within a short interval, so their training session must have been at least somewhat strenuous.

“Touya, you should learn the Indomitable skill before dinnertime. That’s your deadline. You have some idea of what you need to do, right?” I asked.

“Yeah, kinda. I can meet that deadline...I think?”

Dinner was still a few hours away, so based on the length of time it had taken Touya to learn Magic Barrier, he could probably learn Indomitable before dinner as long as he really applied himself. However, I would probably have to be harder on him.

I sat down on Touya’s bed and grabbed a grimoire in one hand so I’d have something to do, then hefted the stick in my other hand. “I don’t need to hold back if I’m just whacking your butt, right?”

It made sense that parents would generally spank children on the butt. From what I knew, even light blows to other parts of the body, like the head, could be dangerous, but that wasn’t a concern with the butt. If you got spanked hard enough that your butt turned red, it would be painful to sit down for a while, but your life wouldn’t be in danger.

“Hold on, Nao! Please go easy on me!”

Touya tried to get up, but I placed my legs on his back to pin him down.

“Huh?! I can’t get up?! Wait, Nao, listen!”

I was weaker than Touya in terms of raw muscle strength, but the position I was sitting in gave me better leverage. On top of that, I had the Enhanced

Muscles skill, while he didn't.

"Didn't you say you were going to do your best to keep going?" I asked. I cocked my head and pretended to be confused. "If there's pain involved, you'll *have* to do your best, right?"

Touya waved his hands around and made excuses. "Dude, think about what I need to do after this! It'd be really embarrassing for me to have to ask either Haruka or Natsuki to heal my butt!"

"I see. Well, good luck."

I grinned and swung down with the stick.



Luckily for Touya, he managed to learn the Indomitable skill pretty easily. In fact, it probably took him less time to learn than it had taken me. *I guess pain really is a good teacher, as they say.*

Touya rubbed his butt and glared at me spitefully, but he had nothing to complain about. It had all worked out in the end.

"Of course I'm going to complain! That was painful, Nao!" Touya exclaimed.

"If it's that painful, go to the girls' room and get your butt healed."

"Well, uh, I'll go ask for healing when it's time for dinner..."

That would probably be less awkward. I wouldn't hesitate to ask Haruka to heal my own butt, but Natsuki, I was less sure about.

"Was it really that painful? I didn't put that much force into my blows," I said. "They should only have been as strong as regular slaps."

"It felt more painful than that," Touya replied. "Besides, even slaps can be painful if you take a bunch in a row."

"Hmm, in that case, I guess I might have messed up. Do you want me to go ask Haruka to heal you so that you don't have to ask yourself?"

I'd been hitting the seat of his pants, so presumably it wasn't as painful as it would have been if I'd been paddling his naked butt, but it was possible that my Enhanced Muscles skills had made my blows stronger than I had intended them

to be.

“Nah, it’s fine. It’s not like I can’t put up with this amount of pain.” Touya paused in thought for a moment and then shook his head and turned to me with a grin on his face. “By the way, Nao, are you interested in red-light districts? That’s a thing in this world.”

“Huh? Why do you want to talk about this all of a sudden? Is it just because the girls aren’t around?”

“I mean, yeah, this is a rare opportunity.”

Haruka had stayed in the same room with us until we met up with Yuki and Natsuki, and the girls still came over to our room for group discussions. Touya was right that we rarely got the chance to chat with each other without any girls around, but...

“Come on, there’s no way you’re not interested, right? You’re a healthy young man. A decent amount of time has passed since we got here, so...”

“Well, yeah, that’s true.”

It wasn’t unusual for waitresses at inns to seek out “personal customers,” although there weren’t any waitresses like that here at The Slumbering Bear. However, back at the inn in Sarstedt where Yuki and Natsuki were working, it had seemed like there were a few waitresses like that, and they weren’t that rare back on Earth either, at least not in the past. That being the case, red-light districts had to exist somewhere in Laffan.

“In that case, wanna go and check out a place like that?” Touya asked.

“I can’t exactly say no. I’m a guy too, after all.”

“Did you really have to be so indirect? Anyway, let’s get goi—”

I raised my hand and cut Touya off in the middle of his sentence. “But how do you plan on getting money from Haruka for that purpose? Do you really think she’d give us an allowance if you told her that we wanted it for a brothel?”

“Ugh, you’re right. Apparently there are some cheap places out there, though...”

Haruka was in charge of managing all of our money, although she gave us

each a small allowance. We had discussed the idea of splitting our money between a party fund and individual funds after our house was complete, but the amount of money that Touya and I had on us at the moment probably wouldn't be enough to pay for a decent brothel.

"We can't just lie either..." said Touya.

"Yeah, that sounds like a bad idea," I said.

Lying would probably be the worst option considering the circumstances we were in. The ability to trust each other was extra important in a different world, after all. *Besides, she'll probably see through any lies we come up with.*

"What if we sneak out and do some hunting so we can earn a little money of our own?" Touya asked.

I had almost gone along with Touya's idea, but then I recalled that Haruka had told us not to go to "those kinds of places" due to the danger of sexually transmitted diseases. If we ignored her warning and ended up infected, then we would probably be doomed.

"Apparently high-level Light Magic can treat those kinds of diseases, but there's no way we could ask Haruka for healing!" I exclaimed.

"Are you sure that Haruka would say no if you asked, Nao?"

"I mean, she'd probably agree to cure us in the end, but we'd be in her debt for life!"

If I somehow ended up with hemorrhoids, I wouldn't mind swallowing my pride and asking Haruka for help even if it meant baring my butt to her, and she probably wouldn't mind healing me either. However, it would be a different story if I ended up with a sexually transmitted disease from a brothel after she'd specifically told me not to go to one, especially if I needed to show her my private parts to be healed. It would probably be very difficult to get her forgiveness, and there was even a chance that I would end up with symptoms that were too awkward to talk about. If that happened, I might have to rely on patent medicines or other suspect forms of healing, so things would just get worse and worse for me.

"What if we just get hand jobs instead? That should be low risk, so..."

Is something wrong with your head, Touya? “Think again carefully, Touya. Do you really want to go to a brothel that badly?”

He paused in thought for a bit before answering. “Well, I guess not really. I’ve never been to one, and obviously I *couldn’t* go in the past, so I’m just slightly curious.”

We’d both been too young to go to such places back on Earth, besides which neither one of us would have been brave enough, but it sounded like Touya had become sort of curious after we got transported to this world, especially since it was fairly normal for people in this world to frequent brothels. However, the girls in our party had modern cultural values, so we would risk getting on their bad side. With that in mind, the two of us going on those kinds of “adventures” together wouldn’t be worth it.

“In that case, just go ahead and jack off when you need to release some steam,” I said. “I’ll turn a blind eye, so don’t worry about it.”

“Uh, if it comes down to that, I’d prefer if you helped by staying on guard,” said Touya. “The girls enter our room without hesitation a lot, so...”

“Oh, good point.”

“Hmm, now that I think about it, this isn’t really something that we should be discussing openly and seriously with each other.”

“Right. I guess it’s something that only has value when kept secret, then?” I said.

Those were the first words that popped into my head, but Touya shook his head in response. “No, that’s not it all.”

Apparently I was wrong.



The next day, we continued to work towards the goal of becoming stronger as a party. We had some simple goals in mind: first, for Touya and Natsuki, as our frontline fighters, to learn to deal with multiple foes at the same time; second, for the rest of us, as the back line fighters, to learn to obliterate more enemies at once. As a result of our training, everyone in the backline group managed to

increase the magic levels displayed on our status screens. However, all that meant was that we were now able to use new spells available at each level that were recorded in grimoires. Level ups didn't seem to increase the potency of our spells at all, sadly. I had now gained a spell called Fireball that would create an explosion upon impact, which seemed like it would be useful for instantly obliterating weak enemies or distracting stronger ones. It was quite powerful, but if I used it on an orc, the blast would probably render its meat, skin, and fur unsellable, so I decided to continue shooting orcs' heads off with my Fire Arrow.

As for melee combat, we didn't get any results out of our training, at least not on our status screens. My Spearmanship increased to Level 3, but it didn't seem to make a huge difference. We all managed to learn the Enhanced Muscles skill as well, so we couldn't tell the difference that it made from sparring sessions. It did make weapons feel lighter in my hands, so it was a useful skill, but that was the only real difference that I could detect in our sparring sessions. However, I also did some interval training in an effort to become nimble in combat, and as a result, I learned a new skill called Greased Lightning, which made a pretty noticeable difference in my speed. At first, I didn't mention that I'd gotten a new skill and used it to dominate in a sparring match against Touya, but the match went so well for me that everybody instantly figured out what had happened. Yuki copied the new skill right away, and Touya managed to learn it after a few hours of the same interval training that I'd done. In the end, our sparring matches settled back to us being more or less even with each other.

Natsuki and I headed towards the Adventurers' Guild to turn in the materials that my party had obtained from our battle with the orcs.

Diola-san noticed us the moment we entered the building. "Nao-san, the guild has issued a hunt quest for orcs."

"Oh, really? Did orcs appear near a highway recently?" Diola-san had told us that keeping the roads safe was one of the primary reasons the guild would issue a quest.

She shook her head. "No, there haven't been any sightings reported yet. However, for the last few weeks, your party has been turning in orc materials on a consistent basis, so the guild has come to the conclusion that there must be a large number out there."

It seemed we were indirectly responsible for this turn of events.

“Has your party encountered an orc leader yet, Nao-san?”

“It’s bigger than a regular orc, right? I’m pretty sure we have, yeah.”

“Then there definitely is an orc nest in the words. I said this before, but don’t be reckless, all right?”

“Mm, I haven’t forgotten what you said. There’s nothing more important than survival.” Our second-biggest priority after survival was to maintain a decent standard of living across our entire lives; to meet both of those goals, we needed to become stronger as a party. “Oh yeah, if the guild has officially issued a hunt quest, then would now be the right time to sell orc magicite, Diola-san?”

“Of course. Please follow me to the back.”

I followed Diola-san to the backyard and took four orcs’ worth of meat out of my magic bag along with the stash of orc magicite we’d accumulated. Ordinarily, each magicite was only worth about three thousand Rea, but as long as the hunt quest was active and the guild was paying double, they were worth a hefty sum.

Diola-san gave me an entire purse full of gold coins. As I stuffed it into my bag, I tried my best to hold back from grinning at the huge amount of money.

In the past, our entire party had always gone to the guild together, but now that we had magic bags, we didn’t need all five people to lug materials, so either Touya or I would go along with one or two of the girls. Natsuki had tagged along with me today, so I looked around to see where she was and found her near the bulletin board.

“Natsuki, Diola-san told me the guild has issued a hunt quest for orcs. Is there a poster up?”

“Mm, it’s right here.”

I examined the poster she was pointing at. It called on adventurers to exterminate an orc nest located deep within the east forest and to slay the stronger forms of orcs that were present there. The poster also mentioned that

the guild would pay double for orc magicite until the quest was completed. That was more or less what Diola-san had already told me. However, there wasn't any detailed information about the stronger forms of orcs that might appear at the nest, nor was there any mention of the fact that the guild would organize a large-scale hunt quest if this orc hunt quest went unfilled.

"It'd be dangerous to read this and attempt the hunt quest thinking that orc leaders were the most dangerous kind of orc you were likely to run into," said Natsuki.

"Mm. Also, this poster says to slay stronger forms of orcs, but it doesn't even specify 'orc leaders,'" I said. "I guess figuring out the specifics is part of your responsibility as an adventurer."

The guild presumably couldn't confirm whether the strongest form of orc at the nest was just an orc leader or something even worse, so that was probably why the poster hadn't specified. It was up to the adventurers who read this poster to decide what to do based on the information provided. However, the guild might not really expect anyone to be interested in this quest, so maybe the information was scant because the poster was just a formality.

"Let's head back to the inn and discuss things with the others before we decide on anything," I said.

"Mm. But the reward is decent, so it would be nice if we could take this quest on," said Natsuki.

We looked at each other and nodded before heading out of the guild.



Haruka was the first one to react to our news. "Oh, they issued a hunt quest for orcs? Perfect timing. Tomi told us that he's finished making the shortwords that we ordered."

"Huh? What do you mean by perfect timing?" I asked. "Are we going to attempt to exterminate the orc nest?"

"Well, not exactly, but we're going out to hunt orcs anyway, right?" said Haruka. "That's what we've been training for."

“Yep. I’m confident that I’ll be able to slay orcs even faster now!” Touya exclaimed.

“I think I’ll be able to slay orcs in one hit with the Fire Arrow spell now,” said Yuki. “I used to have to team up with Haruka to slay one orc, so it’ll be a huge difference.”

I had thought the others would hesitate a bit since our previous battle with orcs had been so bruising, but they all sounded quite eager. *I guess it kind of makes sense since I was the only one who got close to death. The others only took minor injuries.* The biggest problem last time was the amount of time it had taken us to gut the orcs, so we had taken some orc leather and made a magic bag with a wide mouth. The girls had handled the process of embroidering it with a magic circle, which had looked pretty difficult due to the size of the bag. *Now that I think about it, we could use this magic bag for all kinds of things. We just have to make sure nobody sees us. It might be a good idea to discuss it with Diola-san, though...*

“In that case, should we head over to Gantz-san’s store to pick up the shortwords?” Natsuki asked.

“Mm, let’s go grab them and then head towards the east forest,” said Haruka. “Everyone good with that?”

“Yeah, I’m down,” said Touya. “I’m kind of bored of doing nothing but training.”

“Same here,” said Yuki. “Also, the weather’s good today.”

The rain had lifted yesterday, and the sky outside was bright and clear. It was the perfect weather for a picnic, but instead we were going to head out to slay more orcs. We brought all the supplies we would need for a day of hunting and then hurried towards Gantz-san’s store.

When we arrived, Gantz-san greeted us. “Oh, it’s you guys. Are you here to pick up your order?”

“Yeah,” said Haruka. “Is Tomi in the back?”

“Yep. Touya knows his way around, so follow him.”

With Gantz-san's permission, we headed to the back of the store and entered what looked like a blacksmith's workshop. Tomi was working on something in front of the forge, but he noticed us right away and turned around to face us.

"Oh, hey," said Tomi. "You guys got here quite early."

"Mm. We're heading out to hunt orcs—we plan on making use of the shortswords that you've forged right away," said Haruka.

"Is that so? In that case, I'll hand them over."

Tomi presented us with two shortswords. They looked blunter than I would have expected given that Haruka had ordered something similar to a kodachi. The blades were also thicker than the image I'd had in mind, and about fifty percent wider. Like a kodachi, they were slightly curved, but the design of the hilts and the round guards looked closer to typical swords in this world. The sheaths that Tomi handed to us along with the swords had simple designs and no trace of the artistic elegance that Japanese swords had. I felt slightly disappointed, but what we needed were practical weapons, so it wouldn't be right to complain. On top of that, although it was kind of hard to tell what with his thick beard, Tomi looked like he was sleep deprived. He also looked like he was excited to hear our thoughts, though. It seemed like Haruka and Yuki were both aware they had asked for a lot; they took the shortswords from Tomi in silence and swung them around for a bit before nodding to show their approval.

"They're a bit heavy, but we can handle the weight," said Haruka.

"Mm. These weapons feel well-balanced, and their length is just right for us," said Yuki.

I had tried lifting one of the shortswords myself. It definitely didn't feel that heavy to me, most likely because, as Yuki had said, it was well-balanced. At first, I had thought the shortswords looked like broad-bladed knives, but they were actually more similar to a kodachi.

"Your orders were for practical weapons similar to a kodachi, so that's why I shaped them like this," said Tomi. "Each sword has a core of blue iron sheathed in magisteel. The blue iron is pretty tough."

Oh, a core of tough metal sheathed in something harder? I guess he was

imitating the way Japanese swords are made. That makes me a bit curious about how good these shortswords actually are.

“They’re sharp enough to cut through an orc’s skin, and they won’t get chipped even if they clash with swords made of normal iron,” said Tomi. “They won’t bend easily either.”

According to Tomi, magisteel was stiffer than yellow iron but less tough than blue iron. However, I felt like it would have been better to make the entire sword out of magisteel. I was curious about how Tomi had dealt with the challenges of combining two different metals, so I decided to ask him.

Tomi scratched his head; he had a bit of an awkward look on his face. “Well, yeah, these shortswords would have been just as good or even a bit better if I’d just made them entirely out of magisteel. However, using two different metals like this helps cut the costs of the materials, and apparently skilled blacksmiths like Gantz-san can make tougher weapons using this kind of structure, so I decided that was probably the method that I should attempt.”

We had ordered these shortswords from Tomi in part to give him the opportunity to practice, and we’d only paid for the materials, so these were acceptable results. After all, if we’d wanted better swords, then we could have just paid Gantz-san a proper price that included the cost of his labor. *Hopefully Tomi keeps getting better at making weapons. He’ll probably be even more skilled by the time I order a weapon from him.*

“What would happen if these shortswords clashed against my sword?” Touya asked.

“Your sword would probably be the one that would get dented,” said Tomi. “These shortswords might get chipped if they clashed against yellow iron, but all you need to do to fix that is sharpen them again. You know how to sharpen swords, right, Touya-kun?”

“Yeah, I also have the Blacksmithing skill.”

“Also, you can use these shortswords like hatchets to cut through branches, so they should be useful for all sorts of purposes,” said Tomi.

“Oh, yeah, it’s nice that you can use backup weapons like these outside of

combat as well,” I said.

In the forest, branches and thickets would get in our way all the time, so these shortswords would probably see a lot of use clearing our path.

“Um, what do you guys think?” Tomi asked. “Did these weapons live up to your expectations?”

“Yeah, I think they’re quite good,” said Yuki.

“We’ll have to test them out in actual combat to get a feel for them, but they look decent to me,” said Haruka.

Tomi had looked a bit uneasy when he asked Yuki and Haruka what they thought, but when he heard their responses, his face beamed with happiness. “Oh, I’m glad to hear that!”

“Mm, thanks for your hard work,” said Haruka. “You struggled a bit to fulfill our orders, didn’t you?”

“Well, I learned a lot from this process, so it was worth it,” said Tomi. “I wanted to do what I could to pay you guys back for the help you gave me in the beginning.”

“Don’t worry, these shortswords will definitely be of use to us,” said Haruka. “So, how much do we owe you?”

“Oh, please ask Gantz-san about that. I don’t actually know the total cost of the materials, so...”

According to Tomi, he had asked Gantz-san about what materials to use so that he didn’t go over the allocated budget.

“Okay. I’ll give you our final reviews after we actually use these swords,” said Haruka.

“That’ll be good to know!” Tomi exclaimed. “I’d love to improve on them!”

“Mm, we’re going to use these right away today,” said Yuki. “Good luck with work, Tomi!”

“Thanks. I’m looking forward to more orders in the future.”

Tomi turned back to his work, and we returned to the front of the store. It

looked like Gantz-san was waiting for us; he was grinning when he saw us return.

“What do you guys think?” Gantz asked. “Not bad, right?”

“Yeah, based on Tomi’s explanation, we don’t have any complaints—at least not from looking at them and swinging them around a little bit,” said Haruka.

“We just need to test them out in actual combat now,” said Yuki. “Specs alone don’t necessarily guarantee quality, after all.”

“No need to worry. This is how I make a living. There’s no way I would hand my customers weapons that would put them in danger,” said Gantz. “Sure, my apprentice made these swords as practice, but I vouch for their quality.”

“It’s not like we have any misgivings, but we still need to test them out,” said Haruka. “In any case, how much do we owe you?”

“Hmm, let’s see... How about eighty gold coins in total for both of them?”

Only eighty thousand Rea for decent weapons that are partially made of magisteel? That’s almost half of what my spear cost...

“That’s cheaper than I thought it would be,” said Haruka.

“I mean, he used some magisteel, but they’re pretty small weapons. Oh, and after you’ve used the swords for a while, tell him directly what you think of them,” said Gantz. “It doesn’t matter if it’s praise or complaints. It’ll help him become a better blacksmith either way.”

Haruka nodded, took some gold coins out of her wallet, and lined them up on the counter. “Okay, thank you very much.”

This was something that crossed my mind every single time we had to pay for something: it was kind of annoying to count out dozens of coins. Maybe some people would find it easier than counting out paper bills, but paper currency was at least easier to carry around. The gold coins in this kingdom weren’t pure gold, but they were still quite heavy.

According to Haruka, there were large gold coins that were equal in value to ten regular gold coins, but I hadn’t seen a single one up until now; apparently wealthy merchants used them for large transactions. It made sense that you

wouldn't commonly see people using a coin worth the equivalent of one hundred thousand yen. All the same, Haruka really struggled with counting out a bunch of coins every time that we had to pay for something.

While Haruka was intently lining up gold coins on the counter, Touya stared at the shortwords that Tomi had made. Suddenly, Touya raised his head and looked at Gantz-san. "Gantz-san, how would you actually rate these shortwords?"

Gantz-san raised one of his hands to his chin and glared at Touya. "Well, he didn't make full use of the materials, but he did a decent job as my apprentice. Or rather, he did an amazing job given that it was his first attempt at making weapons. I'm not gonna pry into his past, but he's definitely not an amateur, is he?"

Touya responded with a bitter smile and tried to laugh off Gantz-san's last question. "Heh heh, yeah, but I'm not gonna say anything."

There was no way that Touya could tell Gantz-san that Tomi really was an amateur or that he was only capable of blacksmithing due to skills he'd gotten from an evil god.

"Whatever. His abilities are close to a pro's. He just needs experience," said Gantz. "You don't have to worry about him at all."

"Good to know," said Touya. "I'll leave him in your care, then."

Gantz-san laughed and gave us a reassuring smile. "Yeah, you can count on me. I owe you for the rights to the shovels that you guys made. Besides, he is my apprentice, so I'll take care of him until his training is over."



After picking up the shortwords we headed directly towards the east forest. As we'd expected, the swords ended up being useful even before we got into actual combat. The thickets would get denser as we ventured deeper into the forest, so usually Touya would be responsible for hacking through the brush with his sword to make a path for us. However, it wasn't a very efficient method. It took some time, and branches would often whip back at our faces. In contrast, the shortwords that Tomi had made could hack through brush much

easier, so we were able to clear a path without nature fighting back.

“These shortswords are quite sharp,” said Yuki. “They make things a lot easier for us here.”

“Mm. It’s also nice that they’re durable enough that we can swing them around like this,” said Haruka.

Hatchets or scythes would have done the job as well, but those would take up space in our magic bags. It was convenient that we could just use the shortswords for this purpose as well.

“We’re getting close to the orc territory,” I said. “Our targets are groups of around ten orcs, right?”

“Mm. Well, we can still go ahead and slay smaller groups of orcs if we bump into any,” said Haruka.

“Orcs don’t move in groups of twenty, do they...?” Touya asked.

“No, given that orcs move in packs to hunt, I think the odds of running into a group that size are low,” Haruka replied. “When you went scouting last time, you detected two digits of orcs, right?”

“Yeah. My Scout skill only detected around fifty orcs at the nest,” I said.

The number of orcs at the nest wouldn’t come close to one hundred, even if I included the ones that weren’t present at the time. Anyway, I was fairly sure that my Scout skill would have been able to detect an extra fifty orcs, even if they were wandering around outside of the nest.

“Based on the total population, there must be multiple orc leaders at the nest, but the main question we need to be worried about is whether there are orc captains as well,” said Natsuki.

“Yeah, it might be wishful thinking to assume that the orc leader we slew was the strongest form of orc from that nest,” I said.

“Are you sure you guys aren’t overthinking things?” Touya asked. “Thirty orcs is the minimum for a regular nest with an orc leader, so based on simple math, wouldn’t a nest need to have thirty orc leaders before it produced a single orc captain?”

Yuki interjected, “By that logic, orc kings would only appear at nests with a minimum of eighty-one thousand orcs. That doesn’t sound very realistic.”

“Oh, hmm, I guess you’re right...”

“Yeah, considering the lower population of this world, eighty-one thousand orcs could probably destroy whole countries easily,” I said.

People in this world were stronger on average than people back on Earth, but ordinary people still weren’t capable of slaying orcs. Even the guards who defended the town walls would probably have a hard time fighting orcs one-on-one, so Yuki was right that eighty-one thousand was an unrealistic number. Any countries near an orc nest would get overrun long before the orc population grew to that size.

“What if it’s something like one orc captain per ten orc leaders, with the same rule applying for generals and kings?” Natsuki asked.

“That’d mean a nest would need thirty thousand regular orcs for an orc king to spawn there, which sounds more realistic.” *Thirty thousand still sounds like it’d be enough to overrun and destroy a country, though.*

“Based on that theory, there should be at least two or three more orc leaders at the nest,” said Haruka. “That would mean there aren’t any orc captains there, however.”

“Let’s just go with that assumption for now,” I said. “I have the Scout skill, so I can just give a signal to flee if I detect an extremely dangerous foe.”

My Scout skill was extremely useful for ensuring the safety of our party. In fact, we relied on the Scout skill for planning; if it detected a dangerous foe, we’d flee before it got close.

We finalized our planning and slowly circled around the area where the orc nest was located. By the time we’d completed half of our circuit, our Scout skill had detected a group of eight orcs but no orc leaders. A group like that would be easy prey for us, but...

“What should we do, Haruka?” I asked.

The only problem was the location. It would be ideal to fight in an area where

we had the highway at our backs, but if we attacked this group of orcs, our backs would be towards the deep forest. That being the case, if we ended up needing to retreat from the battle, we would need to take a roundabout route and sneak past the orc nest.

“A group of eight orcs should be fine,” said Haruka. “The battle itself shouldn’t take long if you and Yuki can slay four orcs right away. Plus we do have that large magic bag on us.”

We had made a new magic bag specifically for the purpose of transporting orcs to another site where we could take our time gutting them. In fact, we would actually be in more danger during the gutting process than we would be during combat. In addition to the sheer amount of time it would take to dress eight orcs, the smell of blood might attract more orcs. Our hands would also get covered in fat, which would also make it hard for us to wield our weapons properly if we had to stop what we were doing and fight again. There wasn’t much risk of us getting ambushed since I would be on guard the entire time, but it would be annoying if we had to flee and ditch the prey that we had slain.

“How are we going to divvy things up?” Touya asked.

“As I said, Nao and Yuki will attack the four orcs in the rear,” said Haruka. “Try to slay them all in one hit each. I’ll attack one of the orcs in the vanguard. You and Natsuki handle the other three if they try to gang up on us. All clear?”

We all nodded and headed towards the group of orcs, approaching from the leeward direction. We had started to pay attention to the direction from which we would sneak up on orcs; we’d noticed that orcs seemed to have a good sense of smell, maybe because they were related to boars. In fact, based on the information from my Scout skill, it seemed like orcs were able to detect us from quite far away if we approached them from the windward direction.

It would be ideal if we could all mute the sound of our footsteps as well, but at the moment, the only people in our party who had the Stealth skill were Yuki and I. However, we had all gotten better at moving quietly, and in the forest, the sound of our footsteps would get masked by all kinds of other sounds, so we didn’t have to worry about it too much.

When the group of orcs came into our view, it looked like they had already

noticed us. *I guess we still have a lot of room to improve before we can successfully ambush orcs.*

“Here they come!” I exclaimed.

The moment the orcs charged, we all got into our assigned positions. I coordinated with Yuki in order to blast Fire Arrows at the four orcs in the back before they got anywhere near Natsuki and Touya, and we easily slew all four. The remaining four orcs panicked at the sight of our magical onslaught, so Natsuki and Touya took that opportunity to dash at them. Natsuki took advantage of the height difference between an orc and herself and put her spear through the underside of its jaw and all the way out the back of its head. Meanwhile, Touya broke an orc’s ankles with his sword and then, as it collapsed to the ground, crushed its head with an overhand blow. Haruka managed to slay an orc by herself as well by landing three arrows on it. In no time, the last orc fell to the combined efforts of Natsuki, who was lunging forward with her spear, and Touya slashing at the orc.

I let out a deep sigh of relief after I saw the results of our battle. It had all been over more or less in an instant; the orcs hadn’t had the time or opportunity to fight back. Yuki and I hadn’t even needed our weapons. All in all, it had been a nice, easy battle.

“It seems like it’s pretty easy for us to take on a group of eight orcs now,” said Haruka.

“Yeah, the Enhanced Muscles skill helped increase the strength of my attacks by a lot,” said Touya.

“Oh yeah, you broke an orc’s ankles,” I said.

I’d heard a nasty cracking sound when Touya’s sword had connected with the orc’s legs. Even nastier was the sound that had vibrated through the air when he smashed the orc’s skull.

“Yeah, I tried to break an orc’s ankles last time and failed, so I gave it another shot.”

“Hm? Didn’t you succeed last time too, Touya?” I asked.

“Well, yeah, but that was me using my Charge skill and ramming an orc with

my shield. Back then, I wouldn't have been able to break its ankles just with my sword."

According to Touya, he had made a lot of progress thanks to the Enhanced Muscles skill; he had more raw strength and didn't need to charge up his attacks anymore.

"Breaking an orc's ankles like that will make it more annoying to dress, though," said Haruka. "Natsuki had the cleanest kill."

"Oh, come on, give me a break," said Touya. "I can't hit an orc's head without breaking its legs first..."

Orcs were about three meters tall on average, well out of the reach of Touya's sword. In past battles, he'd tried several times to jump up and land an overhand blow on an orc's head, but from that angle, his attacks would be weak enough that an orc could always block them, so he'd given up on that strategy. On top of that, he would be defenseless and wide open while he was in midair, so it was a good thing that he didn't try to attempt this anymore.

"Can't you try aiming at an orc's head from below like Natsuki did?" Haruka asked. "Your sword isn't as sharp as a spear, but you still stab stuff, right?"

"It's not as easy as you think, Haruka," said Touya. "Natsuki has always pulled that trick off easily, but it's actually pretty difficult to find an opening *and* nail the underside of an orc's jaw."

"Yeah, Touya's completely right," I said. "It's no easy feat."

I had tried the same thing before, but it was basically almost impossible to find a good opening when facing off against an orc. Even if I had an opening, I probably couldn't pull it off; I wasn't that good with a spear yet.

"Really? In that case, I guess you're just amazing, Natsuki."

Natsuki smiled; she looked a bit flattered by Haruka's praise. "Oh, it's nothing special, Haruka." In fact, Haruka was praising her for something quite risky.

"Um, shouldn't we hurry up and start gutting these orcs?" Yuki asked. "It's not safe to hang around here for too long, right?"

"Good point," said Haruka. "Something will probably smell all of this blood

soon, so let's hurry."

The girls opened the large magic bag and Touya threw in the orcs. Now that we all had the Enhanced Muscles skill, it only took two of us to hoist an orc into the bag, so the process went pretty smoothly.

"I gotta say, though, this sure looks weird," said Yuki.

"It really does," said Natsuki.

Yuki and Natsuki were talking about the sight of the enormous orc carcasses vanishing into the magic bag. The girls had sewed it in a strange elliptical shape with a diameter of about two meters; the depth of the bag was only about twenty centimeters. Of course, we'd used magic bags before, but it was weird even by that standard to watch multiple orcs fit into a bag that would ordinarily be too shallow to fit even one.

"Is there any point in overthinking this?" Touya asked. "All that matters is that it's convenient for us, right?"

"You sure are a simple person, Touya," I said.

"I mean, if we're gonna talk about *strange*, then all magic is strange, right? I think it's easier to just accept things as they are. All right, this should be the last one!"

We threw the last orc into the magic bag and then folded the bag; it folded down to the size of a shopping bag like the kind you'd get at convenience stores back on Earth. It was definitely strange to remember that there were a few tons of orcs inside, but Touya was probably right that there was no point in overthinking it.

"Okay, what do we do now?" I asked. "Should we head out of the forest and then start gutting these orcs, or should we look for some more orcs first?"

"I'd like to slay a few more orcs first," said Haruka. "I haven't gotten a chance to use my shortsword in combat, after all."

"Wouldn't you have to be in a pretty dangerous situation to even need your sword, though?" I asked. "It's better to avoid getting into that kind of situation in the first place, right?"

“I need to test it out in case I do end up in that kind of situation,” Haruka replied. “I don’t want to try using it for the first time without any practice.”

“Yeah, I feel the same way,” said Yuki. “My shortsword is gonna be my main weapon, however.”

“Well, I don’t really have any reason to say no as long as you can do it safely,” I said. *It would be stupid to suffer serious injuries as a result of testing out swords, after all.*

“Of course. I only intend to test out this shortsword in a relatively safe fight,” said Haruka. “Prioritizing self-care is one of our main rules, after all.”

“Find some orcs for us to test our shortswords on, Nao!” Yuki exclaimed.

“I mean, I’ll try, but don’t expect much.” *I hope there’s a small group of orcs located in a convenient spot...*



Our large magic bag had about eighteen orcs inside by the time that we left the forest a few hours later. We didn’t manage to find any small groups of orcs, so we instead worked together to whittle down a few large groups so that Yuki and Haruka could each face off against orcs one-on-one. Both girls succeeded in slaying an orc with their shortswords. Yuki had previous experience with close combat, but it was more or less Haruka’s first time. I was ready to back her up if necessary, but she didn’t end up needing my help. The skin and fur of the orc that she had slain was too badly damaged to be worth any money, but it didn’t matter; it was proof that even Haruka could slice through an orc’s tough skin despite being the weakest of any of us physically.

When we got out of the forest, we took the orcs out of the magic bag and started to gut them, making use of our new knives and swords, and the process went much faster than our previous attempts. However, we still had to gut eighteen orcs in total. We ended up with a lot of meat, but we also had to discard a huge volume of parts. In the forest, animals would clean up the carcasses we left behind, but we couldn’t count on that here near the highway. The number of discarded parts plus the blood on the ground made it seem like we were conducting a demon-summoning ritual or something. We had to deal with this problem somehow.

We'd already spilled a lot of orc blood during combat, but the volume that flowed out when we were gutting them was enough to fill an entire bathtub. We would have probably ended up flooding our surroundings in a sea of blood if we hadn't been paying attention; someone might even have filed a formal complaint if we hadn't cleaned up after ourselves. On top of that, it seemed like we were the only ones turning in orc parts at the Adventurers' Guild, so it would probably have been easy for the authorities to identify us as the culprits. As a result, we made use of Yuki's Earth Magic to excavate a large hole where we could dispose of the orcs' blood and internal organs. We then refilled the hole and made sure there was nothing left to clean up before heading back to town.



The moment we got back to our rooms at The Slumbering Bear, Yuki stood up as if she was going to announce something. "Okay, let's start the meeting! We're going to do some self-reflection."

Haruka had a look of disbelief on her face. "Where did that come from all of a sudden, Yuki? Is something wrong?"

"How rude! I'm perfectly fine! It's just that we're going to discuss and reflect on our actions, right?"

"Well, yeah, but..."

"I figured it would be nice from time to time to have someone announce the start of these meetings," said Yuki. "Up until now, we've kind of just randomly started them."

"Oh, so you're just doing it for a change of pace?" Natsuki asked. She nodded and looked happy. "I think that's a good idea, then."

Yuki scratched her head and smiled bitterly. "Well, no, I just kind of felt like saying it this time, so it's not what you think it is."

"Oh, I see..."

Natsuki sounded and looked slightly disappointed at Yuki's response. She was the most serious person among us, so it kind of made sense to me that she would be a bit disappointed. The rest of us were laxer and only really cared

about doing whatever it took to get stuff done. For example, when it came to summer homework, Natsuki was the type of person who would slowly make progress each day. Haruka and Yuki would usually rush things and finish the homework within a few days of receiving it.

As for me, I would only do my summer homework when I felt like it, and I would usually just finish an entire subject at a time when the motivation kicked in. I would repeat that process and would usually be done with all of my homework about halfway through summer break. Touya was the only one among us who didn't have a set pattern. Sometimes he would finish all of his summer homework right away, but sometimes he would cram it all in near the end of summer break or right before the deadline. However, he had never turned in his summer homework late, so he was pretty talented in a way.

"A self-reflection meeting, huh? I guess we can begin with talking about how our training paid off," said Touya.

"Yeah, it definitely did," I said. "It kind of felt like our skills did more work, though."

"We had to train in order to learn those skills, so I'd say it counts," said Touya. "It wasn't easy to learn them by any means."

We were lucky that we hadn't yet ended up in a situation where we had to make use of the Indomitable or Magic Barrier skills to survive, but Enhanced Muscles and Greased Lightning had proven quite useful in our battles against orcs.

"Our abilities at magic have improved a lot as well," said Yuki. "The fact that Nao and I can now slay four orcs together at the start of a battle makes a huge difference."

"Hmm. I guess I'm glad that we sparred one on two in order to practice fighting against multiple opponents by ourselves," said Natsuki. "We didn't have any troubles during our battles today, but it's possible that we'll end up in that kind of situation if we do attempt to exterminate an orc nest."

"As far as Haruka and Yuki's attempts at close combat, I don't really have any comments," I said. "It's not like either of you absolutely have to slay orcs in close combat anyway."

Yuki was kind of a flex fighter in terms of positioning, but Haruka was absolutely a backline fighter. Her proper role was to avoid injuries while buying time until someone else in our party could help her out. Natsuki was capable of using healing magic as well, but it would be dangerous if Haruka was taken out of commission; she was our main healer, so it would be ideal for her to avoid close combat if possible.

“I’m kind of worried about the lack of strength behind my arrows,” said Haruka. “My bow doesn’t feel strong enough against orcs.”

Haruka would need to spend about an average of three arrows in order to slay an orc if she only used her bow to do so. She would sometimes be able to slay an orc in one shot if she managed to nail a lethal spot, but arrows to the torso didn’t seem to do that much damage to orcs, although they weren’t so thick-skinned that the arrows would just bounce off.

“Do you mean that you want to buy a stronger bow?” I asked.

“Well, yeah, that’s one option since I have the Enhanced Muscles skill now,” Haruka replied.

According to Haruka, she was able to fire arrows faster now due to the Enhanced Muscles skill, but there wasn’t any more force behind the arrows; that wasn’t really how bows worked. Likewise, the Enhanced Muscles skill had also made her shots more accurate since her hands were steadier, but that didn’t change the fact that she needed to aim for lethal spots if she wanted to deal any significant damage. It sounded like she wanted to become capable of dealing a lot of damage even if she landed arrows in nonlethal spots.

“Doesn’t Fire Magic have a spell called Enchant Fire, Nao?” Touya asked. “Would that work for this?”

“Well, I can’t use that spell yet, but even if I could, it would be more efficient for me to use Fire Arrows instead.”

It would probably be faster for me to just cast the Fire Arrow spell instead of casting Enchant Fire on one of Haruka’s arrows and waiting for her to shoot. Touya’s idea would be a decent one if the Enchant Fire spell was really strong, but I wasn’t anywhere close to being able to cast it, so it wasn’t something that we could test out yet.

“Oh, I guess that’s true,” said Touya. “The Fire Arrow spell doesn’t consume actual arrows either, so...”

“What if you try to learn some offensive magic, Haruka?” Yuki asked. “Wind and Water Magic have some offensive spells, and you should be able to learn Fire Magic as well. I think there’s also the option of creating new spells of your own that aren’t listed in grimoires.”

“Well, I’d prefer to save my mana for healing magic, so I’m not sure if learning offensive magic would be of much use.”

“Oh, right, I forgot about that.”

So far, Haruka and Natsuki’s healing magic had seen much more use during our training sessions than in actual combat, but the fact that we had healing magic ready at hand if needed gave us confidence and a sense of security, so Haruka’s argument was sound and logical.

Natsuki had a rebuttal, however. “It should be fine for you to learn offensive magic, Haruka. My Light Magic has leveled up to Level 3, and I don’t use offensive magic during combat. This is somewhat of an extreme example, but you could just save enough mana to heal me and use the rest for other purposes.”

“Oh, so I can heal you and you can heal the others,” said Haruka. “I guess we can practice that strategy a bit. You’re up, Nao.”

“Huh? You want me to teach you offensive magic?”

“I mean, as far as offensive magic goes, Fire Magic is the simplest to learn and use, right?”

“Well, yeah, you’re right. There’s offensive magic listed in grimoires for Fire Magic even at Level 1.”

Other types of magic only offered offensive magic from Level 3 to Level 5. Light Magic was an exception; our Light Magic grimoires didn’t list any offensive spells. Mages had a certain amount of freedom in how they cast spells, so it was technically possible to use Light Magic for offensive purposes, but it seemed like most people in this world expected Light Magic to be used for healing purposes.

“In that case, are we gonna wait until Haruka can use offensive magic before we head out to hunt orcs again?” Touya asked.

“Mm, we should wait until then,” said Natsuki. “Based on the number of orcs that we’ve encountered, our next battle against orcs will probably be a battle to exterminate the nest, so it would be safer to have more options available to us.”

From the time that we’d scouted out the orc nest until now, we had slain about twenty-eight orcs, so there probably weren’t many orcs left at the nest. With that in mind, Natsuki’s prediction was probably right.

“Okay, that’ll be our next goal. Let’s all work hard to accomplish it.”

Our self-reflection meeting for the day ended with those words from Haruka.



We resumed our training sessions from the next day onward, and the construction work on our house progressed while we got covered in dirt and injuries. In fact, it was ridiculous how fast the construction was going. I had no idea what the typical speed was for construction work, but it didn’t seem normal to me. There were a lot of people who looked like part-time workers, but the main thing that surprised me was the large number of people who looked like carpenters. *Is there actually enough work to go around for this many carpenters in one town...?*

“Oh, those carpenters? I went and asked since I was curious as well, and apparently the specialty produced in Laffan is furniture,” said Haruka.

According to Haruka, the large number of carpenters here would usually produce furniture for a living, but if someone ordered a house, they would tell each other to gather up in order to work on it together. It seemed that construction work was popular among carpenters because they’d be paid in hard cash right away. As a result, the work would usually be completed in a short amount of time, which was a good thing for whoever placed an order as well.

“Furniture, huh? I had no idea about this until now,” I said.

“Yeah, I didn’t know about it either,” said Haruka. “Well, we haven’t had the

free time to think about these kinds of things until now, so...”

We had to worry about making a living for ourselves above all, so it was only natural that none of us would know what kind of industries existed in this town if they weren’t relevant to us.

“Why furniture of all things, though?” I asked. “Is there a reason for that?”

“Yeah, sort of,” Haruka replied. “I was told that it began with the discovery of precious wood at the foot of the mountain north of Laffan.”

“Oh, I didn’t know there was logging in that area.”

I remembered being told to stay away from that area since it was dangerous, but perhaps the real reason we’d been told to stay away was because there was a valuable and protected resource there. It would make sense if there were rules that punished people who got close to that area. *Maybe there are also trees similar to Yakushima cedars that loggers could legally take in the past but are now forbidden to cut down.*

“No, there’s no logging in that area nowadays. Or rather, logging can’t be done there now for a number of reasons.”

According to Haruka, the strongest monsters that would appear at that area in the past were orcs and sometimes, on rare occasions, ogres. However, over time, more dangerous monsters had slowly started to appear more and more frequently, and that made the area too dangerous for logging relative to the value of the precious wood. As a result, adventurers stopped taking on quests to escort lumberjacks, so the supply of precious wood from that area had dried up.

“Anyway, it sounds like the precious wood that’s still in circulation is quite expensive now.”

“In that case, what do those carpenters use to make furniture now, Haruka?” I asked.

“They said that they use the wood harvested from trees located in the south forest in order to make normal furniture,” Haruka replied. “There was a precious wood bubble that’s already burst, but they still have the abilities that they honed working on precious wood in the past, so it seems like there’s

plenty of demand for their work.”

Oh, interesting. I was impressed that they had actually honed their abilities instead of just being dependent on the market value of the materials, although there was also the possibility that the carpenters who’d slacked off had lost their jobs by now.

“I guess that means that we can rest assured about the quality of the furniture in our house,” I said.

“Mm. We didn’t cheap out on the budget either, so I don’t think there’s anything to worry about,” said Haruka.

She looked over at the construction site, and I followed her gaze. Our house looked like it was almost done. The pillars were all done, as was the roof, and it looked like the material being used the most for the walls and floors was sturdy wood. There were also some walls being rendered out of mortar and some parts of the floor being paved with stone.

“Now that I look at it, there doesn’t seem to be any thermal insulation at all,” I said.

“Mm. Houses back in Japan would have materials like glass wool or polyurethane foam packed into the walls,” said Haruka. “I wonder if this house is going to be okay in terms of heat and cold...”

“Yeah, there doesn’t seem to be any thermal insulation for the spaces above the ceiling either...”

The construction methods the workers were using seemed to be the standard for houses in this country, so I wanted to believe that things would be okay. However, there was also a possibility that people in this country simply put up with the heat and cold.

“Can you make thermal insulation materials via alchemy, Haruka?” I asked.

“I’m not sure,” Haruka replied. “Even if I could, it would be hard to install glass wool after construction is done, although it might be possible to install polyurethane foam by opening a hole in a wall.”

“Nah, I don’t think we have to go that far,” I said. “The structure of our house

looks pretty simple, so it should be fine if we just strip off boards and then replace them afterwards.”

That sounded like something even we could do by ourselves, and if we couldn't, there was always the option of asking a carpenter for help. It would be a lot harder if our house were like modern-day ones back on Earth with wallpaper over gypsum boards, but it probably wouldn't be too difficult if it were just simple wooden boards.

“Hmm. Well, let's just think about this again after a year of living here if any problems do come up,” said Haruka.

“Sounds good to me,” I said. “The climate here may actually be comfortable enough that the lack of insulation won't be an issue. We'll see.”

However, we were used to modern living standards, so I wasn't sure how much we could put up with. *I'm really amazed that Japanese people in the past were able to survive the winters in houses that only had shoji paper sliding doors...*

“Oh yeah, now that I think about it, there's a Level 2 Fire Magic spell called Warmth,” I said.

“Oh, right,” said Haruka.

“On top of that, there's a Level 5 Fire Magic spell called Resist Cold, and there's a Level 6 spell called Resist Heat. It might even be possible to merge those two to create a new spell called Air Conditioning.”

“Those spells sound like a good motivation for me to learn Fire Magic.”

Those spells were probably intended for use outdoors or in extreme environments, but that didn't mean they couldn't be used in everyday life. The only question was whether I had enough mana to use those spells around the clock. However, if Haruka learned to use Fire Magic, over half of our party would use Fire Magic, which would greatly reduce the burden on any individual. In fact, if Haruka managed to learn Fire Magic, it would halve the burden for Yuki and me.

“All right, do your best to learn Fire Magic, Haruka!”

“Mm, I will! All for the sake of a comfortable life!”

Haruka clenched her fists; she had a beaming smile on her face. That goal was different from her initial reason for wanting to learn Fire Magic, but regardless, it was a good thing that she was motivated.

In the end, it took about three days for Haruka to learn the Fire Arrow spell. I wasn't sure if her motivation was a factor, but she also learned how to cast two Fire Arrows at the same time right away, since the use of mana wasn't that much different from other types of magic. Her Fire Arrows were quite powerful; she would have no problem slaying orcs.

“I guess this means it's finally time for us to take on the orc nest,” said Yuki.

“Mm, we should be prepared now,” said Natsuki. “However, we should be wary. There should be at least two orc leaders at the nest—and possibly more.”

We had slain a total of about eighty orcs up until now, so based on our theory that there was one orc leader per thirty regular orcs, Natsuki was probably right.

“Last time you held back an orc leader on your own, Natsuki, so this time I'll do the same!” Touya exclaimed. “The rest of you guys can deal with the remaining orcs while we hold two orc leaders back. If there are more than two, then good luck, Nao!”

“Me?! Well, actually, I guess you're right.”

Close combat was out of the question for Haruka, and it would probably be difficult for Yuki since she'd just swapped weapons, so by process of elimination, I was the only one left. However, I wasn't sure if I would be able to hold back a large orc leader by myself.

“I think we should avoid combat altogether if there are three or more orc leaders at the nest,” said Natsuki. “It depends on whether Nao-kun's Scout skill can detect them or not, though.”

“Mm, it's risky to leave one orc leader to Nao alone,” said Haruka. “It would be best to avoid fighting a third orc leader if there's one at the nest when we show up, and if one joins the fray unexpectedly, we should keep in mind the option of fleeing from battle.”

“That makes sense,” said Yuki. “After all, one blow from an orc leader would squash Nao flat!”

Um, I completely agree with you, but don't phrase it like that, Yuki. It sounds like you're calling me weak and unreliable...

“Let's go with that plan, then,” said Touya. “You good with this as well, Nao?”

“Yeah, I'm down. I don't plan on trying anything reckless.”

There was no point in being stubborn about wanting to fight an orc leader by myself; I would put everyone's lives at risk if I failed.

“All right, let's use tomorrow as a day to rest and then challenge the orc nest the day after tomorrow,” said Haruka.

“Mm, we should definitely rest up so we're in the best possible condition,” said Natsuki.

Resting before a boss battle to recover HP and MP was a standard strategy in games, so Haruka's idea made perfect sense to me.

“Rest, huh? I can't think of anything I want to do tomorrow,” said Touya.

“What else is there to do aside from resting, Touya?” I asked. “You definitely need rest the most, since you've built up the most physical fatigue of any of us.”

Touya seemed a bit fidgety, like a kid who knows vacation is coming up, but I snapped at him to emphasize the importance of rest. He was the only one in our party who couldn't use magic, which meant his training was all physical, so he had worked out his body the hardest out of any of us.

“Eh, I don't really feel tired at all,” said Touya. “Besides, even if I just sleep here at the inn, I'm still gonna end up with a lot of time on my hands.”

“I didn't say that you should sleep all day or anything,” I said. “All right, then, what do you want to do?”

“Well, we can discuss that right now. What do you guys think an average *male* adventurer does when he has free time?”

He glanced at the girls while emphasizing the word “male.” *Wait, don't tell me you haven't given up on that idea, Touya...* Regardless of gender, the things that

an average adventurer would do for recreation were drinking, gambling, whoring, and so on. We were too young to drink, and since we had no experience gambling, we would probably end up losing all of our money. That left one obvious option, but there was no way Haruka would ever give us money for prostitutes or suggest that we all go to a brothel together, even if there were places out there that catered to the needs of both male and female clients. *Or rather, I don't even want to think about Haruka spending money at a place like a host club!*

I wasn't sure if she knew what Touya was implying, but Yuki threw her hands in the air and brought up a completely unrelated idea. "I'd love to go out and browse furniture!"

"Huh? Furniture? Seriously?" Touya asked. He blinked repeatedly; he must have realized his plans had already been thwarted.

Yuki nodded back confidently. "Yeah, furniture! You know, beds, drawers, tables..."

"Oh, that sounds like a lovely idea!" Natsuki exclaimed. "There wasn't enough space for the carpenters to build our house to our precise specifications, but furniture is something that we can pick to our liking."

"Mm, we will need furniture soon, so I'm down for this idea," said Haruka. "However, are there actually any furniture stores that we can browse through, Yuki? In this world, don't you have to order furniture through a workshop?"

"Don't worry, I figured it all out! I asked Simon-san, and he told me that there's a furniture exhibition hall in this town that rich people and nobles visit."

According to Yuki, who explained it all to us with a smug grin on her face, the exhibition hall was jointly operated by multiple furniture workshops. People could visit to see if anything on display interested them and could ask to be introduced to the individual workshops that made the furniture. After that, they could then place orders directly with those workshops.

"There's also the option of ordering the exact same furniture that's on display in the exhibition hall," said Yuki. "But yeah, don't you guys think this is a good idea? It should be easier for us than showing up at a workshop out of the blue and trying to place a bunch of orders."

“Well, yeah, that sounds like a good idea, but can people like us actually enter places like that, Yuki?” Natsuki asked. “As in, are adventurers actually welcome at an exhibition hall?”

“Don’t worry, I asked Simon-san about that too! He’ll help us out.”

“Oh, good job, Yuki!” Haruka exclaimed. “In that case, let’s go to that exhibition hall tomorrow. What about *you*, Touya?”

Haruka had a bit of a cold edge to her voice. At least, I was pretty sure it wasn’t just my imagination.

Touya must have heard the same thing; his ears were twitching in fear. He immediately said, “O-Of course we’ll tag along as well! Right, Nao?”

“Huh? I was planning to tag along from the very beginning. Haruka’s specifically asking you, not me.” *Don’t try to get me involved in this! I have nothing to do with the plans you had in mind!*

“I see,” said Haruka. “All right, tomorrow, let’s choose some furniture together and place our orders.”

“Mm, I’m looking forward to it,” said Natsuki. “Right, Nao-kun, Touya-kun?”

Natsuki showed us a gentle smile, but thanks to Touya’s blunder, even her words sounded like they had another layer of meaning behind them. He and I had no choice but to swiftly nod back in agreement.



The next day, Yuki guided us to the exhibition hall. It was located a bit east of the center of Laffan beside a wide thoroughfare. We had passed by this road multiple times before, but we hadn’t noticed this place at all until now; it was hard to tell what was inside the building from the exterior. The people who operated this exhibition hall probably didn’t care about its appearance since only a select few patrons would ever be allowed inside. However, the building did look a bit high-class in many respects, such as the way the doors looked.

“Are you sure it’s okay for us to enter this place, Yuki?” I asked.

“Yeah, it should be okay. If we do get turned away, then we can just go ask Simon-san to write us a proper letter of introduction.”

Yuki didn't hesitate at all as she entered the building. Haruka and Natsuki followed her inside right away, but Touya and I looked at each other for a moment before we caught up to the others.

An elderly man greeted us when we entered the building. He had suspicion in his eyes as he looked over all of us.

"Welcome. If I may ask, who are you?"

"My name is Yuki. Simon-san mentioned us to the management. He told us we could browse the furniture on display here."

The elderly man's face betrayed a bit of surprise, but then he smiled at us. "Oh, I see. We thank you for your business."

I had no idea what he was talking about.

"The work on your house has been a boon to us. A few carpenters from our workshop have been dispatched there. Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Crowney, and I'm currently in charge of managing this gallery."

"Oh, I see," said Yuki.

It seemed that he wasn't just being polite. According to Crowney-san, the responsibility for managing this exhibition hall would rotate between the different workshops. Apparently his workshop was the one that was currently in charge.

"There are no other customers present at the moment, so please feel free to take your time as you look around the furniture on display," said Crowney.

"Thank you very much," Yuki replied.

Having gotten his permission, we started to look around. Most of the furniture on display had chic, understated colors; there was practically none in bright and vivid colors. Some of the leather couches and chairs were upholstered in decently bright colors, but most of the furniture on display appeared to be made of plain wood. The lineup was definitely a bit different from what you would find at a furniture store back in modern-day Earth. As we examined further, we found some furniture painted in bright colors similar to those used for fishing lures, but...

Touya seemed to share my thoughts. “Oh, there doesn’t seem to be much furniture in flashy colors.”

Crowney-san nodded. “The furniture trade in Laffan began with precious wood from the mountain. The natural figure of the wood was what made it valuable. That is why, to this day, much of our furniture is of unpainted wood; it shows off the grain.”

According to Crowney-san, “the figure of the wood” referred to the characteristic patterns on its surface. Depending on how beautiful or unique this patterning was, the prices of two pieces of wood could differ widely, even if they were taken from the same kind of tree. Most of the time, however, the only difference was how they looked. Two pieces of furniture made from the same tree generally wouldn’t be too different from each other in terms of their actual functions, so price alone wasn’t the best measure of how practical each product was.

“Oh, so all of these pieces are designed to display the wood to its best advantage,” said Haruka.

“Correct, although back when wood from the north forest was more readily available, there were more variations in color. I must say that the pieces made recently aren’t quite the same,” said Crowney. “The pieces you see here with slightly different colors were colored artificially after their manufacture.”

Crowney-san also told us that there were types of precious wood that were almost completely red, yellow, green, or even blue. Red sounded like a plausible enough color for trees, but I’d never imagined a solid blue tree. It was a reminder that I was in a completely different world.

“Gotcha. I don’t mind just using normal furniture, though,” said Touya. “Oh, these drawers look quite nice.”

The furniture that had caught Touya’s eye was a chest of drawers that stood at waist height. It seemed to have been stained red with ink. The handles of the drawers were bare of any decorations and gave off an impression of practicality, which was something I liked to see.

“Yeah, I like the color too,” I said. “We don’t really have that many clothes, so this would work for us, even though it isn’t that big.”

“I see that you’ve found a very fine product,” said Crowney. “However, I should mention that the price is about 120 thousand Rea.”

“Whoa, that’s really expensive!” Touya exclaimed. “Does it actually cost that much just for this?”

I didn’t voice my thoughts, but I was just as taken aback. However, my spear had cost more than one hundred and twenty gold coins, so this chest didn’t seem that expensive to me. *Actually, wait, what am I thinking? Ugh, my sense of money is completely messed up...*

“Touya, I think you’re comparing the price to furniture at stores like Ikea or Nitori,” said Haruka. She sounded a little exasperated. “It’s fairly normal for high-quality furniture to cost this much since it’s handmade by artisans.”

Natsuki was examining the drawers. “Mm, the drawers look quite well designed, so I imagine they’re worth the price,” said Natsuki.

Natsuki was probably right; she was a good judge of quality. However, that didn’t necessarily mean that the drawers were right for us.

“Quite right. Furniture of the sort we display may seem a bit expensive, but these are assets that will outlast every one of us and can be passed down through many generations,” said Crowney. “I give you my guarantee that all of the products on display here are worth their price.”

“That definitely seems to be the case,” said Natsuki. “All of the products I’ve seen so far are of high quality.”

“Do we have enough in our budget to pay this much just for one set of drawers, though?” Yuki asked. “We also need to at least buy beds for all of us, after all. Well, we can buy these drawers if you’re willing to save up and pay for them, Touya.”

“I ought to explain that this product happens to be rather pricey due to the beautiful figure of the wood. If you are not particular about the figure of the wood, we have other, similar drawers available at prices less than one hundred thousand Rea,” said Crowney.

According to Crowney-san, the drawers that had caught Touya’s eyes also had a striking natural color in addition to the beautiful figure of the wood. The

simple design was intended to make those two qualities stand out.

“Oh, in that case, I’ll—”

Touya sounded like he was interested, but I grabbed his hand and pulled him towards me so I could whisper to him and snap him out of it. “Calm down, Touya. Don’t fall for the sales talk. Besides, do you really think you’re the kind of person who can afford to blow this much money on some drawers?”

It wasn’t that expensive—we could earn that much from slaying three orcs—but we still had to pay the other half of the fees for the construction of our house. Besides, each of us only received a small allowance, so we couldn’t throw away that kind of money on a personal purchase. We would have to split our income between the five of us before any of us could consider purchasing furniture like this. It was something that would have to wait until our house was completed.

“Mm, for today, we should just look for beds and furniture for the shared spaces in our house,” said Haruka. “We can purchase furniture for our individual rooms at some other time. Does that sound good to everyone?”

“I agree,” said Natsuki. “We’ll need beds right away, but other furniture can wait until we see the completed house and have an idea of what we actually need or want.”

“I kinda feel the same way,” said Yuki. “We’ve only seen our rooms on the blueprints. Is that okay, Crowney-san?”

“Of course. Feel free to browse for the furniture that you want. The joy of considering what to get, appreciating the look of different pieces, and testing out their ease of use—all this is part of the process of selecting furniture.”

Crowney-san also mentioned that most customers didn’t order on the same day that they came to browse furniture. His words seemed to encourage the girls; they started window shopping, circulating around the exhibition hall from corner to corner. In fact, they ended up spending the entire day window-shopping in the exhibition hall. Touya and I were used to this kind of behavior from the girls, since we’d had to accompany them during their shopping sessions quite often back on Earth. In this case, though, we only tagged along until noon. Then, after lunch, the two of us walked away and took advantage of

the couches and chairs in the exhibition hall to take a load off our feet.

“Man, Touya, expensive chairs sure are amazing,” I said. “It feels so comfortable just sitting here...”

“Yeah? This couch I’m sitting on feels pretty good too,” Touya replied. “I’m gonna pay for this couch once I save up enough money...”



I was sitting in a rocking chair; I rocked back and forth as I talked to Touya. My voice was pretty chill, as was his. Back on Earth, there were all kinds of ultramodern furniture that were expensive and prioritized aesthetics over usability, but ease of use seemed to be the most basic standard for furniture in this world, followed by simple decorative touch that displayed materials like wood to their best advantage. The rocking chair felt so good that I actually did kind of want to place an order for a chair of the same model. Since we had magic bags, we wouldn't need much furniture for storage purposes. In fact, one set of drawers would probably be enough if we just threw it into a magic bag, and that would free up money for other kinds of furniture. *Hmm...*

"Sorry for the wai—oh, my, you two look quite relaxed," said Haruka.

"Yeah, this chair feels great," I said. "How did things go on your end, Haruka?"

"We only placed orders for beds and a table for the dining room, but we took some mental notes of what kind of furniture would be nice to have in the future. I guess you can say that we enjoyed our window-shopping session."

"Yeah, it was fun to check out all sorts of different furniture," said Yuki. "You guys should have come with us!"

"Mm, everything was of high quality and pleasant to look at," said Natsuki.

"Oh, I see," I said. "I'm sorry that we took up so much of your time, Crowney-san."

Crowney-san smiled. "Please, think nothing of it. With no customers, I would simply be sitting idle, after all. Regardless, our discussions were quite stimulating to me as well; I learned all kinds of new things."

He'd had to tag along with the girls basically the entire day, but he probably wasn't lying when he said he had enjoyed conversing with them. *I guess he really likes talking about furniture.*

"Thank you for your time today, Crowney-san, and for your help," said Haruka. "We're glad that we got the opportunity to look at all sorts of good furniture."

"Oh, it was my pleasure. Feel free to visit again when you have time."

“Thank you very much!” we all exclaimed in response.

After Crowney-san saw us off to the entrance of the exhibition hall, we thanked him again, and then we started back towards our inn. I wasn't sure if the girls had gotten a break today; they must have spent a lot of physical energy walking around and window shopping, but they were probably feeling mentally refreshed since they had really enjoyed the experience.

It would have been great if our day had ended on that note, but on our way back to the inn, we ran into trouble. We came across a group of three adventurers. Normally, we would have just walked past them, but when we got close enough to see each other's faces, one of them looked at us and said, “Oh!”

He looked really surprised and pointed us out to his companions. I tilted my head in confusion and glanced at the others in my own party. They looked confused as well.

“Do you know these people, Nao-kun?” Natsuki asked.

“Uh, no.”

The adventurer who had pointed at us was a guy with an unkempt beard. It looked like he was on his way back from work since he was covered in dirt and sweat. The other two adventurers looked more or less just as grimy. I couldn't recall anyone I knew who looked like them, so I was fairly sure that they were strangers. The only place we would have crossed paths with adventurers like these guys would have been at the Adventurers' Guild, but we didn't visit the guild very often, and we'd never experienced the cliché light novel scene of a bunch of other adventurers trying to pick a fight with us at the guild. We didn't go to pubs either, so there was no room for a similar experience to happen there. The only other person who came to mind was the guard who had ogled Haruka a while back, but that guy wasn't an adventurer. *No, really, who are these dudes?*

“Shidou and Furumiya, right?!”

“Hm?”

This guy's one of my classmates?! No way! He completely looks like a middle-

aged dude! This guy is so grubby that I would've definitely confused him for a bandit if I'd met him on a highway. I might even have attacked him as a form of preemptive self-defense!

"And if that's the case, are the rest of you Azuma, Nagai, and Kamiya?!"

Yuki and Natsuki looked more or less the same as they had in their previous lives, so it seemed like this guy had recognized the two of them and then had guessed who the rest of us were because we'd often hung out as a group of five back on Earth. At the same time, he hadn't immediately recognized the rest of us by our faces, so he probably wasn't anyone we knew well. I was probably the member of our party who looked the most different in my new body, but Yuki and Natsuki had still figured out who I was right away. Touya looked quite different as well since he had animal ears and a tail, but his face was pretty much unchanged.

"Do you know this guy, Yuki?" I asked.

"Nah, I don't think," Yuki replied.

"It's me, Tokuoka!"

Yuki paused in thought for quite a while and then nodded and said, "Oh."

I recognized the look on her face. It was the look of someone who didn't remember clearly at all. However, I remembered who Tokuoka was since I was a guy as well. He was one of my classmates; he'd sat near the front of the classroom on the right side. *Probably, I think. Details like that don't matter, right? It's not like I don't remember at all.*

"Huh? Wait, is it really Shidou-san's group?"

"Seriously?! Whoa, it's been a while!"

The other two guys approached us after they had heard what Tokuoka said. As they looked at the girls, the expressions on their faces were openly lecherous. *Who are the rest of these guys? I can't tell who they are due to their unkempt beards, even though they're still humans and probably don't look much different than they did before.* On a side note, my facial hair had gotten a lot finer now that I was an elf, but the girls had a low opinion of guys with thick facial hair, so I shaved every day, as did Touya.

“Huh?”

“I’m Maeda!”

“I’m Iwanaka!”

“...Oh, right, Maeda-kun and Iwanaka-kun.”

Yuki nodded again, but it seemed like she didn’t know who these guys were either. They must not have left a strong impression on her back on Earth. *If I recall correctly, Iwanaka had good grades, although not as good as Yuki and Natsuki’s. I remember him being somewhat popular with the girls in my class since he had decent looks. As for Maeda, I think he was good at sports. I can’t recall anything else since I didn’t hang out with them that much.*

“Where do you guys go for adventurer work, Shidou-san?” Tokuoka asked.
“We mainly go to the south forest.”

“Well, we mainly go to the east forest,” Yuki replied.

“Seriously? You guys are still working in the east forest?” Maeda asked.
“We’ve already been working in the south forest for about a month now!”

“Yeah, the monsters and animals in the east forest were too weak for us!” Iwanaka exclaimed. “Now that we’ve moved on to bigger and better things, we’re already able to pay for individual rooms at inns!”

Tokuoka’s party looked down on me and Touya as they boasted about their “accomplishments.” It was true that guild personnel generally recommended the east forest for beginners, but that only applied to the outskirts of the forest. Regardless, being able to pay for individual rooms at an inn didn’t seem like anything to boast about. It would probably be uncomfortable if we could only afford one large room where people had to huddle together to sleep, but we weren’t staying at an inn like that. However, I kept silent; I didn’t feel the need to go out of my way to antagonize these guys by pointing out the facts.

“Oh, I have a great idea!” Tokuoka exclaimed. “Why don’t you join our party, Shidou-san? You’ll have better chances at a good future with us!”

Wait, did this guy really just invite the girls to join his party while ignoring Touya and me?

“That sounds great!” Iwanaka exclaimed. “You girls probably won’t be able to climb up in the adventurer ranks if you get stuck in the east forest for more than two months, after all!”

“Yeah, exactly,” said Maeda. “You two are welcome as well, Azuma and Furumiya. You’re probably all staying in one large room at an inn, right? You’ll be able to stay in individual rooms if you join our party!”

Maeda extended his hand to Haruka, but she gave him a cold look and stepped back. “Ridiculous.”

“Can you guys please stay away from us?” Natsuki asked. She had a cold look on her face as well. “You smell *awful*.”

Yuki gave a fake laugh, but she wasn’t smiling either. “Ha ha, you guys are dreaming! If this is a joke, you better come up with a better one!”

“Huh?!”

Honestly, of the responses these guys had gotten from each girl, Haruka’s had probably inflicted the least mental damage; at least she’d been succinct and direct.

“Why not?!” Tokuoka exclaimed. “Things are different here than they were back in Japan! Do you girls not understand that it’s dangerous out there if you’re weak?!”

“Yeah, for real!” Iwanaka exclaimed. “Do you really think you can protect yourselves when you can’t even afford proper weapons?!”

“You know, you guys might have had good grades at school back on Earth, but that doesn’t mean anything in this world,” said Natsuki.

The guys in Tokuoka’s party were raising their voices in anger. It was as if they hadn’t expected that the girls would even dream of rejecting their offer. *Did they really think the girls would say yes with the way that they tried to invite them? Only an idiot would take that deal.* Since we weren’t working today, we were unarmed; Touya and I were just carrying the knives we used for gutting orcs. What surprised me the most was that these guys would reflexively assume that these cheap knives were our only weapons.

“Yeah, you guys seem quite dangerous, so...” said Yuki.

“Filthy people are a bit too much for me,” said Natsuki.

“You certainly don’t look the part of professionals who earn a lot of money,” said Haruka.

“Exactly!” Yuki exclaimed. “I can’t believe you guys actually implied that you could climb up the adventurer ranks with those looks, ha ha!”

“Mm, you should clean yourselves up before attempting to do anything else,” said Natsuki.

“Yeah, I couldn’t stand being in the same party as you guys even if I believed you were earning a lot of money,” said Yuki.

The girls weren’t holding back at all. Touya and I sighed in unison and exchanged a glance before turning to watch the roast. Of course, both of us were annoyed with Tokuoka’s party too, but we had held back from saying anything in order to avoid provoking them. Thanks to the girls, though, our efforts were in vain.

“...You’ll pay for this!”

All three guys were red in the face. They reached for the swords on their belts—swords that appeared to be pretty cheap.

“All right, everybody calm down,” I said. “It’s true that the girls were a bit harsh, but it’s a breach of manners to invite adventurers from other parties to join your party. Do you guys really not get it?”

“Yeah, and for another thing, do you guys really think you can take us on?” Touya asked.

Touya and I walked forward to shield the girls behind us. Tokuoka’s party took a step back, as if they were a bit intimidated by us. It was possible after having survived so many battles, I had learned how to project a killing intent towards others, but realistically, it was more likely that they were intimidated by how big and muscular Touya had gotten. He glared down at them.

“Besides, surely you guys know what’ll happen if you draw your weapons in town, right?” I asked.

“Hmph! Whatever. We don’t have time to waste on weaklings like you!”

“Yeah, get out of our way!”

Even as they trash-talked us, they removed their hands from their weapons, but then they squared their shoulders and walked towards us. We hastily made way for them, and they gave us some smug looks as they passed us, but the real reason we had dodged them was different from what they were probably thinking. *It isn’t because you guys are that scary. It’s because you’re dirty and smell really bad. Like, seriously. Touya grimaced when you guys got close, but I guess you didn’t notice that at all.* In a way, they reminded me of how useful the Purification spell was, which made me truly grateful to Haruka and Natsuki.

We waited until Tokuoka’s party was out of sight before we started to talk to each other again.

“Whew! Ugh, they smelled really bad!” Touya exclaimed.

“That’s the first thing you have to say about this situation?!” I exclaimed.

“Wait, were you holding your breath, Touya?!”

Touya had a look of disbelief on his face. “I mean, yeah, of course! They smelled insanely bad! I can’t believe you guys put up with it without holding your breath!”

We were all caught off guard by his comment and ended up laughing.

“Ha ha, yeah, you’re absolutely right!” Yuki exclaimed. “It’s not like it costs that much for water to wash yourselves, so it makes no sense.”

“Mm. It’s true that it’s autumn now, but it’s not cold enough that you need to avoid bathing with cold water yet,” said Natsuki.

“They should shave their facial hair as well,” I said. “Their beards look really unkempt, not fashionable. That said, you need decently sharp razors for shaving, and they’re actually kind of expensive.”

“If they really earned a lot of money, they could afford razors,” said Haruka. “They didn’t seem like they earned much at all, though.”

We all laughed together, but then Yuki groaned. “Ugh, our day was going so nicely until just now. I wanted to end today on a high note, but those guys

ruined it.”

“Let’s just forget about it,” said Haruka. “We should be fine if we just avoid them. They said that they mainly work in the south forest, so that’s a good thing for us.”

According to Haruka, adventurers in Laffan would usually shift to working in the south forest after they had gotten some experience in the east forest. In the south forest, much of the work that was available through the guild involved escorting lumberjacks, since timber was important to Laffan’s furniture industry. However, escort quests were simple enough that the compensation was generally pretty low, so most adventurers would instead move to other towns to search for more rewarding work. That was why there weren’t many high-rank adventurers here in Laffan.

“All right, let’s pull ourselves together and head back to the inn and get some rest in preparation for tomorrow,” said Haruka.

“Yeah, all we did today was an enjoyable furniture window shopping trip!” Yuki exclaimed. “I’m a little bit tired, though.”

“Mm, my legs feel a little bit sore as well,” said Natsuki.

Huh? Just a little bit tired? I already felt exhausted from tagging along up until noon! I looked at Touya, and he had an awkward look on his face as he nodded back to indicate that he agreed with me. However, we were smart dudes, so we kept quiet as we headed back to our inn.

Chapter 2—Exterminate the Orcs!

The next day, we headed out early in the morning to the east forest to exterminate the orc nest. It was possible that we would have to change our plans if there were too many orcs at the nest, but that was our initial goal. We moved in a spiral around the orc nest just like we had last time, approaching slowly and relying on my Scout skill to detect orcs. So far, I hadn't detected any at all. I was a bit confused by that fact, but we made three further circles through the woods before stopping at a place that was right before my Scout skill could detect the edge of the orc nest.

Natsuki tagged along with me as I went to scout out the nest. This time we approached close enough for my Scout skill to register the entire area of the nest.

"Hmm. My Scout skill detects a total of twenty orcs," I said. "Two of them should be orc leaders."

"That's a lot fewer than last time," Natsuki replied. "All right, let's head back."

We quickly returned to where the others were waiting before the orcs could detect us. Touya sounded quite happy when he heard our report. "Twenty orcs sounds like a number we can handle just fine, right?"

"Yeah, as long as we fight carefully and don't let our guard down," I said.

"The next thing to do is decide on a battle plan," said Haruka.

The orcs were spread all over the large nest, so catching them by surprise and dramatically reducing their numbers in one attack wasn't an option. On the other hand, their positions made it possible for us to slay them one by one. The ideal scenario would be to slay the orc leaders first, but they seemed to be located near the center of the nest, so it would probably be a bad idea to go out of our way to target them. We all kept these factors in mind as we discussed our plan, and we ultimately decided that we would approach from the leeward direction while using magic to slay orcs on the periphery of the nest. If any orcs

noticed us and tried to approach us, we would slay as many as we could with ranged attacks.

Touya and Natsuki would deal with the orcs that actually managed to close with us, and with the orc leaders if any showed up. The rest of us would deal with the other orcs. It was crucial that we slay as many orcs as possible before the orc leaders appeared, but it wasn't like I had to take on an orc leader by myself, so this battle plan didn't seem that dangerous to me. We would be in trouble if orc leaders were more intelligent than we thought and were capable of commanding regular orcs to attack us all at once, but it wasn't like we had to force ourselves to stand our ground and fight to the death; there was always the option of fleeing from battle if the tide turned against us.

"All right, let's do this," said Touya.

I led the way with my Scout skill. Touya was right on my heels, followed by the rest of the party. Soon the orc nest came within view. There were just some simple huts—not much more than pillars and roofs. None of the huts had any walls, and the roofs were made of branches, but they were still well constructed. I already knew how many orcs there were, but it was my first time actually seeing the nest with my own eyes. I was fairly sure that orcs were at least somewhat intelligent since they wielded clubs that looked like they were handmade, but based on these huts, perhaps they were actually more intelligent than I had assumed them to be. It looked like there were a few orcs resting under the huts. From afar, they just looked like boars taking afternoon naps, but they were the monsters that we were going to slay.

The death quota that Yuki, Haruka, and I had to meet was two orcs each, so we used hand signs to communicate to each other which orcs each of us would target, then launched a volley of Fire Arrows at the same time. The Fire Arrows instantly blew the heads off of our targets, and the rest of the orcs screamed in surprise. While they were still in a panic, we attacked again and slew four more. That was all of the orcs in the vicinity, so we moved into the nest and destroyed the nearby huts in order to clear away obstacles to visibility. *Now that I think about it, what we're doing is kind of similar to what bandits do. I'd feel bad if they weren't monsters, but monsters attack people on instinct.*

The remaining ten orcs had started to approach our position, having heard

the sounds of battle. Two of them were orc leaders. There was still plenty of ground between them and us, and we made use of that distance to slay six more orcs with our magic. *Can I get another shot in? Hmm, barely, but I think I can make it!*

“Left!”

I yelled the direction that I was going for and then shot a Fire Arrow at the orc on the extreme left. Haruka yelled “Right!” at about the same time and slew the orc on the extreme right with her own Fire Arrow. As for Yuki, she shot a Fire Arrow at the rightmost of the two orc leaders. In the end, the only orc that managed to approach us unscathed was the other orc leader. The one Yuki had targeted now had burns on its right shoulder, and all of the regular orcs fell before they got anywhere near us. We went with what we had planned as Touya headed towards the orc leader on the left while Natsuki headed towards the orc leader on the right. Haruka switched to her bow in order to distract the orcs while she conserved mana in case anyone needed healing. Our initial plan was to focus on slaying the wounded orc leader first, but Natsuki had a different idea.

While I was charging up a Fire Arrow for greater potency, Natsuki dashed around the orc leader’s left flank and thrust out her spear. “I’ll be fine, Nao-kun!” she exclaimed. “Go help Touya-kun instead!”

Her movements were so fast that the orc leader couldn’t keep up with her at all. In fact, her spear had already gone in one of its ears and out the other. *Whoa, Greased Lightning combined with Enhanced Muscles really is powerful.* I saw that one hit from Natsuki had already finished off that orc leader, so I aimed the Fire Arrow that I had been charging up at the orc leader that Touya was facing off against. It was distracted dealing with Touya and had its back towards me, so there was no way for my spell to miss. The orc leader shifted a bit right before my Fire Arrow struck, so it only blew off the top of its head, but it was dead regardless.

“Ugh!”

The orc leader started to collapse forward as soon as it died, and Touya hastily moved out of the way before it could fall on him.

I let out a sigh of relief now that the battle was over. “Whew, mission accomplished.”

Haruka nodded; she seemed satisfied as well. “Mm, things went quite well for us this time.”

“It was definitely easier than I thought it would be,” said Natsuki. “I think that’s partly because there were fewer orcs than we anticipated, though.”

“True, but we also managed to pull off what we had practiced quite well,” said Yuki. “In a way, we approach battles efficiently, like a special forces team.”

“Well, it was only possible because we had discussed and planned things out together beforehand,” I said.

We had known each other for quite a long time by now, so we were able to match each other’s movements to a certain extent, but that wasn’t enough to guarantee that things would go well for us if we were fighting by the seat of our pants. Our battles only went smoothly because we would plan out details like who would attack what and where, along with setting priority targets so that we didn’t all waste attacks on the same target. We had also planned out different types of signals and how many seconds we would wait between receiving a signal and attacking in order to synchronize our attacks. We practiced all of that during our training sessions.

“Mm, it’s also important that we keep our chatter at a minimum during combat so that none of us misses out on important information due to random yelling,” said Haruka.

One rule that we followed was to avoid raising our voices during battle unless it was absolutely necessary. That applied to the use of magic as well. I yelled “Left!” earlier to indicate that I would attack the orcs on the left. Yuki, Haruka, and I were in charge of slaying orcs with magic. When I’d shouted, there had been two regular orcs left standing. The orcs were positioned from left to right, starting with an orc leader, two regular orcs, and then the other orc leader. One of us would be free to attack one orc leader, so I’d yelled that I was going for the regular orc on the left to avoid confusion, and Haruka had followed up as well. This had allowed Yuki to avoid hesitation as she shot her Fire Arrow at one of the orc leaders.

On a side note, yelling helped increase the strength of physical attacks, so it was okay to yell in close combat. However, Natsuki would barely raise her voice at all, and even Touya would only yell from time to time. I personally felt like it would be fine for Touya to yell more since he had the Roar skill, but the girls seemed to have a low opinion of that skill, so he barely used it at all. The skill didn't seem to have any negative effects on the user's allies, but that didn't change the fact that it was quite loud. *Sorry, Touya, but I can't really back you up on this.* As a result of all these factors, the only screams and yelling that we would hear in battle would be from the monsters that we were fighting. However, most of the monsters would quickly lose their heads to our spells, so the total amount of noise across a battle would often end up being quite low.

"All right," I said, "let's start preparing for the gutti—orcs are approaching us! Ten orcs and one orc leader!"

"Is it a group of orcs that just returned from hunting?!" Haruka exclaimed. "How much time left?!"

"Ten seconds! They're coming from behind!"

We hadn't raised our voices that much earlier during the battle, but the orcs had screamed quite loudly, so it was probably their screams that had reached the ears of the other orcs. Based on the information that my Scout skill had provided me, the orcs were galloping towards us in a straight line from the direction that we had come when we invaded the nest.

"We'll face them right here!" Haruka exclaimed. "Natsuki, Touya, you two handle the orc leader together! The rest of us will deal with the other orcs!"

"Okay!" we all exclaimed in response.

By this point, I had used quite a lot of magic, but I still had more than enough mana left to deal with ten orcs. We held our weapons at the ready. The first orc that jumped towards us was the orc leader. It looked at the dead orcs littered on the ground behind us and then roared in anger and charged us. The three of us who were mages had once again spread out in a loose formation from left to right. We each shot two Fire Arrows at a time towards the orcs at the back, while Touya and Natsuki both split in opposite directions to avoid the orc leader's charge and distract it. After that, Haruka, Yuki, and I each fired a single

Fire Arrow towards the remaining orcs and slew them. Next, I faced off against the remaining regular orc with my spear. I attacked its legs in order to trip it before aiming for a lethal spot and slaying it in one thrust. Once the orc was dead, I looked back and saw that the others had slain the orc leader quite easily too; Yuki and Haruka had gotten in clean hits with magic while Touya and Natsuki had distracted it.

“That should be all of them, right?” Yuki asked. She looked a bit uneasy. “I don’t really have much mana left for more...”

I shook my head. “I’m not so sure about that. We’ve slain a total of four orc leaders and one hundred orcs so far, which adds up to more than we were expecting. If we’re right that there are roughly thirty orcs per orc leader, then there should be at least ten or more orcs left, so...”

“Eh, I don’t think the proportions are that exact,” said Haruka. “Besides, the only thing we know for sure is that stronger forms of orcs appear at nests containing at least thirty orcs, right?”

“Yeah, I guess that’s true. In any case, I’ll stay on guard with my Scout skill, so we don’t have to worry about being ambushed.”

“Oh yeah, just now, you noticed and warned us about these orcs quite fast,” said Yuki.

“Mm, I’m very impressed that you didn’t let your guard down even though we had just won a battle, Nao-kun!” Natsuki said.

“Oh, ha ha, yeah...”

I forced out a dry laugh in response to the sudden praise, which I hadn’t expected to receive given that I used my Scout skill constantly as a matter of habit. I would have probably been constantly stressed and mentally exhausted whenever we traveled through the forest if I didn’t have this skill. Through constant use, I had gotten it to Level 3 by now.

“What should we do about the gutting?” Touya asked. “Should we gut the orcs right here?”

“Hmm, yeah, we should,” said Haruka. “It’s probably a good idea to clean up this nest too.”

I wasn't sure if leaving an empty orc nest alone would make it easier for other orcs to rebuild it, but apparently the previous large-scale hunt quests that the Adventurers' Guild had organized to exterminate orc nests generally involved burning the huts too, so that was probably a good example for us to follow.

We split into two groups to clean up the orc nest. Touya and I broke down the huts and gathered the scrap wood into one place; that was the task that required the most physical strength. As for the girls, they were in charge of gutting the orcs that we had slain. When we had piled up a decent amount of wood, we set fire to it, and the girls discarded the orc parts we had no use for, like their internal organs, into the fire. Orc offal wasn't very appetizing, but it gave off a delicious smell as it burned.

"Uh, Nao, are you sure it's okay to start a fire like this?" Touya asked. "It's pretty big..."

The flames were much bigger and more intense than a normal bonfire, so I got why Touya was concerned. Maybe orc fat was just a really good fuel. Offal was usually grilled with high heat, so this could be a related phenomenon.

"Well, we're surrounded by open space, and it's not that windy, so it should be fine. I can also just use the Extinguish Fire spell if necessary."

Extinguish Fire was a Level 3 Fire Magic spell that, as its name implied, would extinguish flames. Its description said it was "a useful spell at fire scenes," and it was one of the few spells under the Fire Magic category that were recommended for use outside of combat. So far, I had only tested it on small bonfires, but it had always extinguished them completely and left behind no residual smoke at all. The spell seemed to cool the temperature of burning objects below the ignition point immediately so that they wouldn't reignite after you cast the spell. However, the objects that had been on fire before would still feel hot to the touch; the spell didn't completely cool them.

"Oh, that's good to know," said Touya. "I guess we can just keep throwing scrap wood into this fire, then."

"Yeah, we still have about half of the wood to go through," I said.

For the roofs of their huts, the orcs had used raw branches that still had leaves on them, but the other parts of the huts were quite dry and burned very

well. Touya and I continued to break down the orc huts and throw the wood into the fire. It would have been hell if we'd had to do this during the middle of summer, but it wasn't that bad now since the weather had been getting colder lately.

"You know, looking at bonfires makes me feel relaxed for some reason," said Touya. "It's quite nice."

"Yeah, I know that feeling," I replied. "I heard that back on Earth, there was another country with a television channel that just showed a fireplace burning. I wonder if it's just an instinctual thing for human beings."

"Um, I kind of understand what you guys are talking about, but isn't this fire too big for a bonfire?" Haruka asked.

"Well, yeah, I guess it is a bit big," said Touya.

"Mm, that might be true," I said.

As we'd kept piling more and more firewood onto the initial stack of logs, the flames had flared up to more than twice Touya's height.

"Aren't fires for Dondo-Yaki festivals all like this, though?" I asked. "I'm pretty sure it was normal in the countryside where my relatives were located."

"I kind of want to roast some mochi over this fire," said Touya.

"The flames are too strong for roasting mochi," said Haruka. "Besides, we don't have any mochi on us. Be careful not to mess up piling the wood, okay?"

"Yeah, leave it to us," Touya replied.

Although the flames were towering, the pile of wood was only about two meters in height. It probably wouldn't be dangerous even if it collapsed in on itself, but now that we were almost done dismantling the orc huts, Touya and I went and grabbed some long pillars to adjust the bonfire. By that point, the girls had also finished gutting the orcs, so they stuffed all of the meat, fur, and skin into our magic bags. We had slain a total of thirty-eight orcs today including the orc leaders, so there was enough meat that you'd have to measure it in tons rather than kilograms.

After we were done cleaning up the nest, Natsuki and Haruka used the

Purification spell on everyone. All we had to do now was wait for the bonfire to burn out; then we could head back to town.

“This bonfire looks like it’ll take quite a while to burn out,” said Haruka.

“Yeah, there were a lot of orc huts,” I said.

There had been a total of around thirty orc huts, each with four pillars and four roof beams. None of the pillars were that thick, but the total amount of wood was considerable.

“Well, I guess we can just eat lunch here,” said Haruka. “The smell of blood in the air is a bit unpleasant, but we can put up with it.”

The battle had taken place on the outskirts of the orc nest, but we had burned the wood from the huts in the center of the nest so that the flames wouldn’t spread to the trees of the forest. The girls had dressed all of the orc carcasses in the center of the nest as well, so the smell of blood was actually thicker here than it had been where we had battled the orcs. However, we were more or less used to the smell of blood by now; it wasn’t enough to make any of us feel like puking.

“If we’re gonna grill some meat here, I’m down,” said Touya. “It’s been a while since we last had some barbecue!”

“Yeah, we’ve barely used the cooking utensils that we bought,” I said.

We had only used those cooking utensils once or twice while we were outside of town for adventurer work. In fact, we had used them many more times during our training sessions. We would get some scrap wood from the carpenters working on our house and would make a small fire for brewing tea and roasting potatoes.

“Grilled meat, huh? That sounds nice,” said Natsuki.

“Oh yeah, you guys have mentioned before that you used to eat grilled meat a lot as a party of three,” said Yuki.

“Now that you mention it, that’s true,” I said.

In the beginning, most of our meals had been skewers of tusk boar meat cooked over an open fire, but we had more or less stopped eating like that. For

one thing, we'd gotten a bit tired of the taste of tusk boar; for another, it was annoying to have to start a fire every time. Since Natsuki and Yuki grouped up with us, we'd generally just been buying lunch.

"All right, let's start with the preparations," said Haruka. "We have a grill net on us this time, so we may as well use it."

"Okay," I replied.

We gathered some stones that were lying around the nest and made a simple stove, then stuffed it full of charcoal from the bonfire. The girls set up the grill net and lined up some slices of meat on it. The fat melted out right away and made some smoke when it dripped onto the charcoal. I didn't mind the air being a little smoky; that was part of the fun of grilling meat.

"Now this is what I'm talking about!" Touya exclaimed.

"Yeah, definitely!" I said.

A cast iron skillet would do in a pinch, but meat grilled on a net over charcoal felt completely different. Touya and I were quite happy to see all of the meat, but the girls seemed to have some complaints.

"Looking at all this meat makes me feel like we're lacking something, though," said Haruka.

"Yeah," said Yuki, "it'd be great if we had vegetables to go along with all of this meat."

"Mm, we should have brought some with us," said Natsuki.

The girls had a good point; it would be nice if we had some side dishes as well.

"What kind of vegetables do you use with grilled meat?" I asked. "Is it things like cabbage and onions?"

"Mm," said Haruka. "You can also use green peppers, eggplants, carrots, and asparagus."

"What about corn?" Touya asked. "I like the taste of grilled sweet corn."

"Sweet corn would be nice, but it might be difficult to get our hands on in this world," said Natsuki.

According to Natsuki, it wasn't just a matter of finding a naturally sweet variety of corn. Sweet corn gradually lost its sweetness after being harvested, so there was also the problem of preservation.



You would either have to preserve the corn at a low temperature or cook it immediately after harvesting it.

“The ideal would be to harvest sweet corn early in the morning and then boil it right away,” said Natsuki. “It tastes best that way. Anyway, we can grow delicious corn of our own if we make a kitchen garden.”

“Oh, so that’s why the corn in stores back on Earth wasn’t sweet at all!” Touya exclaimed.

“Yeah, you can’t really tell what corn will taste like at a glance, even though you can tell if it’s ripe,” said Yuki.

I had heard stories about how hairy corn would taste better than corn that wasn’t very hairy, but it was hard to tell at a glance how much time had passed since an ear of corn had been harvested and how it had been preserved.

“Unfortunately, we can’t expect a supply chain in this world for corn that’s been preserved at a low temperature,” said Haruka.

“Mm,” said Natsuki. “Magic bags are ideal for preservation purposes, but they aren’t available to most farmers.”

“All right, let’s make our own kitchen garden!” Touya exclaimed. “We might as well make use of the spacious plot that we bought.”

“Well, yeah, there’s plenty of space for a kitchen garden,” I said. “Do you know how to make a kitchen garden, though? Any experience with this?”

Touya turned towards me with a confident look in his eyes. “Nope, none at all! My yard wasn’t big enough for a kitchen garden!”

Back on Earth, we had all lived in detached houses, but Touya’s house had a small yard. My house and Haruka’s both had decently large yards, but neither of us had experience making a kitchen garden either.

“So yeah, I’ll need your help, Yuki!” Touya looked at Yuki and clasped his hands together as he petitioned her. “Gardening is your hobby, right? Can you make a kitchen garden for us? I’ll help out!”

“Huh?!” Yuki exclaimed. “I mean, yeah, I like growing flowers, but vegetables are a bit different...”

“Hmm. What about you, Natsuki?” Touya asked. “You sound like you have some experience with kitchen gardens.”

“Well, yes, I did grow some vegetables in the corner of my yard,” Natsuki replied. “However, all I did was purchase fertilizer, soil, and seeds, so I don’t actually know that much...”

Yuki and Natsuki both had slightly bewildered expressions on their faces. Stores in this world didn’t sell fertilizers or fertilized soil, and the seeds available were also different from the ones back on Earth, many of which had been bred or genetically modified to be easier to grow in gardens. In this world, there were probably decent odds that you would plant a garden only to watch it fail, so it made sense to me that Yuki and Natsuki were a bit hesitant.

It was Haruka who provided some unexpected encouragement. “I think it wouldn’t hurt to give it a try. We’re not farmers, so it’s not like our livelihoods would be ruined if we failed. A life consisting of nothing but work would be dry and boring, so gardening as a hobby would be a nice change of pace if nothing else.”

Until now, we’d had to focus on survival, so we’d had no room to think about other things. Our days consisted of just work and training while we saved up money for purchasing our own house. However, we wouldn’t really have to worry about that anymore once our house was done, so that would leave all of us with more free time in the future. *Should I think of finding a hobby as well? There are no games or internet in this world, and books aren’t exactly affordable either...*

“Well, if it’s okay even if we fail, then I don’t mind,” said Natsuki.

“Yeah, I’d be down with giving it a try as a casual hobby,” said Yuki.

“Sure, that sounds good to me!” Touya exclaimed, sounding very carefree. “Let’s just give it a go and hope for the best!” He laughed for joy, but Yuki and Natsuki responded with dry laughs.

I wanted to eat some sweet corn as well, so it would be great if their efforts paid off in the end. However, it all depended on whether or not sweet corn actually existed in this world.

“Now then, the meat should be ready, so let’s start eating,” said Haruka.

The moment Haruka had announced the meat was ready, Touya had already thrust out his chopsticks and snatched a slice of meat off of the net. On a side note, we’d had to make those chopsticks ourselves; stores in this world didn’t sell anything like them, of course.

“I’m digging in!” Touya exclaimed. He threw the slice of meat into his mouth.

I grabbed some meat with my own chopsticks and threw it into my mouth.
“Mm, delicious!”

The flavor was pretty basic—it had only been seasoned with salt and a few spices—but it was still delicious.

“It’s really nice to have outdoor barbecue sessions like this from time to time!” Yuki exclaimed.

“Mm. It’s a bit of a shame that the meat always tastes more or less the same, though,” said Natsuki.

“Yeah, we could give the meat a refreshing taste if we had some lemon juice,” said Haruka.

I completely agreed with Natsuki and Haruka. Salt was the main seasoning we used on meat. We technically had inspiel sauce as another option, but it seemed wrong for grilled meat.

“It’d be great if we had some dipping sauce specifically for grilled meat,” I said.

“Yeah, that kind of sauce is amazing,” said Touya. “With just that plus some meat and vegetables, I can go through multiple bowls of rice.”

“I’ve heard there are some amazing people out there who can devour multiple bowls of rice with just that sauce,” I said. “Can we make it ourselves?”

I looked at the girls, hoping for a good answer, but they all shook their heads.

“No, it’s actually quite hard to make that kind of sauce,” said Yuki.

“We can probably find substitutes for the fruit and vegetable ingredients, but there are other problems,” said Natsuki.

“That kind of sauce isn’t complete without soy sauce or miso,” said Haruka.

We still lacked the incredible power of soy sauce and miso.

“To make soy sauce and miso, you need rice, wheat, and soybeans, right?” I asked. “Can we make some ourselves if we get our hands on those ingredients?”

Haruka and Yuki shook their heads, but Natsuki raised her hand. “Oh, I’ve made some myself. However, it’s impossible without koji mold.”

“Oh, right, koji mold. There’s probably none in the stores in this world, right?”

“Mm, I highly doubt there’s any sold in stores,” said Haruka. “However, koji mold is a type of fungus, so we might be able to find some ourselves if we keep searching.”

Haruka went on and explained all sorts of things. All I understood was that it was very difficult, but it sounded like it wasn’t impossible, which was all that I needed to know for now. All I could do was hope that Haruka’s efforts would pay off—and help her out when or if she needed it.

“Well, let’s set aside the topic of soy sauce for now and talk about what to do from tomorrow onward,” I said. “We’ve exterminated the orc nest here, so we can’t continue to earn money from orcs, right?”

“Yeah, it’s a shame since they were a good source of money for us,” said Touya. “There are probably still some orcs out in the wild, but I doubt we’ll come across them as often.”

Many people considered orcs a nuisance, but they were an easy source of income for us. We had previously discussed the idea of culling the orcs rather than exterminating the nest outright; that way, we could continue to use them as a resource in the long term. We’d given up on that idea as soon as the guild had issued a hunt quest. Even if we’d left the nest intact, the guild would have eventually organized a large-scale hunt quest, but that wouldn’t have benefited us in any way, which was why we had decided to exterminate the nest ourselves.

“Most adventurers move on to the south forest after getting some experience here in the east forest, right?” I asked.

“Yes, it seems that the average adventurer usually moves on to escort quests protecting lumberjacks,” said Natsuki. “However, that doesn’t really apply to us, since most adventurers would have moved on to the south forest long before now—as soon as they were capable of slaying hobgoblins.”

Oh yeah, I forgot that orcs aren’t a popular target for adventurers. It’s worked out for us, though, since we’ve earned a lot.

“Monsters in the south forest are stronger on average than the ones here in the east forest,” Natsuki added, “so it’s possible to earn a bit more there just gathering herbs and slaying monsters.”

“It’s still less than what we can earn from orcs, though, right?” I asked.

“Of course. It might be worth it to venture into the south forest just to get some experience, but it’s not worth it in terms of money,” said Natsuki.

The materials from four orcs would easily fetch us the equivalent of over one million yen. It was a fair price considering how much meat we would have to bring back with us, but it still seemed like an outlandish amount of money to us. Back on Earth, our monthly allowances had been just a few thousand yen. We would probably be fine for a while just living off of the remaining orcs as long as we didn’t waste money on expensive things.

“Well, let’s take our time to think about what to do,” said Haruka. “After today’s battles, we should have enough to pay for the other half of the construction budget, so we can relax for a bit while we discuss our future plans.”

“Yeah, we definitely need a long vacation, and now we can afford it.” Yuki paused in thought for a second before smiling and clapping her hands as if an idea had just popped into her head. “Oh yeah, how about we go over to Aera-san’s place to celebrate today’s victory?”

Touya agreed right away. “Oh, that sounds like a great idea! Aera-san’s cooking is delicious, and I’ve been wanting to eat a real deal full-course meal instead of a plain old lunch!”

The rest of us had no particular reason to object to Yuki’s idea, so we all nodded as well.

“All right, once we get back to Laffan, let’s go and make a reservation for dinner at Aera-san’s place,” said Haruka.

“Yep!” Yuki exclaimed.

As we relaxed around the bonfire, we all thought about our upcoming vacation. When the flames had burned much lower, we extinguished the fire and headed back to Laffan.



We headed to Aera-san’s place right after we got back to Laffan, but when we arrived, it was completely full. Aera-san apologized to us and looked like she felt bad, but we would have felt way worse if her place had been completely empty of customers after the help we’d given her. Aera-san also told us that there weren’t any seats available for dinner reservations and that we would have to make reservations at least three days out. She mentioned that the budget was negotiable, so we ended up requesting a course that would cost twenty gold coins for the five of us.

Aera-san was quite surprised when she heard our request, but we handed over the twenty gold coins with no hesitation and told her it was to celebrate a special occasion. These days, it wouldn’t hurt for us to spend twenty gold coins on things like this every once in a while, although we had to keep in mind that we no longer had an easy source of income in the form of orcs. It was important for us to remember our humble beginnings, back when we only had a mere ten large silver coins to our names and couldn’t even afford to buy spare clothes. However, it was also important for us to enjoy a rare opportunity to celebrate with an expensive dinner.

We were all quite happy as we walked back to our inn, but Yuki suddenly groaned and stopped in her tracks. “Ugh, this guy again...?”

I followed Yuki’s gaze and grimaced at what I saw.

“Oh, hello, Shidou-san! I’m sorry for getting carried away the other day. Do you have a little time to talk?”

The person in front of us was Iwanaka, one of the guys from the party of three we’d run into the other day. It looked like he had shaved his facial hair, so I

could actually recognize him now. However, it looked like his attempts at shaving hadn't gone too well, since there were traces of cuts on his face. He'd missed a lot of spots too. It wasn't that strange, though, since there weren't any decent mirrors in this world, besides which sharp razors were expensive. He also looked like he had cleaned himself, probably because he'd been hurt the other day when the girls said that he and the other guys in his party smelled bad. Only a crazy person would attempt to hit on girls looking the way those guys had looked yesterday.

Yuki looked a bit annoyed and told Iwanaka to get to the point. "Is it just you today? What do you want to talk about? We're busy as well, so keep it short."

"Okay. How does the idea of merging parties sound to you? That way we can work together in the south forest," said Iwanaka. "At this time of year, there will be less and less work available here in Laffan, so I believe it will impact your current livelihood if you don't make a change."

Iwanaka had a bright smile on his face as he explained his bizarre idea. It sounded like he was trying to include Touya and me this time since he had failed to convince just the girls to join him. However, his attempts at appeasing us this time didn't change the fact that it was too late for him. We were already suspicious of his intentions, and even his smile seemed suspicious to us.

"Well then, I didn't expect you to have the balls to suggest merging parties when you ignored me and Nao last time," said Touya.

"Right? You guys completely ignored us and tried to hit on the girls," I said. "Surely you haven't forgotten about that, right?"

"O-Oh, no, we were planning to ask you guys after—"

"Huh? That's not how you guys sounded at all," said Yuki.

"Yeah, Yuki's completely right," said Haruka. "Besides, our current party of five is quite stable, so there's no reason for us to recruit more members."

"Mm, our lives as adventurers have gone quite smoothly so far," said Natsuki.

Iwanaka hastily interjected in a last-ditch effort to change our minds. "Are you guys sure about this?! Are you really okay with spending the rest of your lives doing meager work in this town?!"

It seemed like he was making weird assumptions. *What makes him think that his party can climb up the adventurer ranks easily?*

“I don’t see a problem with that if it’s enough to make a living,” said Haruka.

“Mm. Also, I don’t find that the work available to us in this town is meager at all,” said Natsuki.

“Huh?!” Iwanaka sounded surprised, but I couldn’t understand why. Even back on Earth, it was fairly normal for people to spend their whole lives in the town or city where they worked. The ease of travel would depend on the means of transportation available, but most people wouldn’t move around a lot unless they had to for work. There were a lot of dangers in this different world, so a peaceful life doing work in one town was a reasonable standard for success.

“Besides, your party doesn’t seem very strong, Iwanaka-kun, so there’s no reason for us to merge parties with you,” said Yuki.

“W-Well, it’s possible that we might be a bit weaker than you guys right now due to our starting skills, but all three of us have EXP skills!”

We all looked at each other after we heard those words. *Is that why he’s so confident?* All of us were probably thinking something along the same lines —“Seriously? They all have those land mine skills?”—but Iwanaka seemed to misinterpret our reactions.

Sounding confident again, he said, “Sure, EXP skills mean that you start out with lower skill levels than the other people who got transported to this world, but they’ll definitely make you stronger in the long term. With that in mind, they’re worth it for people who know to plan ahead.” Iwanaka had a smug look on his face as he said that, as if he was confident that we hadn’t been smart enough to get those EXP skills. “On top of that, I have the Copy skill as well!”

Ugh, I know I shouldn’t laugh, but it’s really hard! I’m losing control of my facial muscles! I hastily averted my eyes from Iwanaka’s face; I was definitely going to burst out laughing. The only ones among us whose facial expressions didn’t change were Haruka and Natsuki. They’d been good at keeping straight faces even back in school. On the other hand, Yuki’s cheeks were twitching on the verge of laughter, and Touya was facepalming to hide his expression. He was definitely trying his best to hold back from laughing. The Copy skill along

with an EXP skill would require at least 150 Points to obtain. Iwanaka had most likely had a decent number of points to start with since his grades had been good, but he had made really bad choices.

“I’ll admit that our party might be weaker than yours right now, but in the future, we’ll reach levels of strength beyond your wildest imagination!” We all responded with silence, but Iwanaka didn’t seem to care and carried on, “When that time comes, I’ll become a leader of people. You guys might be a step ahead of us now, but we’ll leap ahead of you! Our success is guaranteed.”

Iwanaka continued to boast about his future to us and didn’t seem to notice the exasperated looks on our faces. A sense of superiority oozed out of his smug face as he continued to rant, emphasizing various points. It was painful to listen to him talk. I actually felt kind of bad for him due to how delusional he was.

Since we’d remained silent and just let him talk, Iwanaka’s smug look eventually changed to a nasty grin. “However, part of being a good leader is making smart use of other people. None of you guys will be able to become a leader like me, but I do have use for you as my subordinates. You’ll regret it in the future if you don’t join my party now. Lots of people will flock to us once we become stronger—and that includes women.”

Huh, what’s with this arrogant attitude? My pity for him vanished in an instant. Touya must have felt the same way I did, since the exasperated look on his face changed to a fierce one, and he placed his hands on his weapon. Today, unlike yesterday, we were on our way back to our inn after hunting, so we had our proper weapons on us. I hadn’t thought Iwanaka would be stupid enough to pick a fight with us right now, but it seemed I had been wrong.

“Are you implying that we should deal with you right now?” Touya took a step towards him, and Iwanaka seemed to come to his senses; he took two steps back in fear.

Okay, yeah, he’s stupid. Boasting to someone that you’ll eventually become stronger than them while you’re still a lot weaker—that’s asking for a fight.

“E-Even adventurers get punished if they draw their weapons in town, right?!” Iwanaka exclaimed. “That’s what you guys said yesterday!”

“Yeah, you’re right about that,” said Touya. “By the way, did you know that in this world, unlike in a lot of light novels, there’s no device capable of checking people’s criminal records?”

Touya glanced at me as he said that, and I nodded before joining in. “Yeah, it’s unfortunate that there’s nothing to record crimes in our status screens either,” I said.

“It really is. There’s probably no way for the authorities to confirm whether an incident like a murder happened outside of town,” said Touya.

“Yeah, you’re right. Oh yeah, that reminds me—deep in the forest, dead monsters tend to disappear right away,” I said. “Something out there probably eats the carcasses, so...”

Touya and I glanced at Iwanaka from time to time as we continued to chat with each other. It was amusing to see his face turn pale. He slowly stepped backwards and yelled “You’ll regret this!” before running away. I was impressed that he had managed to make the right decision within a short amount of time, but...

“They’re the ones that’ll regret their decisions for sure,” I said.

“Yeah, definitely,” said Touya. “All three of them have EXP skills, right? I’m amazed. The odds of that happening must be extremely low.”

I wasn’t sure if they had formed a party together because they were friends back on Earth, or if they had been transported to the same place in this world by coincidence. There was also the possibility that they had grouped up after meeting each other here in Laffan. One way or another, they were probably in a party together because they were similar to each other, but I was still amazed at the odds.

“I think it’s just because the people with dangerous skills have already been weeded out,” said Haruka. “The Copy and EXP skills aren’t life-threatening and also cost a lot of points, so they probably weren’t able to afford other land mine skills.”

“So you’re saying the people who have managed to survive this long have grouped up?” I asked. “I guess that makes sense.”

“Also, as far as I could tell with my Third Eye skill, his skills were 4x EXP, Copy, and Level 1 Third Eye,” said Haruka. “I’m not sure how reliable or accurate that information is, though.”

“Oh, I forgot to use the Third Eye skill on him,” I said. “I’m glad you remembered, Haruka.”

“Well, there’s no point using it on orcs, so I can’t really blame you for forgetting,” said Haruka.

Third Eye wasn’t exactly an all-purpose skill, so it was easy to forget about. There was also the possibility that we didn’t yet know how to use it properly, but it wasn’t like there was anyone that we could ask for instruction.

“That skill build definitely sounds like it cost more than the number of points that I started with, though,” said Touya. He sighed. “What a waste of points...”

However, considering the difference in combat abilities between Haruka and Touya, the number of points you started out with wouldn’t necessarily result in a huge difference in abilities. It seemed like the difference was small enough that someone could close the gap depending on how they approached things and how much effort they devoted to self-improvement. The “evil” god had told us that “Effort will never betray you,” and that was probably what he’d meant.

“Oh yeah, now that I think about it, how did you avoid the EXP skills bait even though you didn’t have the Help Guide, Touya?” I asked.

“I mean, even the 2x EXP skill had a cost of 50 Points, so it was too risky to go for it when I didn’t know what kind of place I was going to get transported to,” Touya replied. “You’ll die if you can’t win your first battle, so it’s normal to go for a skill build that should make you decently capable in combat, right?”

Touya had started with 120 Points, so if he’d decided to get the 2x EXP skill, that would have left him with only 70 Points for combat skills. According to him, he had prioritized making a decent skill build for combat and survival, so luckily, he hadn’t had enough points left over to get an EXP skill.

“Right, there’s no point in increasing your EXP gain by ten times if you can’t even take advantage of it by winning your first battle,” I said.

“Exactly. It’s too much of a gamble to hope that the first foe you come across

is something weak enough for you to beat so you can level up,” said Touya.

We had managed to arrive at a town without encountering any major obstacles, but for someone like Tomi who got transported inside a forest, it would be risky if they didn’t have any combat skills. With that in mind, it seemed like Iwanaka’s party had gotten somewhat lucky after all; they had at least survived.

“Oh yeah, what about you, Yuki?” I asked. “How did you avoid getting baited by the EXP skills?”

“Me? Well, I just had a bad feeling,” Yuki replied. “I felt like 120 Points was way too cheap for a skill that would provide ten times experience gain.”

“Oh, that’s a smart way to think about it,” said Touya. “I want to praise your intuition, but...”

“Yeah, she ended up getting the Copy skill anyway,” I said.

“Come on, give me a break!” Yuki exclaimed. “All that matters is that it’s useful now, right?”

Yuki looked a bit unhappy and tried to poke me. I just chuckled and held her back by placing one of my hands on her head. It was true that her Copy skill was actually quite useful—so useful that I was somewhat jealous of it. She had ended up as something of a jack-of-all-trades and a master of none, but that didn’t change the fact that she was capable of dealing with all sorts of different situations. Copy allowed her to easily acquire skills that I had struggled to learn, so the fact that I got to make fun of her from time to time seemed like a fair tradeoff to me.

“I’m a bit confused about that guy’s intentions,” said Haruka. “At first, he seemed like he wanted to apologize, but halfway through, he started to sound like he wanted to pick a fight with us. What was his goal?”

“Dunno. Maybe he’s just a kind of person who looks down on other people and wasn’t consciously trying to pick a fight,” said Touya.

I voiced my doubts about that theory. “Are you sure about that? There’s no way that’s his actual personality, right?”

Haruka shook her head. “No, it’s possible that that might be the case. He showed traces of arrogance even back on Earth. He’s definitely the type of person I would never have become friends with; I couldn’t get along with him.”

I had barely crossed paths with Iwanaka back on Earth, but apparently Haruka had seen what kind of person he really was. She had interacted with him from time to time because they were both model students, besides which Iwanaka was the class rep. If Haruka described him as someone she would never become friends with, the same was probably true for the rest of us. Or rather, based on our interactions with him in this world, it was already obvious that he had issues even if we factored in the possibility that his skills had made him arrogant. You’d have expected him to have noticed by now that his skills were trash, but it was better for us if he remained in the dark.

“I don’t know what skills the other two guys have, but they probably have land mines as well considering how they acted yesterday,” said Haruka.

“Mm, this could be an issue for us,” said Natsuki.

“Well, if they all have EXP skills, then we should be fine as long as we don’t slack off on training,” said Yuki. “However, strength alone won’t solve everything, so...”

“Yeah, it’s kind of annoying since there are other factors that we need to keep in mind,” I said.

We were definitely stronger than their party at the moment, but it wasn’t realistically possible to stay on our guard constantly. There was the possibility that they would try to catch us by surprise. The only way to set those worries aside would be if we became immune to stab wounds, but unlike Yuki and Natsuki’s story of an adventurer being stabbed by a girl out of “love,” there would be nothing romantic about whatever violence might follow.

“I doubt they’ll try to attack us in town, but...” Haruka didn’t sound very confident when she said that.

Yuki paused in thought for a while and then shook her head in response to Haruka. “Maybe they will. In any case, us girls should either stick together as a group of three at all times or tag along with Touya or Nao—if that’s okay.”

“Don’t worry about it,” I replied. “It’s not that much of a hassle, and it’s also better than one of you getting attacked alone while you’re outside.”

“Yeah, exactly,” said Touya. “I actually kind of hope those guys do attack us so we can deal with them for good.”

“Whoa, Touya, that’s quite an extreme opinion!” I exclaimed.

Touya looked a bit surprised. “Huh? Don’t you feel the same way I do, Nao?”

“Well, yeah, it’s true that yesterday I was thinking it’d be nice if they just attacked us so we could beat them up.” *If they do, I hope they attack us outside of town. We’d have to hold back in town.*

“While we’re in the middle of adventurer work, we should be fine if we just head deep into the forest,” said Natsuki. “Those guys probably won’t follow us, and even if they try, they’ll just go missing.”

Whew, I knew Natsuki would be merciless like this. She’s got a very scary smile right now too.

“Just to make sure, will that be because of, uh, unnatural causes?” Touya asked.

“Well, there’s no reason to do anything on our end if they don’t do anything.”

“Right, that’s true, ha ha!”

Even though those guys were scum, I felt a bit hesitant at the thought of being the ones to attack them first, so I was glad to hear that from Natsuki. Touya seemed like he felt at ease as well; he was laughing, but his face froze when he heard Natsuki’s next words.

“However, there is the possibility that injured monsters might head in their direction,” she said with a bright smile, “and that would be quite unfortunate for them, you know?”

Touya and I responded with silence.



As a party, we had decided to take a break for the three days before our celebratory dinner. That meant we were all free to do whatever we wanted

after we were done with our usual morning training and breakfast, but...

“Uh, Yuki, what are you girls planning to do today?” I asked.

“Us? We’re planning on going out to shop for materials that we can use to make our own clothes,” Yuki replied.

“Mm, we discussed it with each other and decided we should make use of the next three days to prepare clothes for winter,” said Natsuki.

Up till this point, the girls had made only a few simple articles of clothing for us, but they said that because the weather was going to turn cold soon, they had decided to take advantage of this opportunity to make some seasonal clothes.

“Right, it’s expensive to straight out buy clothes,” I said.

“Mm, it’s because the ones in stores are all handmade,” said Natsuki. “Um, Nao-kun, if I made some clothes for you, would you wear them?”

“Of course I would. I’m fine with anything as long as it doesn’t look weird.”

“Thank you for letting me know. In that case, I’ll do my best!”

I should probably have been the one saying thanks to her, but apparently I didn’t need to; Natsuki sounded quite happy about it. The clothes the girls made were all of good quality thanks to their Sewing skills. Although they looked no different from the clothing that ordinary people wore in this world, they were more comfortable to wear and higher quality than the ones sold in stores. That being the case, there was no reason for me to say no to Natsuki’s offer. However, I wasn’t really sure why the girls insisted on making things like indoor working clothes and yukata robes apart from personal considerations like fashion, but I didn’t have a problem with it since the clothes were perfectly serviceable. *I wonder which one of them likes those kinds of clothes.*

“Should Touya and I tag along as well?” I asked. “Those guys are out there somewhere in this town, so...”

Back on Earth, we had tagged along with the girls quite often in order to protect them from guys hitting on them, but it was never fun to tag along with them when they went shopping for clothes. It was nice to watch them try on

and show off cute clothes, but it was also exhausting since they would repeat this process for a few hours on end. Still, I felt a bit uneasy about them going off on their own after what had happened yesterday.

Haruka paused in thought before replying to me. “No, it’s fine. I’d like for it to be just us girls today. We should be fine since we’re going out together as a group of three.”

It sounded like they actually wanted to go check out clothes by themselves, so I nodded without any further hesitation. There were probably things that would be easier or more convenient to do without us guys around, after all.

“Okay, take care,” I said.

“See ya,” said Yuki. “I probably don’t have to say this, but make sure to avoid going anywhere near dangerous places.”

“Well, the only really dangerous place in Laffan at the moment is the construction site of our house, but we don’t have to worry about that,” said Haruka.

“True. Anyway, we have an idea of what places are safe by now, so don’t worry about us,” said Touya.

“That kind of confidence is exactly why you should be careful, but oh well,” said Haruka. “We’ll be back later.”

There was probably no need to worry about the girls since Haruka understood that. After we saw them off, I was left alone with Touya.

“What are your plans for today, Touya?” I asked.

“Nothing comes to mind. Any ideas, Nao?”

“Dude, I wouldn’t have asked you if I had any good ideas.”

There was the option of practicing my magic. I wasn’t completely opposed to that idea, but it went against my determination to relax and enjoy the free time that I had right now, so it just felt wrong to me.

“How about we try making a kitchen garden?” Touya asked. “We’ll have to leave the cultivation of crops to Natsuki and Yuki, but we can get things started now.”

“A kitchen garden? Oh, for sweet corn?”

Now that I think about it, he talked about this before. We had the land now, so there was nothing wrong with getting started even though our house wasn't done yet.

“That definitely sounds like a hobby that we can kill time with,” I said.

“Right? Luckily, we already have the land, the hoes, and the shovels!” Touya exclaimed.

“Hoes? Oh, you mean the ones we bought in the beginning and stopped using once we got some shovels?”

“Yeah, those hoes. You need hoes for plowing soil, right?”

Shovels were more convenient for digging holes, but Touya was right that hoes were more suited for agricultural work.

“As for where to make the garden, we can just choose a random corner of our yard,” said Touya. “Is plowing the soil all we need to do?”

“Nah, I think it'd be a good idea to also enclose some space too, like for flower beds,” I said.

“Oh, I guess you're right.”

The idea of just growing crops out in the yard didn't feel right to me; that would be more like a farmer's field than a garden. My image of a kitchen garden was a plot enclosed with concrete blocks. It would be ideal if it were visible from the windows in the kitchen as well.

“There's no way we can find concrete blocks for sale in this world, right?” Touya asked.

“Probably not,” I said. “We'll have to make do with regular rocks.”

There probably wasn't a law against picking up rocks, after all. It would be a problem if we tried to carry away rocks from someplace like a quarry, but nobody would complain if we just picked up rocks outside of town. We also had magic bags on us, which solved the problem of carrying rocks back to our garden.

“All right, let’s go get some rocks!” Touya exclaimed.

“Yeah!”

We grinned at each other in excitement and then headed out, but as soon as we ventured beyond the town walls, we stumbled upon a problem.

“Uh, Nao, where do you think we can find some rocks?” Touya asked.

“Hmm, good question...”

Before us, beyond the east gate, stretched the grassy plains. If we walked along the highway, the east forest would eventually come within view, but I couldn’t recall seeing any rocky areas along the way. There had to be some rocks lying around the plains, but rocks big enough to enclose a kitchen garden were probably few and far between.

“In the forest, didn’t we see some really big rocks from time to time, Nao?” Touya asked.

“We can’t go there by ourselves, though.” Even if we returned safely, the girls would yell at us for sure. “Besides, how are we supposed to break large rocks like that? Can you use a move like ‘Something Slash!’ and slice through them?”

“I don’t have a move like that!” Touya exclaimed. “My sword would get bent if I tried. I mean, I don’t think it’s impossible if there are magical sword techniques like that, but...”

“That’s basically saying that it’s only possible if we can bend the laws of physics,” I said. “I guess the realistic option for us is to use tools like a chisel, a wedge, or a hammer.”

“We can go to Gantz-san’s place for those tools later. For now, let’s just look and see what we can find here.”

“Yeah, I guess it’s possible that there’s enough here for what we need.”

Touya and I went in different directions, running around the grassy plains in search of rocks, but after searching far and wide for about an hour, neither of us had found enough rocks to fill his hands. We might as well have spent an hour jogging. The rocks we had found didn’t look very nice either, so the girls would probably reject them since our garden would be in a very visible spot of

our yard. I was feeling like we had wasted our time, but then I looked up and saw a mountain range far away. The foothills were covered in forest, but above a certain elevation, there were no large trees.

“There are probably rocks all over that mountain. If only we could get there...”

Unfortunately for us, that area was too dangerous for us to explore on our own. I sighed to myself as I gazed at the mountaintop.

While I was resting, Touya ran over to me. “Are you taking a break, Nao?”

“Yeah. Also, I don’t think this is gonna work out. How about we try a different place?”

Touya checked where I was looking and immediately shook his head. “You mean the mountain? Nah, it’s way too dangerous.”

“I know that. I’m just suggesting that we go somewhere else to look for rocks. By the way, I can’t see any trees on that mountain after a certain level of elevation. Is that the tree line?”

“Hm? Oh, yeah, I see what you mean, but I don’t think it’s the tree line. It doesn’t get that cold in this area, right? If my instincts are correct, then there shouldn’t be that much difference in elevation between the mountain and where we’re standing.”

“I guess that makes sense. I wonder why the mountaintop is bare of trees, then.”

I had read before that tree lines were determined by multiple factors, including temperature and wind. That meant that warm areas would have a higher tree line and cold areas would have a lower tree line. As Touya said, this region never got very cold, so presuming trees in this world were biologically similar to trees on Earth, it seemed strange that the mountain would have a bare crown given that it didn’t look that tall.

“Oh, what if it’s because the mountain is volcanic? Maybe it has hot springs!”
Gas and geological features like calderas would prevent trees from growing, right?

“I mean, yeah, maybe, but if your theory were true, I’d expect there to be more evidence of volcanic activity,” said Touya.

“Good point. I can’t see any steam or anything like that...”

It was possible that by drawing a connection between volcanically active mountains and steam, I was making unwarranted assumptions, but I wanted to believe there were hot springs in this world. There weren’t many forms of recreation and leisure activities on offer, so it would be great if we had a natural outdoor hot spring all to ourselves. That said, taking an outdoor bath could be pretty dangerous given that there were monsters to worry about in this world.

“So what do you think we should do, Touya? Should we continue gathering rocks here?”

“Well, how many rocks have you gathered so far, Nao?”

“Eight. You?”

“Ten. Hmm, this isn’t much at all...”

“Yeah, it really isn’t. Also, these rocks are all too different in shape. We should definitely try something else.”

“Should we go smash those large rocks in the forest?”

“We’d have to ask the girls to tag along with us. Are you brave enough to interrupt them when they’re enjoying their shopping session, Touya?”

Touya answered without hesitation. “No way.”

That was a reasonable response; I wasn’t brave enough to try either. Guys and girls had different hobbies and ways of thinking about the world, so it was important to be considerate of each other; relationships without that sense of reciprocity wouldn’t last long. The five of us had known each other for years now, so for the most part, we knew how to avoid getting on each other’s nerves without thinking about it consciously.

“Let’s just go buy some tools at Gantz-san’s place today and call it for now,” I said.

“That sounds good to me,” said Touya. “We’re just doing this to kill time, so there’s no reason to hurry.”



“So yeah, Gantz-san, sell us some stonecutting tools,” I said.

“Where did this come from? I mean, I’ll give you the tools if you pay for them,” said Gantz. “You’ll need things like a chisel, a wedge, a regular hammer, and a specialized hammer for cutting rocks. You might need a few different wedges as well, depending on the size of the rocks you’re working on.”

“A specialized hammer?” Touya asked.

“Yeah, something like this.”

Gantz-san showed us a hammer. One side of the head was shaped like a flathead screwdriver. According to him, this hammer was for shaping and chipping away at a rock after it had been split into a manageable size.

“All right, sell us a set of those tools,” I said.

“I don’t mind selling you guys these tools if you really need them, but for this kind of work, it’s better just to pay stonemasons,” said Gantz. “Amateurs can’t make good products. It’s also better just to buy stones for what you need.”

“Ha ha, don’t worry about it,” Touya replied. “We know that it would be better to pay professionals, but we’re just doing this for fun.”

Professional stonemasons could definitely make better final products than us, so it would be a better use of our time and money to hunt monsters instead of gathering rocks to split and shape. However, that wouldn’t be fun at all. We wanted to do it ourselves even if we sucked at it so we could have a hobby just for us guys.

“I guess that’s fine as long as you understand,” said Gantz. “All right, here’s the set of tools. Come back if you end up needing more.”

“Yeah, we will,” I said. “Thank you very much, Gantz-san.”

We paid for the tools that Gantz-san had selected for us and headed out of the store. The only problem left was to get our hands on proper rocks to use these new tools on. Chatting with Touya about our options on the way back to the inn, I brought up the idea of asking Diola-san for help again. However, when we got back to our rooms, we were greeted by the sight of the girls all looking

very unhappy.



Inns that served people with low income, such as day laborers and low-rank adventurers, were located in a corner of Laffan near the city walls. Iwanaka's party was staying in a room for three in one of the slightly better inns. It was a small room; the three beds left barely enough space for people to move around.

Iwanaka returned to that room with an ugly, furious look on his face. He slammed the door behind him and then sat down on his bed and stomped the floor.

"Damn it!"

Maeda and Tokuoka were standing up. Staring down at him, they began to voice their complaints.

"I guess we don't have to ask you how things went," said Tokuoka. "You sounded so confident, but this is all you have to show for it?"

"Couldn't you have at least brought Shidou back with you?" Maeda asked.

"You should go and try if you think you can do better than me, Maeda!" Iwanaka exclaimed. "Do you really think it's that easy to bring back one person from a party of five?!"

"Yeah, I guess it's hard to drag one of them behind us while we're inside the town," said Tokuoka. "We finally found them, and yet..."

"It'll be easy after we get one of the girls back to our room, but managing that is the hard part," said Maeda.

Haruka, Yuki, and Natsuki had always stood out among the girls in their class back on Earth. They hadn't been anywhere within reach for guys like Maeda and Tokuoka. Iwanaka had been a model student, but Haruka had treated him no differently than the rest of her classmates. However, grades didn't matter here in this world, and the existence of skills had made Iwanaka's party overconfident. That was why they had tried to hit on the girls, and naturally, their attempts had failed. As a result, they had changed their strategy: they

planned to bait one of the girls away from the party in order to kidnap her. So far, that plan hadn't gone any better than the last. Iwanaka had been foolish to expect he had a chance of convincing one of the girls; he wasn't that much of a smooth talker, and the girls already had a bad impression of him and his party. But of course, if Iwanaka and his friends had been smart enough to understand that, they wouldn't have tried hitting on the girls in the first place.

"They also threatened to kill us if we tried anything," said Iwanaka.

"Huh?! Did Shidou really say that?" Tokuoka asked.

"No, it was Kamiya and Nagai. Well, they implied it—they said the authorities can't crack down on crime outside of the town walls."

"Oh, that makes sense. There would be no witnesses outside of town and no way to tell exactly what happened if someone went missing," said Maeda. "People in town probably just assume that missing people were killed by monsters and don't bother searching for them."

"The same applies to the girls, though," said Tokuoka. "All we need to do is snatch them when they're outside of town."

"Do you think we can beat them in a fight?" Iwanaka asked. "It'll be the three of us against their party of five..."

Tokuoka and Maeda both paused in thought.

"Well, we have fewer numbers, but we have more experience than them," said Tokuoka. "Or we ought to, anyway."

"But they still have higher skill levels than us, right?" Maeda asked. "They must since they didn't spend their points on experience gain skills."

"Yeah, based on their reactions to us, that seems like the logical conclusion," said Tokuoka.

"If our goal is to kidnap the girls, we can't kill any of them in a fight," said Maeda. "Well, it should be okay if we accidentally cut off somebody's arms and legs."

"Nah, I don't like that idea," said Iwanaka. "I don't have an amputee fetish."

Iwanaka's party was assuming that Nao's party was still stuck doing herb-

gathering quests in the east forest and must therefore be weaker and less experienced than their own party. However, they were also somewhat wary of Nao's party since all five people had high-level combat skills that no one in Iwanaka's party did, so they weren't completely confident that the odds were in their favor.

"Ugh," said Tokuoka, "if we were stronger, we could just kill Kamiya and Nagai and make the girls ours," said Tokuoka.

"Don't you have the 10x EXP skill, Tokuoka?" Maeda asked. "Level up already."

"Believe me, I would if I could," Tokuoka replied. "However, this world doesn't have a clear level system, right? It seems like slaying goblins isn't enough to learn new skills."

"Yeah, it's hard to tell how many experience points we've gained since we can't see our character levels," said Iwanaka.

All three of them had skill builds composed mainly of EXP gain and aptitude skills. None of them had had enough points left over to obtain combat-related skills, so slaying even one goblin was still a challenge for them. In spite of their limitations, they had somehow managed to slay a few goblins, but none of them had felt any stronger as a result.

"People in this world don't know about character levels or skill levels, right?" asked Tokuoka. "We can see our skill levels on our status screens, though."

"Does the 10x EXP skill actually work?" Maeda asked.

"It should work. It's displayed in the status screen as a skill," said Iwanaka. "Or rather, if you think about it rationally, it's obvious that it should work."

Tokuoka frowned. "Huh? What do you mean by that?" he asked.

Iwanaka had a slightly smug look on his face as he explained. "Put it this way. We don't know exactly how this world works, so let's assume it operates on either a character level system or a skill level system. As an example of a character level system, think of a standard RPG like the *Dragon Quest* games. So far, we've slain some goblins, but goblins are considered one of the weakest monsters in this world. Now then, what would be the equivalent in *Dragon*

Quest?"

"Slimes, of course," said Maeda.

"Correct. Tokuoka here has slain the equivalent of a few dozen slimes," said Iwanaka. "Should he level up as a result?"

"Uh, yeah, he should. A few battles ought to be enough to level up, right?"

"Again, correct—but that's only for a character who's starting at Level 1."

"Huh?" Maeda looked a bit confused.

"We're considered adults in this world," said Iwanaka. "With that in mind, do you think that we're merely Level 1?"

"Uh, I guess it would make sense for us to be at a higher level," said Tokuoka.

"Precisely. For argument's sake, let's assume we're all around Level 10," said Iwanaka. "Now then, should it be possible for us to level up by slaying a few dozen slimes?"

"Nah, definitely not," said Maeda. "We'd probably need to slay hundreds or even thousands."

"Exactly. Ten times one is just ten, which isn't much experience gained per kill," said Iwanaka. "On top of that, if it were that easy to become stronger by slaying a few dozen goblins, then it would be strange that there are so many middle-aged adventurers in this town."

Middle-aged adventurers would participate in the same escort quests that Iwanaka's party generally took on; together, they would fight and slay any monsters like goblins that harried the lumberjacks of Laffan. That implied that those adventurers had probably slain more than a few hundred goblins across their entire lives as adventurers—and yet they were still doing menial escort quests for a living. If it were possible to become stronger just by slaying a few dozen goblins, it wouldn't make sense that those middle-aged adventurers were still hanging around Laffan. That was Iwanaka's theory, in any case, and his reasoning was somewhat sound.

"As for a skill level system, that's like in games where training or winning battles gives you experience points that you can use to level up your skills," said

Iwanaka. “We can see our skill levels in our status screens, so I think it’s likelier that this world operates on a skill level system rather than a character level system. How much training have you done with your sword, Tokuoka?”

Tokuoka had a bitter smile on his face; he scratched his head as he replied. “Uh, well, not much.”

“I figured as much. Now then, how much training do you think it takes for an amateur to become modestly skilled at wielding a sword? If one month of training were enough, you would have to do nothing but train for an entire month.”

“Ugh! I thought the 10x EXP skill would make it easy for me to get a harem!”

Iwanaka sighed; he had an exasperated look on his face. “The skill makes training ten times more effective, so I suggest making use of it. It’ll be a better use of your time than whoring.”

“Bro, are you serious? Sex costs less than one large silver coin! What kind of guy wouldn’t take that opportunity?!”

Tokuoka had discovered that prostitutes hung around the street corners in the area of town where their party was staying. The cheapest girls only cost the equivalent of a single meal. However, to make a living, prostitutes had to go through large numbers of men every day, so sex was generally brief and would take place in dark alleys, either standing up or on the ground on top of a cheap blanket.

“Streetwalkers are cheap, but they’re really dirty, and they all look kind of ugly,” said Maeda. “Although I guess looks don’t matter that much since you always meet them in dark alleys.”

If the prostitutes had heard Maeda’s assessment, they probably would have returned the compliment. Like Iwanaka, he had cleaned himself and shaved his facial hair, but he didn’t look that much better than before.

“Maeda, you pay for sex way more often than I do,” said Tokuoka. “Why don’t you hold it in for a few days and then pay a bit more when you go out? It’ll feel better that way.”

“There’s not that much of a difference between you two,” said Iwanaka.

“Why don’t you guys at least go to a brothel?” He sighed once again.

Tokuoka snorted. “That’s way too expensive, jackass. How many times have you fucked prostitutes in a brothel, Iwanaka? As far as I know, you’ve only gone a few times, but that was enough to use up most of your money, right?”

“Ugh! I mean, okay, you’re right, but that applies to both of you guys as well, doesn’t it? The moment you two have a little money, you hit the streets.”

“Hmph. This wouldn’t be an issue if you succeeded at bringing Shidou back to our room,” said Tokuoka.

“Yeah, we could’ve shared her,” said Maeda. “She’d probably feel way better than the average prostitute.”

“Mm, Kamiya and Nagai are a nuisance,” said Iwanaka.

“Especially Nagai,” said Tokuoka. “I can’t believe he’s gotten so muscular. Just how much training did he do?”

“On top of that, he’s also a beastman,” said Maeda. “If only they would split up into two groups...”

“Yeah, it’d be three on three if Kamiya and Nagai aren’t around,” said Tokuoka. “Iwanaka, which girl do you want dibs on?”

“Well, I’ll go with Azuma. She had better grades than me, so I always found her annoying. I want to make her scream with my meat as punishment!”

“I’ll go with Furumiya,” said Maeda. “The thought of her grimacing is enough to make me hard!”

“I guess that leaves me with Shidou,” said Tokuoka. “Well, I don’t mind tight little girls like her, so that works out.”

The plans they were discussing were criminal in this world, just as they would have been on Earth, but they didn’t seem to understand or care.

“Well, in any case, time is on our side thanks to our experience gain skills,” said Iwanaka. “We can just wait for an opportunity.”

“Yeah, you’re absolutely right,” said Tokuoka.

The three of them exchanged lecherous grins.



A day had passed since Iwanaka's party discussed their plans.

Maeda dashed back into their room. "Hey, wake up, Tokuoka!" he yelled, almost out of breath. Although it was evening, Tokuoka was already asleep, so Maeda slapped him awake. "You get ready too, Iwanaka!"

"Huh? What's up all of a sudden?" Tokuoka asked. "Aren't we taking a break today?"

On a side note, Iwanaka's party took a one-day break every two days or a two-day break every three days despite earning far less money than Nao's party. As a result, they had no savings, and their lives could fall apart at any moment.

"Forget about that! I found them!"

"What are you talking about, Maeda?" Iwanaka asked.

"I found Shidou and the other girls! They were walking around outside—just the three of them! Kamiya and Nagai weren't with them!"

"Seriously?! Wait, where did you find them?" Tokuoka asked. "It's a bad idea to attack them if there are a lot of other people around."

"Don't worry, they were walking in a fairly empty area!"

"This seems like a great opportunity for us," said Iwanaka. "As I said yesterday, time is on our side, but it'll be hard for us to find them again if they move to a different town."

"Right?! We probably won't get an opportunity like this again!"

It was true that this was an opportunity for them, but it was not a positive one. That much would have been obvious if they had remained calm and given the situation some thought, but they had lost all reason. They hastily grabbed their weapons and stood.

"Oh, wait, should we conceal our faces? It'd be bad if there were any witnesses," said Tokuoka.

"They're not citizens of Laffan, so even if they go missing, the authorities

probably won't investigate too deeply," said Maeda.

"Let's wrap some cloth around our faces just in case," said Iwanaka. "That should be enough to make it hard for people to recognize our faces from a distance."

Before leaving their inn, they wrapped some cloth around their faces, just as bandits would do. Contrary to their intentions, concealing their faces in fact made them look more suspicious. The inn that they were staying at wasn't the kind of place where anyone would care, but someone would most likely report them to the authorities if they kidnapped some girls and brought them back to the inn. That possibility apparently hadn't crossed their minds at all.

"There they are," said Maeda.

The three had leaped into action immediately, so they managed to find Haruka, Yuki, and Natsuki rather quickly. The girls hadn't moved too far from where Maeda had first seen them. They appeared to be enjoying their time and chatting with each other. They were carrying a fair amount of baggage, but they were wearing casual clothes and didn't have any weapons, so they looked like ordinary girls enjoying a walk around town.

"Should we attack now?" Tokuoka asked.

"No, let's wait and see," said Iwanaka. "Hopefully they move somewhere with fewer people around."

Iwanaka's party stalked the girls for a while, and eventually the girls arrived at an alley that was dark enough for the guys' purposes.

"Now!"

The three guys jumped out and surrounded the girls, then drew their weapons. They had expected the girls to be surprised and frightened, but instead, they sighed and responded with irritation.

"Ugh, I'm sick and tired of things like this happening every day!" Yuki exclaimed.

"Mm, I'm not going to put up with our days getting ruined," said Natsuki, "especially not when we're in a good mood."

“We would have ignored you stalking us if you hadn’t shown yourselves, but I guess now we have no choice,” said Haruka.

So apparently the girls had been aware that they were being followed. Iwanaka’s party had hoped to surprise them, but now they were the ones who reacted with surprise.

“Wait, did you notice us the entire time...?”

“How could we not notice?” Yuki asked. “Missing something that obvious would mean death in the woods, you know?”

“Ugh, I thought we could end today on a pleasant note, but that’s ruined now,” said Haruka. “Do you guys really want to die that badly?”

Haruka glared at Iwanaka’s party, and the guys flinched and almost backed off—but then they raised their voices to shore up their own confidence.

“Ha ha, enough with that tough act!” Maeda exclaimed. “Kamiya and Nagai aren’t here right now!”

“Yeah, exactly!” Tokuoka exclaimed. “Do you girls really think you can beat us unarmed?”

“Th-The smart thing to do would be to accept the situation you’re in and adjust your attitudes!” Iwanaka exclaimed.

Iwanaka’s party flashed their weapons as a threat, but all they received was an even colder reaction from the girls.

“Whoa, I can’t believe you guys are the kind of scum who would threaten girls to get your way,” said Yuki. “Are you guys not ashamed of yourselves at all?”

“I figured from the beginning that you guys were born vulgar,” said Natsuki, “but I never expected that you’d reveal yourselves as something even worse.”

“Would you guys happen to be actual idiots?” Haruka asked. “Actually, forget it. I’m sorry for asking when the answer is so obvious.”

“Y-You’ll regret making fun of us!” Tokuoka exclaimed. “We were willing to do things peacefully, but not anymore!”

“Mm, I guess we have no choice but to immobilize you before we bring you

back with us,” said Iwanaka.

“Yeah, this is the easier way!” Maeda exclaimed. “Let’s see how defiant you girls are after we break your arms!”

It was only natural that Iwanaka’s party would be furious when the girls glared at them coldly, as if they were idiots. However, the guys were foolish to assume that the girls would be easy to defeat.

“What’s the plan?” Haruka asked.

“I’ll deal with them,” said Natsuki. “Can you hold my baggage for me, Yuki?”

“Sure, no problem,” Yuki replied. “Since we’re still in town, make sure not to accidentally kill them, okay?”

“Mm, I’ll hold back,” said Natsuki.

“We’ll see about that!”

“Let’s do this!”

“Yeah!”

Iwanaka’s party was armed, but none of them had any weapon skills. On the other hand, Natsuki was unarmed but had Level 3 Martial Arts along with other skills such as Enhanced Muscles, Indomitable, and Greased Lightning. These skills meant that there was no way for Iwanaka’s party to beat Natsuki with raw strength, besides which they were distracted by anger. It only took ten seconds for Natsuki to beat up all three guys. After the beatdown was over, all they could do was lie on the ground and groan in pain.

“I-Impossible...!”

The outcome should have been obvious in advance, but as they looked up at Natsuki, Iwanaka’s party couldn’t believe what had just happened to them. Natsuki swiftly tied their arms and legs together using some thin strings in order to restrict their movements, then looked back at Haruka and Yuki.

“All right, what should we do with these guys?” Natsuki asked. “Should we just discard them somewhere?”

“Is there somewhere we can do that?” Yuki asked. “We’d probably get

stopped at the gates if we dragged them with us.”

“We could turn them in to the authorities, but this incident will probably just get treated as a fight between adventurers,” said Haruka.

“Oh yeah, you’re right about that,” said Yuki. “Maybe we should have allowed ourselves to get injured so we’d be taken more seriously.”

“I don’t think that would’ve been a good idea,” said Haruka. “What if those dirty weapons dealt you a wound that got infected?”

“True, but it doesn’t feel right to me to let them get off the hook so easily,” said Yuki. “They’ve ruined our mood three times now. They should pay for that.”

“Hmm. How about we crush them for good?” Natsuki asked. “Luckily for us, Nao-kun and Touya-kun aren’t around to witness it.”

Natsuki glanced at the guys’ crotches, so it was obvious which parts of their bodies she was suggesting for destruction. The three guys seemed to understand that their private parts were in danger; their faces went pale when they heard Natsuki’s words.

“Ew, disgusting! Can you do it for me, Natsuki?” Yuki asked. “I don’t want to get anywhere near them, even to crush them with my shoes.”

In spite of her words, Yuki made some *whoosh* sounds while aiming a few practice kicks in the air. Yuki had copied the Martial Arts skill from Natsuki, so her kicks were quite strong—strong enough, in fact, that they produced a whooshing sound on their own. A single direct hit would be lethal for any of the three guys. Their faces turned even paler as they watched her.

“Don’t worry, there are some tools lying around here that will be perfect for this purpose,” said Natsuki.

Natsuki pointed at the weapons that Iwanaka’s party had dropped when she beat them into submission. The weapons were of poor quality—Gantz would probably have treated them as scrap metal—but they would serve well enough as bludgeons. On top of that, the people that owned the weapons were the ones that had tried to assault the girls.

“Oh, I see. So you’re saying these guys ‘accidentally’ injured themselves with their own weapons since they didn’t know how to use them,” said Haruka.

“Mm. After all, practicing with weapons can be quite dangerous,” said Natsuki.

Haruka and Natsuki smiled at each other as they hinted at what they were going to do, and Maeda screamed in fear. “W-Were you girls always secretly like this?!”

“Of course,” said Yuki. “Haruka and Natsuki have no mercy for scum.”

“Aren’t you more or less the same as us, Yuki?” Haruka asked. “You were just better at hiding it.”

“Well, girls never show their true nature around boys, so that’s a given,” Yuki replied.

“Th-There are boys right here in front of you!” Tokuoka exclaimed.

Natsuki gave Tokuoka a perplexed look when she heard his rebuttal. “Boys? Oh, my mistake. I seem to have great difficulty registering that fact.”

“Or rather, we’re not sure if we should even consider you guys actual human beings with rights,” said Yuki. “In fact, you guys are even worse than insects.”

“Guys that try to assault and rape girls deserve nothing but death.” Haruka gave a sinister chuckle. Fear rendered all three guys speechless.

“Well, we don’t really try to hide our true personalities around Nao and Touya,” said Yuki. “I can’t exactly say the same for Natsuki, though.”

“Oh, is that what you think?” Natsuki asked. “I think I’ve acted quite naturally around them.”

“Are you sure about that? You wouldn’t have suggested the idea of ‘crushing’ these guys if Nao were around, right?”

“Hmm, I guess you’re right about that, Yuki. I would have probably said something like ‘Let’s castrate them’ or ‘Let’s turn them into eunuchs’ instead.”

“Both of those sentences mean the exact same thing! Oh well, let’s just get this over with and then head back. It’s going to get dark soon, after all.”

“W-Wait, hear us—”

“Be quiet, Iwanaka-kun,” said Yuki. “It’s not good to cause noise pollution, okay?”

Yuki picked up the sheath of one of the swords on the ground and used it to poke the cloth around Iwanaka’s face farther into his mouth. She did the same to Tokuoka and Maeda and stopped them from trying to crawl away.

“All right, who wants to do it?” This time, Yuki picked up one of the swords and swung it around. Her swings were definitely not those of an amateur.

Iwanaka and his party were shocked when they saw that Yuki knew how to wield a sword. Tears began to flow from their eyes.

“Yuki, you might kill them if you swing with that much force,” said Natsuki. “After all, you’d be swinging at a lethal spot of the body.”

“So I have to hold back a bit? That’s kind of difficult,” said Yuki. “Oh, how about we let them choose?”

“You mean let them choose who they want to get crushed by?” Natsuki asked. “Wouldn’t that be a bit too generous?”

“I mean, I feel like even these guys deserve to choose who they want to slice their ‘partners’ off, you know?”

“AAAGGGHHH!”

“See? They’re so happy and excited about this.”

The three guys were definitely not happy about saying goodbye to their “sons” for the rest of their lives. However, Yuki smiled when she saw their reactions, either because her sadistic switch had flipped on or because she was really angry about their recent actions.

“All right, hurry up and choose someone,” said Yuki. “It would be a waste not to choose when we’re giving you guys the chance.”

Yuki continued to swing the sword around, while Natsuki and Haruka folded their arms and glared down at the guys. Iwanaka’s party kept looking back and forth between the three girls.

“You guys can’t decide? Does that mean you guys want all of us to crush you?” Yuki asked.

“If that’s what you want,” said Natsuki, “I guess we have no choice.”

The three guys violently shook their heads, and then, at last, they all turned their gazes on one of the girls.



“Me?” Haruka asked. “Fine, I guess.”

Haruka sounded quite annoyed as she picked up one of the swords on the ground. She took it out of its sheath and then held the blade up in the air. Iwanaka’s party had probably chosen her because they assumed elves were physically weak. They had no way of knowing that their fate would have been the same regardless of who they chose. All three of the girls were strong enough to destroy a man’s symbol with ease. Haruka swung down the sword to end them.



Touya gulped in fear when the girls were done telling us what had happened. “Did you kill them...?”

“Of course not!” Haruka exclaimed. “They frothed at the mouths and fainted, but they’re still alive!”

“We abandoned them on a street corner, so once they can move again, they’ll probably just head back to their inn,” said Yuki.

“Mm, we healed them before we left, so they should be fine,” said Natsuki.

It sounded like the girls had left them sideways on the ground, so they probably wouldn’t choke to death on their own vomit. I doubted that the “sons” inside their pants had survived, but even as a fellow guy, I didn’t feel bad for them at all. They had drawn their weapons and surrounded the girls, so it was impossible to defend them.

“Well, even if they aren’t really guys anymore, I guess it doesn’t matter as long as they’re still alive,” said Touya.

“Yeah, that’s true,” I said. “In fact, it’s better that way for all the women out there in the world.”

“Huh? What do you guys mean?” Haruka asked.

“Oh, we’re just saying that now they can become the kind of men who are nice to women,” I replied. “Don’t worry about it, Haruka.”

I didn’t feel the need to go into detail, so I brushed the question off, even though Haruka looked a little bit displeased with my answer. I looked away

from her and saw that Yuki was smiling, so she probably understood what I was getting at.

“Well, I hope they learned their lesson and don’t bother us again,” said Yuki.

“Will the authorities not help us out?” I asked.

“Apparently it’s a gray area since we’re not actually citizens of Laffan,” said Haruka.

According to Haruka, adventurers did receive some forms of preferential treatment, including ease of entry into and exit from towns as well as exemption from poll taxes and corvée labor, but there were downsides as well. Adventurers had limited access to government services, and their social standing was lower than that of regular citizens, so adventurers would be at a disadvantage in a trial if they harmed a regular citizen.

“We discussed it with Diola-san, but she said that all she could do was issue a warning to Iwanaka’s party,” said Haruka.

Apparently the guild seldom revoked adventurers’ cards over conflicts like this without an eyewitness from the guild staff along with testimony from a third party. If the guild determined that a group of adventurers had committed malicious crimes, the guild would post bounties on their heads, but that usually wasn’t the case in fights between adventurers.

“In any case, there’s no point in worrying about it,” said Natsuki. “They’re not much of a threat to us. Let’s only deal with them again if we have to. If they attack us outside of town, then we can put an end to them for good.”

Whew, somehow I knew Natsuki would have harsh words and a cold smile.

However, Natsuki’s smile quickly turned gentle, and she turned and looked at me. “So what did you guys do today, Nao-kun?”

“Us? Uh, well, Touya and I gathered some rocks,” I replied. “We need to enclose a space for a kitchen garden, so we figured rocks would do the trick.”

“Oh, yeah, rocks would be a good substitute for bricks or cinder blocks!” Yuki exclaimed. “I’d love to make a flower bed as well, so an enclosed space would be great!”

“Oh, uh, actually, our attempts at finding proper rocks didn’t go so well,” I said. I explained in further detail what Touya and I had done today.

Haruka paused in thought before responding. “Rocks, huh? After our celebration, how about we go hunt giant salamanders as a way to relax for a bit? The quest is still available, and we can probably find a decent number of usable rocks in a mountain stream. That far away from town, we won’t bump into those guys either.”

“Oh, that sounds like a great idea!” Touya exclaimed.

“Yeah, I’m down for it too!” I exclaimed. “I’ve always wanted to try out stream fishing at least once in my life.”

I’d never had an opportunity to try it out back in Japan, besides which other problems like fishing rights had held me back. However, access didn’t seem to be an issue here in this world, so I wanted to give it a try if we were going to explore a mountain stream.

“This idea sounds fine to me as well,” said Natsuki. “We should be done with making clothes by tomorrow or the day afterwards, after all.”

“Yeah, same here,” said Yuki. “I’d love to eat some delicious fish like ayu sweetfish, especially since the first fish we had in this world was really bad...”

Yuki grimaced and sighed when she recalled the fish they’d had in Sarstedt. The flavor was definitely unforgettable.

“All right, that settles it,” said Haruka. “Nao, we’ll work on making clothes, so take Touya with you and go prepare everything we’ll need for a long trip. By that, I mean things like tents.”

“I think you guys could ask Diola-san for advice too,” said Yuki.

Haruka’s instructions made sense to me. There weren’t any proper camping facilities that we could stay at, so we would need to bring our own gear.

“Okay, we’ll get to that right away,” I replied. “I’ll discuss with Touya and figure out everything we need for a comfortable fishing trip.”

“Yeah, leave the preparations to us!” Touya exclaimed.

Touya and I looked at each other and nodded confidently.

Chapter 3—Fishing

The very next day, Touya and I got started with preparations for our trip.

“Where should we go first, Touya?” I asked. “Or rather, what do we need to buy?”

“Let’s go and see Diola-san first,” Touya replied.

“Huh? Why? I don’t think she sells camping equipment. It’d be nice if she did, but I doubt it.”

“That’s not what I mean! I’m suggesting that we go ask her for information first!”

“Yeah, I know—I was just making fun of you.”

We headed towards the Adventurers’ Guild. When we arrived, Diola-san greeted us with the same kind smile as always and happily answered our questions.

“The essential equipment for a camping trip? Well, at this time of year, you’ll certainly need winter clothes,” said Diola. “The area around Laffan never gets cold enough that you’d be at risk of dying of exposure, but there is the danger of catching a cold.”

“Would the Fire Magic spell Warmth work for that purpose?” I asked.

“That’s a convenient spell to have, but it doesn’t have any effect while you’re on the move. It could be useful if you were traveling in an enclosed space like a horse-drawn carriage, however,” said Diola. “I’ve heard that expert mages can maintain an area of warmth around themselves even while they’re moving, but given the risk of combat, it’s simpler just to prepare winter clothes.”

“Oh yeah, and come to think of it, you’d use up a lot of mana if you kept the spell going constantly,” I said.

It would probably be very comfortable to use the Warmth spell in the way that Diola-san had described, but it sounded like it wasn’t a good idea.

“As for a spell like Resist Cold, it’s meant to be used on other people, so it’ll work even while you’re moving,” said Diola. “However, once again, that doesn’t eliminate the need for winter clothes since you need to consider the possibility of exhausting your mana.”

“Yeah, freezing to death due to running out of mana doesn’t sound pleasant at all,” I said.

“Indeed. As far as other gear that would be good to have, I should mention cloaks that can shield you from the rain—and not just for camping; you never know when you might need to travel in the rain,” said Diola. “Traveling in the rain for a long time will drain your stamina, so cloaks are almost essential. A separate tent for taking shelter from the rain is nice to have as well.”

“A separate tent?” I asked.

“Yes. I mean a tent that’s no more than some poles and a canopy. Of course, you can hardly start a fire inside a regular tent, so it’s good to have a tent where you can start a fire for warmth,” said Diola. “Also, in the event that the ground is too sodden for you to start a fire, it’s good to have a camping stove as well as some cured firewood in your packs.”

“It sounds like you need a lot of different things for camping trips,” I said.

I could understand why we’d need all of the different equipment that Diola-san had mentioned, but it sounded like it would be way too much to carry around for adventurers who didn’t have magic bags like ours.

The same question must have crossed Touya’s mind; he asked Diola-san, “Wouldn’t it normally be impossible to lug around all of that stuff?”

“Yes, it would be quite difficult without a horse-drawn carriage. That is why I generally recommend that adventurers remain inside town when the weather turns bad—or that they avoid long trips altogether. Unfortunately, as a rule, adventurers who aren’t wealthy enough to own carriages can’t afford to take days off work either,” said Diola-san. “To make a living, they often have no choice but to work in the rain.”

“What should adventurers do in that case?” Touya asked. “For example, what if it suddenly starts raining while you’re outside?”

“You would need either to continue towards a town while being drenched by the rain, or cover yourselves with cloaks and wait for the rain to stop.”

Yikes, seriously? It sounded like it was possible that adventurers would have to cover themselves with raincoats and spend a night outside like that. The raincoats available in this world weren’t anywhere as good as the ones back on modern-day Earth, so it would probably be an even more painful experience. Spells such as Avoid Rain and Warmth seemed boring and mundane, but they were actually important for adventurers.

“However, smart adventurers know to factor in the weather as well as the distance between the nearest town and their destination, so they’re seldom caught out in the rain. As for what else comes to mind...I suppose tents, food, and blankets. Cooking utensils are nice to have as well,” said Diola. “Oh yes, and some large, thick capes can be quite handy. You can wear them when it’s cold, and you can also use them to cover the ground to rest on when it isn’t possible to erect a tent.”

I’d been counting on my memory of camping back on Earth to be of use while Touya and I considered what to purchase. I had gone camping back when I was a kid, but my parents had done all the necessary preparations, so I had no real experience. *Come on, brain! Recall those memories!*

“I ought to add—one thing that’s easy to forget is drinking water. The amount required scales with longer trips,” said Diola. “It’s important to do research beforehand and determine where along your route you can find water. You should also keep in mind the possibility that some sources of water will dry up.”

“Isn’t there a Water Magic spell called Create Water for making drinking water?” I asked.

“That spell will be of great use if you can use it, but relying on it is risky,” said Diola. “This is somewhat of an extreme example, but what will you do if your Water mage dies? Even if the circumstances are never quite that dire, it’s still important to consider the possibility that the mage may run out of mana or be rendered unconscious.”

“Oh, yeah, that’s a good point...”

It was important to avoid getting into that kind of situation in the first place,

but we also needed backup Water mages. Haruka had Water Magic and could learn Create Water by leveling up. Yuki also had the relevant aptitude skill, and I, as an elf, could learn Water Magic without the aptitude skill if I put in some effort. If we all managed to learn the Create Water spell, we would never need to worry about water again, and there would be no need to store up water for emergencies either; if all three of our Water mages ended up dead, it would probably be because the rest of the party was dead as well.

“Thank you for all of the information and advice, Diola-san,” I said. “We’ll make use of it in preparing for our trip.”

“I’m glad to be of help. Is your party going out on a long expedition?”

“Well, it’s not really an expedition, but now that we’ve earned enough money to pay for our house, we decided to go on a trip to catch greater salamanders as a way to take a break,” I replied. “Also, the girls got harassed by some other adventurers recently, so...”

“Yes, they told me about that incident. I apologize that I couldn’t be of more help,” said Diola. “It would have been easy to deal with the problem if it had happened inside of the guild building, but...”

Diola-san sighed and looked apologetic, but Touya and I shook our heads in response.

“Oh, you don’t have to feel responsible at all, Diola-san,” I said. “Right, Touya?”

“Yeah, don’t worry about it,” said Touya. “Part of the reason we’re going on a trip is to dodge further troubles with those guys for a while. We’ll bring some souvenirs back with us, so you can look forward to that.”

“Heh heh, I’ll keep that in mind,” said Diola-san. “Take care of yourselves when outside of town.”

“Of course. Thank you again for all the help,” I said.

Diola-san saw us off with a gentle smile as we headed out of the guild together. As we went from store to store, heeding Diola-san’s advice about the most important purchases, we both did our best to recall our camping trips back on Earth. Most of what we purchased was equipment that Diola-san had

recommended, but we also bought some miscellaneous goods such as ropes and cloth that we could use for all sorts of purposes. There weren't that many different products available in this world, so the lack of options meant that we didn't have to worry that much about what to get.

"Do we only need one tent?" Touya asked.

"I'd normally say we should get two tents to split between us and the girls, but it's not like we're going to be camping out in a safe place," I said. "Two of us will need to be awake at all times for lookout duty, and it's not like we'll need to change our clothes either." We could just purchase another tent later if the girls told us they thought it was absolutely necessary.

Recently, we'd been able to afford casual clothes to wear on our days off, but when we first arrived in this world, we hadn't had any spare clothes at all. It hadn't been a problem thanks to Haruka's Purification spell, which we still relied on to cleanse ourselves. This trip would be somewhat of a break, but we still had to bring our regular equipment with us since we were going outside of town.

"All right, in that case, that should be it for the essential stuff," said Touya. "Let's go get recreational goods for leisure purposes now!"

"Leisure purposes?" I asked. "Do you mean things like a ball and a Frisbee since you have doglike traits?"

"No, I'm talking about fishing rods!" Touya exclaimed. "We need them for stream fishing, right? Also, I'm a wolf, not a dog!"

That's what bothers you about my statement?

Stream fishing was a leisure activity, so Touya's words made sense to me. However, what I was really looking forward to was the aftermath. The thought of cooking the fish we caught and grilling them with salt was enough to make my mouth water.

"Right, we definitely need fishing rods. But, Touya, do you recall seeing fishing rods sold anywhere in this town?"

"Uh, nope..."

Same. I hadn't seen a tackle shop in this town, and general goods stores didn't sell fishing rods either. We had checked the local stores carefully for anything we could use on our camping trip, so I was fairly sure that we hadn't missed any fishing rods.

"Well, let's get our hands on some hooks first," I said. "We can use other things for the rods themselves."

"Yeah, good point," said Touya. "Let's head to Gantz-san's place."

We had assumed that we would be able to find hooks at Gantz-san's store since they were a metal product, but...

"Fishhooks? I don't make them here, and they wouldn't sell if I did," said Gantz.

"They don't sell?" I asked.

"Nope. Who would buy them? There's nowhere near this town to relax and enjoy fishing," said Gantz. "It might be different near Sarstedt, but out there they use nets."

According to Gantz-san, the waters around Sarstedt were the exclusive territory of the local fishermen, and you would get punished if you tried to use a fishing rod at the port without permission. It was fine to fish upstream of the Noria River where we were planning to go, but very few adventurers were capable of fishing in that area, so the demand for fishhooks was low.

"What about fishing rods, then?" Touya asked.

"I doubt anyone in this area sells them. You can make one yourself by cutting a switch from a tree."

It would probably be too much to ask for a fishing rod made of carbon fiber, but we wanted to get our hands on some rods that were at least made of a sturdy, flexible material like bamboo. If there weren't any fishing rods or hooks available, then we probably wouldn't be able to find any reels either. *Actually, though, I don't think we absolutely need reels for stream fishing.*

"Well, if you need fishhooks, you can get Tomi to make them for you," said Gantz. He still sounded amazed that we wanted fishing tools, but he pointed to

the back of the store with his chin. “I’ll provide the materials, and it’ll be a good change of pace for him.”

“Oh, thanks, that’d be great,” said Touya.

We thanked Gantz-san and went into the forge, where we saw Tomi working hard on shovels. They must have been in demand, there were dozens of shovel blades lined up on the ground.

We waited until Tomi had reached a good stopping point before Touya spoke to him. “Hey, Tomi.”

“Oh, hey, Touya-kun and Nao-kun.” He set the tools he was using on the ground. He was smiling when he replied to us, but he looked a bit exhausted.

“Are the shovels selling well?” Touya asked.

“Yeah, luckily,” Tomi replied. “The kodachi you guys ordered the other day were a good change of pace for me, but now I’m feeling a bit tired of making nothing but shovels again...”

“That’s just what a job is,” I said. “Most jobs consist of repeating the same tasks day after day.”

“I understand that, of course,” said Tomi. “It’s better than having to live in the slums.”

Another way to phrase it was that a job would at least pay you even if all you did was the same task over and over. It was hard to come by jobs that would both pay you well and allow you to take on new challenges from time to time, at least not without the threat of getting fired if you failed.

“Actually, though, Tomi, we have some good news for you on that front,” said Touya. “Can you make some fishhooks for us?”

“You’re going fishing?! That sounds great!”

“Oh, do you enjoy fishing, Tomi?” I asked.

“Yeah! I enjoyed both sea and river fishing back on Earth, although I didn’t get to do it as often as I would have liked.”

I was a little surprised to hear that. Of course, we hadn’t known each other

well, so I didn't know much about Tomi's hobbies.

"So, what are you guys aiming to catch?" Tomi asked.

"We don't know if we'll find any, but we're aiming for yamame trout, char, and ayu sweetfish," I replied.

"Do you guys want the hooks barbed?"

"Huh?" I asked. "Are there fishhooks that have no barbs?"

"Yeah. You use hooks without barbs when you plan on catch and release fishing."

"In that case, we definitely want barbed fishhooks, since we plan on eating the fish we catch." *There's no way we would release them!*

"Tomi, I'd like to try using a fly lure," said Touya. "Is that something you could make?"

"Yeah. I usually made fly lures myself using thread and bird feathers rather than buying them," Tomi replied. "However, I don't think you'll be able to catch many sweetfish using fly lures. If you want to catch sweetfish, then using a regular fishing lure or a live decoy would be better."

"Oh, I've heard of the live decoy method before," I said.

The decoy method involved using a live sweetfish as bait, since sweetfish were very territorial and would attack the bait fish. In essence, the bait fish was a false friend that was actually the enemy of the other sweetfish.

"A lure is simpler to use, but to make one, you need to know for sure what kinds of fish there are at your fishing spot," said Tomi. "Otherwise, it's possible that your haul might end up not being any good."

According to Tomi, there were a lot of different types of lures depending on what kind of fish you wanted to catch, so it was important to do your research in advance.

"I see. I guess fishing is more complex than I thought," I said.

"Do you guys want me to make a regular fishing hook and lures as well?" Tomi asked.

“Yeah, sure, we’ll go with that,” I said. “Oh yeah, can you teach us how to make fly lures back at our inn later this evening?”

Tomi happily accepted my request. “Sure, I don’t mind.”

“Do you know how to make regular lures as well?” I asked.

“Um, I don’t have any experience with that kind of lure,” Tomi replied. “You’ll probably have to craft one out of wood, but...”

It sounded like it would be hard to make, but there was no harm in trying since we were mainly fishing for fun. It would be a good experience even if we didn’t catch much.

“What about the fishing rods?” Tomi asked. “Are there any materials you can create with alchemy that would be good for fishing rods?”

“Well, I don’t know,” I replied. “We were just planning to use some random wood from the forest.”

“Believe me, that’s a bad idea!” Tomi exclaimed. “Listen, you don’t absolutely need a reel for river fishing, but fishing with a bad rod will make things way harder. Unfortunately, there probably aren’t any good quality lines in this world either.”

According to Tomi, fishing rods had to be flexible to a certain extent or else the line could easily snap.

“I see. I guess we’ll go ask Simon-san about what materials we can use for lures and rods,” I said. “Thanks for all the advice, Tomi.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Tomi replied, and then asked hesitantly, “Oh, um, by the way...can I tag along with you guys on your fishing trip?”

I exchanged a glance with Touya. The trip we were planning was something of a vacation, so even if we let Tomi tag along, it wasn’t like he would be getting in the way of our adventurer work. However, the problem was that our destination was someplace we had never been before, so we couldn’t know how dangerous it would be.

“It sounds like you have a lot of experience fishing, so we’d love to have you tag along if we knew for sure that we were going someplace safe,” I said.

“However...”

“Yeah, we don’t know if you can survive the place where we’re going.”

“W-Wait, are you guys going somewhere dangerous to fish?” Tomi sounded surprised.

I shook my head. “No, we don’t know one way or another how dangerous it will be. It’s not a place that most people can easily get to, after all.”

“That definitely sounds dangerous!” Tomi exclaimed.

“Well, yeah, ordinary citizens would get killed instantly if they came across monsters like orcs there or along the way,” said Touya.

Even a regular animal like a tusk boar could be very dangerous depending on the situation. In fact, they had been very dangerous for us when we’d first been transported to this world.

“Um, how strong would I have to be in order to tag along with you guys?”

Touya and I stared at Tomi in surprise.

“Wait, you’re willing to put your life at risk to go fishing, Tomi?” Touya asked.

“Do you enjoy fishing that much, Tomi?” I asked.

We had no reason to expect we would die on this trip unless something went horribly wrong, but in Tomi’s place, I would never have put my life on the line. Fishing was just a leisure activity for us, and it wasn’t like we could get rich from selling the fish we caught.

“Well, yeah, I enjoy fishing, but it’s more like that I don’t want to do blacksmithing all the time,” Tomi replied. “I do enjoy this work, but I’d like a change of pace every once in a while.”

“Do you mean you want something else to do in order to relax and enjoy yourself?” I asked.

“Yeah. There aren’t many forms of entertainment available in this world, after all.”

I knew exactly how Tomi felt. In fact, when we ourselves had first gotten some free time, we hadn’t immediately been able to think of what to do.

“I see. Well, again, we don’t know for sure how dangerous this place will be, but I’d say you should at least be strong enough to slay a hobgoblin by yourself,” said Touya.

“In addition, you should train yourself so that you can sustain a decent running speed for at least half a day,” I said.

“I understand what you guys mean by being strong enough to slay a hobgoblin, but what do you mean by running for half a day?” Tomi asked.

It’s more important than you might think. “For example, if you come across a strong foe, you’ll have to run away, right? We don’t plan on ever challenging a foe that’s strong enough that we’d struggle to beat it even if we gave it our all.”

“Yeah, fleeing is the better option with any enemy that risky,” said Touya. “There’s no point in forcing yourself to fight if it’s possible to retreat.”

There was no priority higher than survival, so taking risks against powerful foes would be the wrong move strategically. In fiction, it was entertaining to read about characters fighting impossible odds all the time, but this was reality. Our goal was to only fight enemies that were roughly as strong as us or weaker.

“So yeah, if we had to flee from a powerful monster, we’d have to leave you behind if you couldn’t keep up with us,” I said.

“Yeah, we’d ditch you without hesitation rather than put our lives at risk for you, Tomi,” said Touya.

“Starting today, I’ll start running for training!” Tomi exclaimed.

He sounded like he wasn’t going to abandon the idea of fishing even though we had warned him, so I was willing to admit that he had some guts.

“Good luck with that. Running for half a day might sound easy, but keep at it until you can also maintain a decent pace,” I said. “You’ll need to be as fast as you can if things get dangerous.”

Tomi tilted his head out of confusion. “Huh? Is it okay for me to be the first to flee?”

Touya and I both nodded.

“It’d actually be better for us if you were the first,” I said.

“Yeah, you’d cause more trouble for us if you hesitated,” said Touya.

A fighting retreat would be much more difficult with Tomi in the mix since he wasn’t used to coordinating with us. If we fled at the same time, he would probably fall behind pretty quickly too. However, I would feel bad if we had to abandon him, so it would be easier for us if he was the first one to run away in times of danger.

“Feel free to ask us for advice if you need it,” said Touya. “As long as we have the free time, we’ll be happy to tag along with you while you practice slaying goblins.”

“Thank you for the offer,” said Tomi. “I might ask you guys when I have some free time as well.”

“Sure, that sounds good,” I said. “All right, we’re counting on you for the fishhooks. You can bring them directly to us at the inn.”

“Okay, I’ll bring them over tonight,” said Tomi. “You can count on me to make some good-quality ones!”

Tomi looked quite excited and confident as he turned back towards the forge.

Later in the day, Touya and I asked Simon-san about fishing equipment, since he was an expert on wood carving; we used Tomi’s advice as a point of reference. Simon-san told us what kinds of materials we would need for a fishing rod and lure, and he also told us what kind of tools we would need to make them. He offered to help us make the equipment, but we turned him down; it would have felt somehow wrong to rely on a professional’s help for something we were doing as a hobby.

Afterwards, Touya and I went to purchase materials like bird feathers at the butcher and thread at the general goods store. Once we were done gathering these materials, we headed back to our inn and started to work on the fly lures. We both struggled with the process.

When Tomi got off work, he dropped by. “Hey, I have the goods that you guys requested.”

“Oh, thanks,” I replied. “Did you manage to make some good equipment?”

“Honestly, there’s room to improve, but this is the best I can do for now,” said Tomi.

The fishhooks that Tomi placed on the table in front of me looked quite decent, so I had no reason to complain. He had made a variety of different sizes that we could use for catching yamame trout as well as larger hooks for fish like salmon, although we weren’t planning on it this trip. It seemed to me that the fishhooks in front of me were just as good as the ones that you could buy in a store back in Japan, though I’d never actually examined a fishhook before since I had no previous experience with fishing at all.

“So what’s wrong with these fishhooks?” I asked.

“The thinness of the hook and the strength of the barb,” Tomi replied. “This is the best I can do with my current techniques.”

I wasn’t sure what he was talking about. It seemed like Tomi was only dissatisfied because he was an experienced fisherman. However, we were just fishing for fun, so these hooks would almost certainly do fine.

“Are you guys trying to make some fly lures right now?” Tomi asked.

“Yeah,” I replied. “We’re nowhere close, though.”

We had managed to shape the materials into something like a spindle, but they still looked more or less like blocks of wood. It was up to us to carve this wood into fish shapes, but I wasn’t exactly confident in my own artistic abilities.

“You don’t have to get the shape too precise. All you need to do is reproduce the reflection of a fish’s scales. That should be enough depending on how you attempt to fish,” said Tomi.

“At least, that’s what I’ve heard. I don’t know if it’s actually true or not.”

“The reflection of the scales? That sounds quite difficult to reproduce...”

“I think the best thing you can do for this here would be to stick some metallic foil to the wood,” said Tomi. “By the way, do you guys have landing nets as well? You need nets or the fish will get away easily.”

“Landing nets? Are they absolutely necessary?” Touya asked.

“Fish will violently flail around when you pull them out of water, so they can

fall off the hook sometimes,” said Tomi. “It’s better to get them inside of a landing net before you pull them out of the water.”

Oh, that’s some really good advice. I guess that’s to be expected from someone with fishing experience.

“We couldn’t find any landing nets for sale in stores,” I said. “Should we try to make some ourselves, Touya?”

“Yeah, sure,” Touya replied. “We can buy some thin rope to use for knitting the net. We’ll need net mesh and a handle, so…”

“Oh, I’ll take care of the frame,” said Tomi. “Any kind of wood will do for the handle.”

“That’d be great, Tomi!” I exclaimed.

Wire wasn’t available in this world, which was a problem for making landing nets. It would probably be difficult to produce wire by hand due to the tedious process of drawing metal back and forth through a small hole in a draw plate, but the demand from ordinary people was probably low.

Tomi chuckled when I thanked him for the help that he had offered. “Don’t worry about it. I’m just giving you guys more reasons to take me along fishing once I’m strong enough.”

We had no qualms about taking Tomi along with us as long as we could guarantee our safety when traveling together as a group. In fact, it would be great if we could take him along since we could make use of his fishing experience.

“Yeah, we’ll take you with us when you’re ready,” said Touya. “Well, that’s if we can confirm the place we’re going isn’t dangerous.”

“Mm, if we never return, assume it was too dangerous,” I said.

“Don’t say such ominous things!” Tomi exclaimed. “Didn’t you guys say you would flee from danger?! I don’t want people that I became friends with to die!”

I shrugged and chuckled when I heard how panicked Tomi sounded. “Relax, we don’t plan on dying. I’m just saying that the risk of death is never zero in this

world.”

We were now capable of slaying orcs without much difficulty, but orcs were considered a fairly weak type of monster, at least compared to the other ones out there. It wasn't like each location in this world only had one type of monster wandering around, so if we were unlucky, it was possible that we'd come across an incredibly strong monster and instantly die. My Scout skill was useful for avoiding that fate, but it wouldn't allow us enough time to flee if strong monsters were capable of scouting us out from farther away than my skill could detect them. In that situation, speed would be the factor that decided whether we could avoid combat. We would have no choice but to confront a strong monster head-on if we were slower than it; unlike regular animals, monsters were all very aggressive towards people.

“It sounds like sightseeing tours are impossible in this world,” said Tomi.

“Eh, I think you could do some tourism if you had the money,” I said. “You could just hire a lot of high-rank adventurers as bodyguards.”

“I don't think that's a realistic option at all. Well, I guess the best option is to keep training until I'm strong enough to safely travel the highways.” Tomi sighed in disappointment but then pulled himself together. “By the way, about these fly lures, what's the plan? Do you guys need them done soon?”

“Yeah, ideally, if that's possible for you,” I said. “We plan on going fishing around two days later.”

“That's not much time left, then,” said Tomi. “You'll need thread and bird feathers for fly lures. Do you guys have some?”

“Yeah, we got what we could to prepare,” I replied. “Will the stuff we gathered do all right?”

“These look like they'll do, yeah. All right, the first thing you need to do is to lock the fishhook in place to make it easier to work on. You'd usually use a vise, but we don't have one, so can I use this block of wood here?”

I nodded in response, and Tomi split the block of wood in half before placing a fishhook in the middle and tying the halves together with some string.

“The next thing you need to do is use bird feathers and thread to tie an

artificial fly onto the hook. I should look like an aquatic bug,” said Tomi. “It’s up to you how you want to shape it, so just do something like this, and then...”

Tomi cut the bird feathers into small parts and ripped them up before using some thread to tie the feathers onto the fishhook.

“That should do it,” said Tomi. “Does it look like a bug to you guys?”

“Whoa, yeah!” I exclaimed. “It kinda does!”

I wasn’t sure if it resembled a specific real species of bug, but on the end of the fishhook, it definitely looked like some kind of winged bug.

“Do you only need one fly lure for fishing?” Touya asked.

“Some people make a bunch of different types of fly lures, and you can freely take them on and off,” Tomi replied. “Also, the lure will wear down with use, so having more than one is a good idea.”

“That makes sense.”

It made sense that fly lures would get damaged over time since you would be casting them into rivers for fish to bite onto.

“I guess we’ll try to make a few fly lures,” I said. “Can you teach me and Touya how to make them?”

“Sure, no problem,” Tomi replied. “I’m not that good at it myself, though.”

Tomi was humble about his abilities, but his instructions were accurate and clear, so we managed to make several fly lures within one day. The next day, while the girls were busy making clothes, we worked on fishing lures. Carving wood the entire time would have been exhausting, so for a change of pace, we worked on knitting the landing nets from time to time.

By noon, we’d produced some fish shapes. They didn’t look great, but as I continued working, I told myself it wasn’t that bad for an amateur. I coated the wood with varnish, sprinkled it with some yellow powder, and then applied another layer of varnish in order to suggest scales. I hadn’t thought we would be able to obtain the kind of varnish that we needed for fishing lures, but thanks to Simon-san’s professional knowledge, we had. He’d told us about a form of varnish that was strong and waterproof, though we didn’t know what

the raw materials were. It was a bit expensive, but we were able to afford it since we didn't need that much of it. To complete the lures, we then attached the fishhooks and happily went to show the girls what we had made.

We were met with lukewarm reactions.

"I guess you can say they look decent," said Natsuki.

"Well, you guys definitely put in some effort," said Yuki.

"The lures don't look like fish at all," said Haruka.

Natsuki's words were the kindest, and Yuki only praised our effort rather than the results. As for Haruka, she didn't mince her words at all. I was a bit hurt, but she was being honest, so when I reflected on that fact, it was actually Natsuki's words that pained me the most.

"Do you girls think these won't work at all as fishing lures?" I asked.

"I'm not sure," said Haruka. "I don't know much about fishing either, so..."

"Does it really matter even if it doesn't work?" Yuki asked. "This is just for fun, right?"

"I mean, yeah, but it would be nice to have the opportunity to eat fish, wouldn't it?" I asked.

"True. I guess I'll think of something to do on my end as well..."

We had prepared fishing rods, fly lures, and fishing lures. I wanted to hope that we would catch at least some fish, but we were amateurs, so it was possible that we would catch nothing at all. *If it looks like we aren't going to catch anything, maybe we can just wield the landing nets with brute strength.*

"More importantly, it's almost time for our reservation at Aera-san's café," said Haruka. "Are you guys ready?"

"Yeah. Or rather, there wasn't anything that we really needed to do in order to get ready," I replied.

Our celebratory dinner at Aera-san's café was just a small gathering among friends, so it wasn't like we needed to dress up for the occasion. All we had to do before we left was clean our room; it had gotten messy while we were

making lures.

“Man, I’m really looking forward to Aera-san’s cooking,” said Touya. “I’m sure it’ll taste good since it’s a bit expensive!”

The girls seemed equally excited at the prospect; they all rose to their feet.

“Let’s start cleaning up our work as well, Haruka,” said Natsuki. “There’s a lot of lint scattered on the floor, after all.”

“Good point. All right, let’s meet below once we’re all ready.”

Once we were done cleaning, we went to Aera-san’s café. The dishes she served us were absolutely delicious. Back on Earth, the amount of money we had paid for dinner would have probably bought even more luxurious food, but there was no point in comparing the two very different situations. I felt quite satisfied simply because it was my first time eating some of the rare dishes that Aera-san served. On top of that, it was also good to know that there was delicious food somewhere in this world as long as we had the money. However, it seemed like Aera-san had offered us dishes at a price that was more or less equivalent to the cost of the ingredients, so getting an equally good meal at another place would have probably cost us two or three times the amount of money we had paid here. That would drive the price up to about one hundred thousand yen per person, which wasn’t something we could easily afford. We had splurged this time, but even a tenth of that price would have made me shake with fear; I was a middle-class person at heart. With that in mind, it would probably be difficult to find other places where we could get delicious meals for reasonable prices, so I wanted to hope that homemade meals prepared by the girls could serve as a replacement for that.



The day after our celebration at Aera-san’s place, we headed out to catch giant salamanders—and to try fishing while we were at it. We went east of Laffan towards Sarstedt and then, when Sarstedt came into view, swung north towards the upstream area of the Noria River. The river became a lot narrower upstream, and the volume of water decreased as well.

Yuki seemed to be a bit confused at the sudden change in the river. “This river doesn’t have any tributaries, right? Why was it so big downstream?”

“I’m not sure, but maybe it’s similar to a subterranean river,” said Haruka.

“Oh, yeah, I guess that would make sense since the mountains are quite deep.”

A mountain range stretched north of Laffan all the way to Sarstedt, but there weren’t any rivers in that area. The rain in this area was probably channeled into one place, resulting in the Noria River.

“I don’t really get how it works, but all that matters is that it exists, right?” Touya asked.

“Well, yeah, that’s one way to put it,” I said. “However, wouldn’t it be easy to get access to water around here by digging wells? Why hasn’t this area been turned into farmland?”

The farmland of Laffan was concentrated on the south side of the town, and there wasn’t much of it. The grassy plains east of Laffan weren’t that dangerous, so I didn’t really understand why the land hadn’t been cultivated here.

“It’s probably just because there aren’t enough agricultural workers,” said Haruka. “Laffan’s main industry is furniture, so they probably just purchase imported crops. Agricultural land development will probably reach here naturally once Laffan grows in population and land for people runs out.”

“Oh, so Laffan is a town that’s still in the middle of development,” I said.

Also, the main city of this territory was located south of Laffan, so agricultural land development had probably started from there. If Laffan’s growth was currently stable, then it was possible that the ruler of this territory didn’t see any need to bring people in and develop the lands to the east, which would come with certain risks. However, I wasn’t sure if this was the right policy or not from the perspective of the people in power.

“More importantly, let’s talk about the quest that we took on,” said Haruka. “Where do giant salamanders start to appear?”

“According to the materials that I read, you can find them an hour or more upstream from Sarstedt,” said Natsuki. “However...”

“That’s some pretty ambiguous information,” said Yuki.

“Yeah, it really is,” I said. “The amount of time required to reach a specific spot can differ a lot since some people are a lot physically stronger than others.”

The information wasn’t based on a standard like “five minutes from a train station,” but it had come from the reference room of the Adventurers’ Guild, so the speed estimated was probably that of an average adventurer.

“We’ve already been walking for at least an hour by now, right?” Touya asked.

“Yeah, so we should arrive at the habitat of the giant salamanders any time now,” said Yuki.

The ratio of river sand to rocks had been about seven to three near Sarstedt, but it was about four to six where we were now. The waters of the river were quite clear as well, not murky from mud like they were near Sarstedt.

“Does your Scout skill detect anything, Nao?” Touya asked.

“I can’t really tell,” I replied. “Oh yeah, do giant salamanders swim in the river, or do they hide under rocks?”

“Uh, I’m not sure. Do you know, Natsuki?”

“If I recall correctly, giant salamanders back on Earth were nocturnal, but it might be different in this world,” Natsuki replied. “There wasn’t any information within the reference room materials...”

Hmm. There probably hasn’t been much research done on monsters in this world, and most likely the same goes for regular animals.

We continued to observe the river as we made our way upstream for another thirty minutes. We had reached an area where the ratio of river sand to rock was two to eight when I heard one of us exclaim “Oh!” At the same time, a spear shot out from beside me and plunged into the river, then pulled up something that it had stabbed. It was an animal that was twitching around; it looked like a combination of a catfish and lizard, and its body was black and flat.

“This looks like a giant salamander,” said Natsuki.

Natsuki was the one who had slain the salamander. I used my Help Guide skill on it to make sure, and Giant Salamander was the name that popped up in the display window. It was about eighty centimeters long, so it wasn't that much different from the kind of giant salamander that I was familiar with, but it looked a bit grotesque to me.

"I'm surprised you noticed it," said Haruka. "It was technically within sight for me as well, but I didn't notice."

"Yeah, same here," I said. "I was right next to Natsuki too..."

The fish swimming in the river had caught my eye, but the giant salamander had somehow slipped past me in spite of its size.

"Light is reflected off the river, so its color makes it hard to see," said Haruka. "Let's store this salamander before doing anything else."

"Right, we should do that," I said.

It was apparently important for the quest that the salamander be as fresh as possible, so Haruka cooled it before throwing it into one of our magic bags. We had technically set out here for a little vacation, but there was no reason to skip out on earning money if it was right in front of us, especially since one giant salamander would fetch us at least twenty gold coins if we stored it properly.

"I couldn't find any giant salamanders either, but it seems weirder in your case, Nao," said Yuki. "Did your Scout Skill not pick up on it at all?"

"Nah, things weren't very clear to me. The signals that my Scout skill picked up were quite weak," I replied. "There were some signals in the river, but maybe it doesn't work well on creatures that aren't hostile."

The Scout skill was capable of detecting hostile creatures, but it was hard to notice signals that weren't dangerous if you weren't focused. On the other hand, a skill that could detect every creature within range would make it quite annoying to filter through all the information, so I had no problems with the way my Scout skill worked.

"What about you, Touya?" I asked. "Can you detect anything on your end?"

"Nope, not at all," Touya replied. "My method of detecting things is via

instincts instead of a skill like yours, so I doubt I can detect anything underwater—I can't use my sense of smell."

Touya's method of scouting was probably a combination of sight, hearing, and smell, so one or two of those factors being unavailable would make it hard for him to notice giant salamanders in the river.

"Let me try focusing and see if it works," I said. "Hmm, maybe this is one?"

I'd detected something behind a rock. When I went over to take a look, I saw some blackish, slimy animal. It was smaller than the giant salamander that Natsuki had slain just now, and the name that was displayed in the Help Guide was Poison Toad. The name told you everything you really needed to know. I found it to be a bit creepy and disgusting; it was a bit bigger than something like a bullfrog.

"Oh, did you manage to—huh?! Th-This isn't one at all!" Haruka angrily exclaimed.

Haruka had come up behind me to take a look as well. Apparently she wasn't pleased. I felt like the giant salamanders looked just as disgusting, but she was probably angry since this toad had caught her by surprise.

"Nao, that toad looks poisonous, so be careful," said Touya.

"I know that it's poisonous from its name alone, but is it dangerous just to touch it?" *I wonder if this toad bites or spits poison.*

"Poison toads aren't actually that dangerous," said Natsuki. "You can break out into a rash if your hands come into contact with your eyes after touching one or if your skin is weak, but they're actually edible despite their name."

"Seriously...?"

"Yeah, seriously."

According to Natsuki, poison toads could be consumed as food if you washed them properly and cooked them thoroughly with fire, but they weren't commonly eaten since you had to be careful with your hands while preparing them.

"They apparently don't have much flavor, so there probably aren't many

people who go out of their way to catch them,” said Natsuki.

“On the other hand, does that mean giant salamanders taste delicious since someone was willing to issue a hunt quest for them?” Touya asked.

“Neither one looks very good at a glance, but I guess there has to be some reason why the bounty per salamander is so much. Okay, time to try again.” I turned over a rock. “Let’s see if there’s one here—oh!”

I used my spear to hold down the animal that was under the rock. It was about fifty centimeters long and resembled a softshell turtle from Earth.

“Ha ha, wrong again!” Touya exclaimed. “A softshell turtle this time, huh? Let me try something.”

Touya grabbed a nearby branch and slapped the softshell turtle, which extended its neck far longer than I had expected and bit the branch.

“Whoa, it’s got a strong bite. Actually, it’s ridiculously strong...”

Even when Touya tried to pull the branch back, the softshell turtle didn’t let go at all. In fact, the wooden branch, which was thicker than my thumb, snapped in half. *Yikes, just how strong is its bite?*

Yuki came over to take a closer look when she saw that it had broken the branch. She seemed quite scared by the sight. “I bet this turtle could bite our fingers off no problem...”

“It’d definitely be dangerous for an ordinary person,” said Natsuki. “Adventurers like us should be fine, but that’s no reason to let our guard down.”

“Are these the kind of softshell turtles I’m thinking of?” I asked. “You know, the edible ones?”

“Yeah, I’ve heard about softshell turtles being served as fine cuisine back in Sarstedt,” Natsuki replied.

According to Natsuki, softshell turtles could be found near Sarstedt as well, so they were on the menu at inns. However, I wasn’t sure if they would actually taste good considering how bad the meals at that inn had been.

“I’ve never actually eaten softshell turtle before,” said Haruka. “Do they taste

good?”

Haruka looked at all of us as she asked, and we all shook our heads in response aside from one person. Softshell turtles weren't exactly the kind of food that would commonly show up in regular households. I had always imagined them as fine cuisine that you'd have to get at a restaurant. As a result, I'd never come across any softshell turtles as food back on Earth.

Natsuki was the only one who hadn't shaken her head in response to Haruka's question. "They don't exactly look like it, but they are delicious."

"Oh, so they do taste good," I said. "I wonder why Japanese people are okay with eating softshell turtles but not frogs." *Aren't they more or less the same in terms of being an odd-looking delicacy?*

"It's probably because frogs don't taste that good in general," said Haruka. "Japanese people will eat anything as long as it tastes good."

Haruka's opinion made perfect sense to me; Japanese people would even eat things like sea cucumbers. I had heard before that they tasted similar to chicken, but if that were really the case, I felt like chicken itself would suffice.

"If they taste good, I kind of want to try eating some softshell turtle," said Yuki. "Does anyone here know how to cook them? I wonder if the Cooking skill could work for this purpose."

"It's not that difficult to cook softshell turtles, but it takes some time to clean them," said Natsuki. "The river here looks fairly clean, so I don't think we'd have to wait for, like, one or two weeks, but..."

Living beings couldn't be placed into magic bags, but it wouldn't be easy to bring something as large as this softshell turtle back with us alive.

"I feel like it'd be a waste to let this opportunity go," said Touya. "We've already caught one giant salamander, so why don't we make camp here?"

Everyone went along with Touya's proposal. The purpose of our trip was to have a nice vacation; catching giant salamanders was just a side task. It would also be good to get some experience with camping while we were on our vacation, though. I had no reservations about this plan, since I wanted to try out fishing here.

“All right, let’s get started,” I said.

I lifted up the softshell turtle and threw it into a tub that Touya had taken out of a magic bag. We had prepared large tubs for storing any fish that we caught, but it was barely enough to fit the softshell turtle and left it with no room to move around. After we had thrown the turtle inside, we filled the tub with water created by magic and then sealed it with a lid and placed a rock on top while we waited for the cleaning process to progress. All we had to do was replace the water from time to time. I was looking forward to my first time trying softshell turtle.

“Okay, that’s all we need to do for now in regard to the softshell turtle,” said Haruka. “Let’s start by setting up our campsite.”

“Oh, I’ve heard before that it’s a bad idea to camp along riverbeds!” Touya exclaimed.

Touya sounded like he was showing off his expertise, but Haruka responded with an awkward smile. “That’s not necessarily always the case, Touya...”

One of the reasons why it was a bad idea to camp at riverbeds was due to dam drainage, but that wasn’t an issue in this world. Another reason was the possibility of flooding due to changes in the weather. Rivers deep in the mountains could be subject to flash floods, even if it wasn’t raining downstream where you were camping. However, that wasn’t an issue here either. This river looked like it ran a bit steep upstream, but it didn’t run that deep into the mountains, so there probably wouldn’t be that much of a difference in the weather.

“However, sudden rain can happen at this time of the year, so let’s avoid the riverbed,” said Haruka.

We ended up choosing a place slightly farther away from the riverbed to set up camp and finished the lunch we’d brought with us. After lunch was over, we were all free to use our time as we pleased, but we remained within sight of each other since there was a chance that monsters or wild animals would attack one of us. The reference materials back at the Adventurers’ Guild had mentioned that most of the monsters that could be encountered here were just goblins and the occasional orc, but it was better to not risk having to fight

alone. However, I didn't really need to worry since my Scout skill was now capable of detecting enemies at quite a distance. All that was left was to wait and see how monsters would act at night, but it seemed like it would be safe enough to bring Tomi along with us to this area.

"All right, let's give fishing a try!" Touya exclaimed.

Touya and I gathered our fishing equipment and headed out, and the girls, resting at camp, sent us off with a cheer and told us they were expecting a large haul.

"I'm gonna fish around here, Nao," said Touya. "What about you?"

"In that case, I'll go a bit farther upstream," I replied. "By the way, do you wanna bet on who'll catch more fish?"

"Oh, do you want to make this a competition?"

"Yeah, it'll make it more fun."

Touya and I grinned at each other. I walked about thirty meters away and sat down on a rock to prepare my gear.

"I guess I'll try using the fly lures first."

I was planning on saving the lures that weren't that well made until I had caught at least a few fish. *Can an amateur catch fish with fly lures made by an amateur? I hope so...*

"Time to give it a shot."

I threw the lure into the river, aiming downstream. I could clearly see the fish swimming in the river, so I was hoping that I could catch at least one. After a little waiting, I got a bite.

"There's one!"

I pulled up on my rod and thrust the landing net into the river. I drew the fish towards the net, scooped it up, and placed it on top of the rock beside me.

"Hell yeah!"

It looked to be about thirty centimeters long. I quickly took it off the hook and tossed it into the nearby tub, where it swam around energetically.

“Okay, time to use the Help Guide. *Yamame trout*, huh?”

I wasn’t sure if this was exactly the same as the fish we called yamame trout back on Earth, but they were probably very similar to each other if this was how it showed in the Help Guide, since it was that “evil” god who’d designed our skills. The most important thing for our purposes was that we could probably safely eat this fish without worries.

“All right, I’m off to a good start.”

I grinned and looked in Touya’s direction. When he noticed me, he grinned back and held up two fingers. *Seriously? He’s already caught two?* I hastily cast my lure again and, after a few tries, caught another fish. The one that latched onto my hook this time was smaller than the previous one, but it looked like it was still over twenty centimeters in length. There was a good chance that the reason we were able to catch fish here so easily was because nobody else would come out all the way here for fishing.

Our haul of fish continued to pile up rapidly; the tubs were full of yamame trout by the time that our surroundings turned dark. However, I was a bit disappointed that trout were the only fish we had caught; I wasn’t sure if it was because of our lures or our location. Either way, our haul was large enough to boast to the girls about, which I was grateful for. *It might be worth trying a fishing lure tomorrow if it’s this easy to catch fish here.* Touya and I happily headed back to our camp, and when we arrived, we found the girls were sitting around a bonfire chatting. As soon as they caught sight of us, they stood and walked towards us.

“Welcome back,” said Haruka. “Did you guys catch a lot of fish?”

“Yeah, we got a large haul,” I replied. “Right, Touya?”

“Mm, I never expected we’d get this many,” said Touya. “It was so easy even for us as amateurs that I think the fish don’t know to be wary of people.”

It sounded like Touya felt the same way I did about our haul. We’d made our own crude fly lures too, so our results clearly had nothing to do with talent or experience.

Yuki was quite surprised when she took a look inside of my fish tub. “Whoa,

this is quite a lot! I didn't expect you guys to catch so many. Can I give it a try tomorrow?"

I nodded. "Sure, feel free. We prepared a couple of fishing rods. Haruka, Natsuki, what about you two?"

"Um, you're using artificial bait, right?" Natsuki asked. "If that's the case, then I don't mind."

"Sure, I'll give it a try too if everyone's doing it," said Haruka.

Natsuki must not be good with insects and bugs, so her initial hesitation made sense. If the girls were going to use the fly lures, then that left me with the option of trying out live bait on a fishing lure. It probably wouldn't be too hard for me to find something like earthworms if I just dug in the ground nearby.

"Oh yeah, what did you girls do this afternoon?" I asked.

"We set up some traps and then came back here to relax and chat," Haruka replied. "Well, I guess we also practiced magic a bit."

"Yeah, we made some traps so we could contribute and catch some fish as well," said Yuki.

"We had most of them made by the carpenters, however," said Natsuki.

According to Natsuki, Yuki had taken advantage of her natural ability to get along with others and had asked the carpenters working on our house for help with the parts that were difficult to make; all the girls had had to do was put together the parts that the carpenters made for them. In a way, it was smarter than forcing yourself to tackle an unfamiliar task all on your own. Natsuki mentioned, however, that they weren't sure if the traps would work as intended since they had no experience setting them up, but one way or another, it was fine; this was all just for fun.

"Well, we'll find out tomorrow if the fish traps work," said Haruka. "For tonight, let's just eat the fish that you guys caught."

"You guys really caught a lot of fish," said Natsuki. "We don't have enough skewers for all of them."

"Yeah, I guess it's true that we don't have enough on hand," I said. "I don't

really feel like making more right now, though...”

Initially, we had made skewers ourselves, but we’d shifted to buying them when we’d found them at a store in Laffan for cheap. You could buy wooden or metal disposable skewers, and we had been using the latter. The only problem with cooking meat on skewers was the risk of burns if you ate off of a skewer that was still hot from the fire.

“Let’s clean and gut the fish that we aren’t going to eat so we can preserve them,” said Haruka. “We can hold off on using skewers until the fish are actually ready for eating, since it looks like there’s some fish that can be made into fillet sizes.”

Haruka made some ice with magic and poured it into the tub of fish. She then took out three chopping boards along with cooking knives and handed one of each to Natsuki and Yuki.

“You and Touya don’t know how to gut fish, right?” said Haruka. “Would you guys like to try it out?”

“Nah, we’ll leave things to you,” I said.

“Yeah, you girls are much better at it than we’d be,” said Touya.

Haruka shrugged. “It’s not that hard, but if you say so.” She quickly began to gut the fish.

Natsuki and Yuki joined in, and together, they made quick work of the fish. *Yeah, Touya and I would’ve held them back if we’d tried to help.* We dug a hole nearby to dispose of our refuse, and then waited at a distance and watched the skewered yamame trout that Haruka had placed near the bonfire. I had no idea what to do, so I didn’t want to risk ruining the fish; the best course of action was to observe the process.

“By the way, since when did we have these knives on us?” I asked. “Or rather, did somebody buy them from a store? I don’t recall seeing them.”

The knives that Haruka had taken out looked very similar in shape to the type of santoku knives that could be found in the average household back in Japan; they were quite different from the knives you usually saw for sale in this world. Up to this point, she had been using our gutting knives for cooking as well, so I

was a bit confused.

“Oh, those knives? Apparently they ordered them from Tomi,” said Touya. “They said they wanted santoku knives since they’d be easier to use for cooking.”

“Ah, right, I guess the shape of gutting knives isn’t really suited for cooking,” I said. “It’ll definitely be worth it if the knives help them cook even more delicious food.”

The girls would probably start cooking on a daily basis once our house was done, so from their perspective, custom-made knives were definitely worth the price, and Touya and I would benefit as well. As for us guys, cooking wasn’t really an option. The kinds of dishes that guys cooked all required seasoning, and we didn’t have mentsuyu soup base or yakiniku sauce on us. The fact that the girls could create delicious food even under these conditions was truly thanks to the magical power of the skills that that god had granted us.

“By the way, Nao, how many fish did you end up catching?” Touya asked.

“Oh, right, the bet. I don’t think there’s any point in trying to count since we both caught a ton without any difficulties,” I said.

“I guess that’s true. Oh well.”

Touya looked at the two tubs full of fish and shrugged in agreement. Given how easy it was to catch them, the number of fish that you could catch would probably depend on how much time you spent fishing; individual talent didn’t play a role.

We’d been waiting for a bit when Haruka finally called us over. “Okay, we’re done. The total number of fish was fifty-six. There were a decent number of big ones, so we can probably live off fish for quite a while if we all go fishing tomorrow too.”

“They were all yamame trout, but most of them were quite big,” said Natsuki.

The largest ones that I had caught were close to forty centimeters in length. Most of the fish were around thirty centimeters, and there weren’t many that were shorter than twenty. They were bigger than I had imagined yamame trout would be, but it was better than catching small fish.

“Getting the guts out of the fish was quite tiring given how many fish we had to work on,” said Yuki. “I’m really glad that we have the Cooking skill.”

Yuki said she had only gutted fish a few times before now. Even so, her work looked just as good as Haruka and Natsuki’s, probably because she also had the Cooking skill.

“Well, if our fishing sessions continue to go well, we’ll have to gut even more than that tomorrow,” said Haruka.

“Ugh. I want to catch a lot of fish, but I didn’t think of the problems it’d cause...”

Natsuki pointed out, “We don’t know if we’ll catch as many fish as Nao-kun and Touya-kun did, but it’ll be all five of us fishing tomorrow.”

Also, we had only spent half of today fishing, whereas tomorrow we would have the entire day to fish if we wanted to. There was a good chance that our total haul would exceed two hundred fish if things went well for us.

“Well, if it comes to that, just paralyze the fish and drain them of blood before putting them in our magic bags,” said Touya. “More importantly, can we start eating these skewered fish? They shouldn’t be too hot now, right? It’s getting hard for me to resist the delicious smell in the air...”

“Yeah, they should be ready,” said Haruka. “All right, it’s dinner time.”

“Let’s dig in!” we all exclaimed.

We each grabbed one skewered yamame trout and took a bite.

“Whoa, delicious!” I exclaimed.

The skin was cooked crispy and the meat was tender and moist. It was the most delicious fish that I had eaten in this world up to this point even though it was just grilled with salt, probably due to a number of factors: the way the fish were cooked, the species of fish, and the situation we were in. The girls were very good cooks, and sitting around a bonfire eating fish I had caught myself was the kind of experience I could never have had back in Japan. Or rather, I could have if I’d really wanted it, but either way, it was something I had never done. Fish wasn’t exactly my favorite food, but I would be willing to eat this

kind of fish every day for quite a while.

“Mm, these yamame trout don’t smell fishy at all,” said Haruka. “I wonder if it’s because the waters that they were caught from are very clean.”

“That could be the case,” said Natsuki. “Yamame trout isn’t the kind of fish that tends to be pungent, but these are especially delicious.”

“I love the taste of these fish!” Touya exclaimed. “Man, I can’t remember the last time I had fish. The ‘meals’ at that inn back in Sarstedt don’t count, by the way.”

“Yeah, there aren’t any places in Laffan that serve dishes with fish in them, so it’s been a while,” I said.

Some stores in Laffan did sell dried fish, but after our experience in Sarstedt, none of us had brought up the idea of purchasing fish. If the dried fish in Laffan was just the dried version of *that* fish from Sarstedt, then it was guaranteed to taste awful. It might be a different fish, but dried fish were more expensive than dried meat, so we didn’t really have a reason to go out of our way to try them out.

“Man, if only this place were closer to Laffan,” I said. “These fish are so delicious that I’d come here all the time.”

The fish were delicious, but the round trip from Laffan would take an entire day. On top of that, you would need to set aside the time for fishing, which would require you to camp outside for a night.

“There’s nothing wrong with spending the time to get our hands on luxurious food!” Yuki gripped her skewer tight as she exclaimed those words; beside her, Natsuki nodded along. “This is the kind of thing we need to brighten up our lives!”

“In that case, what do you all think about the idea of extending our trip so we can catch even more fish before we head back to Laffan?” Haruka asked. “After all, with our magic bags, we don’t have to worry about the fish going bad.”

“Oh, I’d be down for that!” Touya exclaimed. “We can probably catch a month’s worth if we camp out here for an extra night!”

“Yeah, that’s definitely possible considering how many we caught today,” I said. “I’m down for that idea as well.”

“All right, let’s camp here for a total of three nights,” said Haruka. “The nice thing is that we don’t have to worry that anyone will complain about us catching too many fish here.”

“Well, there might be something like a fishing guild in Sarstedt that’s similar to a fishing cooperative,” I said. “Do you know if there is, Natsuki?”

“There technically was a fishing guild, but they’re mostly concerned with managing the waters of Sarstedt’s port,” Natsuki replied. “There’s no reason for them to complain as long as we don’t fish around that area. However, we could run into some weird people, which would be annoying, so it would be best not to get busted fishing here.”

According to Natsuki, there weren’t any laws that made it illegal to fish here, since it was fine to catch other things like giant salamanders. However, we might bump into people who would “ask” us for a share even though they had no legal right to do so. With that in mind, the best course of action on our way back would be to ignore Sarstedt and head straight for Laffan. The only positive experience I’d had in Sarstedt was getting a good deal on some books, anyway.

Our surroundings had turned quite dark by the time we finished eating dinner; we’d each had a couple of fish. Under ordinary circumstances, the hour would be too early for bed, but that wasn’t the case here since we would have to take turns on lookout duty.

“All right, this is our first night camping outside in this world. I think we’ll need to split into two groups to take turns on lookout duty,” said Haruka.

“Yeah, that’s our only option right now,” I said. “We could just rely on the Sanctuary spell if my Time Magic were higher level, but unfortunately, that’s not the case.”

My Time Magic skill was currently Level 3; the spell Sanctuary was available from Level 4 and upward. A better way to explain the standards of magic in this world would be to say that you were considered a Level 4 Time Mage once you could cast the spell. Sanctuary would seal off an area of the caster’s choice and prevent anything on the outside from entering. Novices could only use the spell

like an insect repellent, which was useful, but in the hands of a true expert, the spell would get to the point of completely blocking monsters out of the sealed area. It would also alert the caster whenever a monster invaded the sealed area even if the caster wasn't powerful enough to exclude the monster, which removed any need to stay up for lookout duty. On a side note, there was also a Level 5 Time Magic spell called Isolation Field which could completely seal off an area, but that included the air itself, which could make it dangerous to be inside the bubble.

"It'll be me or Nao with one or two of you girls for the lookout duty shifts, right?" Touya asked. "How should we split the groups?"

"Let's just decide via rock paper scissors," said Yuki.

Nobody voiced any objections to Yuki's idea, so we all went along with it. In the end, I was paired with Haruka while Touya was paired with Yuki and Natsuki.

"All right, Natsuki, your group can go ahead and sleep first," said Haruka.

"Mm, okay. We should be able to get about five to six hours of sleep if we go to bed right now," said Natsuki.

"Already? I wanted to enjoy chatting around a bonfire, but oh well," said Yuki.

"Didn't you girls already chat a lot around noon?!" Touya exclaimed.

Yuki sounded a bit disappointed. I felt the same to a certain extent, but Touya was completely right.

"Chatting at night is different from doing it at noon, but I guess getting rest when you can is an important part of adventurer life as well," said Yuki.

The girls headed into our tent first and Touya followed. It was probably around the equivalent of 7 p.m.; it hadn't been too long since our surroundings had turned dark, so Haruka and I could probably get five or six hours of sleep as well once it was our turn to rest. We could have gotten more hours of sleep if we had split into three groups, but we didn't absolutely need them since this arrangement was only going to be for a few days.

"What are we supposed to do for five to six hours, though?" I asked. "Are we

really just gonna do nothing but sit around like this?”

After we watched the others leave, Haruka had walked over to sit next to me; I was whispering to her so as not to disturb their sleep. The tent that we had bought was thick and waterproof but not soundproof, so I couldn't exactly kill the time chatting with Haruka at normal volume.

“Well, all we can really do is practice our skills,” said Haruka.

“That's limited to stuff that's quiet, though.”

The only skills that I could practice without making a sound were my Scout skill, my magic, and walking around with my Stealth skill while physically scouting out the surrounding area.

“Oh yeah, also, how are we supposed to know when it's our turn to rest?” I asked. “It'll be hard to accurately measure five or six hours based on a feeling alone, so...”

I was now able to tell the passage of time from a few minutes to an hour, something I hadn't been able to do back on Earth, although I wasn't sure if it was because I had a better sense of time now or if it was just because I was more alert to things in nature such as the sun. However, I wasn't confident enough in my sense of time to identify when six hours had passed.

“The skies are clear tonight, so I can tell from the stars,” said Haruka. “It would be nice if we could get our hands on a clock, but...”

“Clocks are expensive, right?”

A bell would ring at certain intervals back in Laffan, but there wasn't anything like a clock tower inside of the town, nor were there any clocks on the walls of stores or dining halls. They weren't exactly necessary for daily life inside of town, and I couldn't recall any stores that sold clocks, most likely because they were expensive.

“Yeah, clocks are made via alchemy, so they're nowhere near affordable for an ordinary citizen,” said Haruka. “It'd be cheaper for me to purchase the raw materials and make one myself. There are hourglasses, but they're also quite expensive.”

“It definitely seems like anything made of glass would be expensive...”



Glass products seemed to be fairly common in this world due to the existence of magic and alchemy. I had seen glass windows here and there in Laffan, but they weren't exactly of good quality. With that in mind, a delicate item like an hourglass would probably be closer to a work of art than a tool for practical use.

"In any case, just leave measuring the passage of time to me," said Haruka. "Feel free to practice your skills as long as you don't fall asleep."

"Okay."

I took Haruka up on her offer and started using my Scout skill. Walking around to scout out the environs would make some noise, and Yuki had only just gone to bed, so it also was possible that she would detect the movements of my mana if I practiced magic. I didn't want to make it hard for her to sleep. Fortunately, my Scout skill was a passive skill that wouldn't use mana or make any noise.

First I closed my eyes and searched around the river with my Scout skill. There were very few signals moving around at the moment, probably because fish like yamame trout were all asleep. However, my Scout skill did pick up on some active signals, which I assumed were the nocturnal types of fish and amphibians. It probably wouldn't be too hard to find giant salamanders at this time, but there was no reason for me to go out of my way to do so.

The next place I turned my attention was the forest, and there my Scout skill picked up a lot of signals moving around. They must have been nocturnal animals, but the signals weren't very strong. That meant that they probably weren't that much of a threat to us, but we still had to be aware of them.

I told Haruka about what I had found with my Scout skill, and she paused in thought for a second before replying. "Maybe the signals in the forest are wolves. There are nocturnal wolves in this forest, right?"

"It seems like it, yeah," I replied. "It doesn't sound like it's that common for people to get attacked by wolves, though."

"The wolves are probably smart enough to know that it's dangerous to attack people. If it's the same here as it was back on Earth, then wolves only move in packs with a maximum population of ten," said Haruka. "The only kind of

people that would camp out here are adventurers, so any wolves that tried to attack them would definitely get their numbers whittled down quickly.”

Haruka’s theory made sense; there was no reason for wolves to go out of their way to attack armed adventurers unless they were totally unprepared. It would probably be easier for the wolves to go for prey like deer. According to Haruka, a pack of wolves usually roamed around a territory between ten and thirty kilometers in size, so they would seldom gather up in great enough numbers to attack groups of people. It sounded like their ecology was quite different from monsters, which would gather under a stronger variant form of the same species to create a nest. That was fortunate for us; I wanted to avoid killing them for no good reason since I liked dogs. I bet we could sell their skin and fur, but there was no need for us to hunt them. *I’ve also got a close personal friend who happens to be a dog.*

I spent the next few hours practicing my Scout skill along with my magic and the Stealth skill. I could practice the Scout skill and my magic while sitting, but I had to walk around for my Stealth skill. It seemed like Haruka didn’t really approve of my Stealth practice, but I wanted to continue doing it since I didn’t ordinarily get much opportunity to practice it. It would probably be of use at some point in the future, after all.

The next morning, Yuki came over to wake Haruka and me. When we got out of our tent, we saw that preparations for breakfast were already done. Apparently Yuki and the others had cooked while taking it easy since they’d had nothing else to do. However, it soon became obvious that Touya hadn’t been of any help at all. He had been working out all morning and was covered in sweat, so Haruka cast Purification on him right away. He thanked Haruka, but she’d probably done it less out of kindness and more because she didn’t want to eat breakfast next to a sweaty guy.

“We have soup for breakfast today,” said Natsuki. “It’s fish and grass with something like udon noodles.”

“Grass? Did we have edible grass on us?” I asked.

“Yeah. Touya-kun gathered some mitsuba parsley for us to use, along with random leaves from the forest.”

Random? I took a look into the pot of soup. It gave off a delicious aroma. According to Natsuki, the chunks of yamame trout had been seasoned with salt and dried overnight.

“I made the udon-ish noodles,” said Yuki. “I did my best to get them as close as I could, but due to lack of space, they’re not very long, so sorry about that.” She explained that she had attempted making udon noodles because she was bored.

The noodles in the pot were shorter than twenty centimeters. Of course, we didn’t have tools like noodle rolling pins or a large wooden board, so Yuki had not had any choice but to use a regular cutting board.

“It’s fine,” I said. “I don’t care how long the noodles are as long as they taste good.”

“We actually haven’t had a taste yet, but they should be fine, I think,” said Yuki.

“All right,” said Haruka, “it’s time to eat and find out.”

“Yeah, my stomach’s been growling for a while now,” said Touya.

That’s just because you spent the whole night working out, Touya. I had used up a lot of energy walking around as I practiced my Stealth skill, but Touya had been even more active than I had. Fortunately, his stomach wasn’t that loud.

“Let’s dig in!” we all exclaimed.

I tried the soup first and found that it tasted pretty good. It seemed like the only seasoning was salt and a few spices, but they complemented the fish stock, which was apparently made from the trout itself. The mitsuba parsley had a more pungent scent than the other herbs in the soup, but it added a nice touch of flavor. Apart from their length, Yuki’s udon-ish noodles tasted a lot like frozen sanuki udon and had a similar chewiness that I really enjoyed. They didn’t go down as smoothly as true udon noodles, but given the circumstances, Yuki had made some really good noodles with what was available to her.

“Um, how is it?” Yuki asked hesitantly.

“Both the soup and noodles taste great,” I replied.

Yuki beamed. Both the soup and the noodles made me feel at ease; they tasted like standard Japanese fare. I enjoyed bread too, but if I had no choice but to eat it every day for a long period of time, I would get sick of it eventually.

“Mm, it’s been a while since I last had some soup with fish stock,” said Haruka. “It tastes great.”

Natsuki noted, “It’s going to get colder soon, so it might be a good idea to make dried fish to use as stock.”

We had yet to find seaweed or bonito in this world, hence Natsuki’s eagerness to find something else she could use as soup stock. I was willing to help out however I could; I wanted to enjoy more meals like this.

“There’s also the option of using dried shiitake mushrooms, but dried mushrooms in general are expensive, right?” Haruka asked.

“Yeah, it seems like they’re a luxury food in this world,” said Natsuki. “It’s probably because there isn’t much supply.”

I was curious and asked Natsuki about the price of mushrooms, and she explained that it wasn’t reasonable for something we planned to use as soup stock. In fact, they were way too expensive even for normal consumption.

“Would fish be cheap in coastal towns?” I asked.

“Seafood might be cheap near where it’s caught, but the sea is far away from here,” said Haruka. “I don’t know exactly how far, but it’d definitely take us at least a few months to reach the coast. That’s too far to travel for shopping.”

According to Haruka, the country we were in was landlocked, so to reach a seaport, we would have no choice but to charter a horse-drawn carriage or walk; nothing like a horse-drawn omnibus existed in this world. It would be a difficult journey, one that would require us to camp outside; there was the risk of being attacked by bandits or monsters along the way. In other words, it wasn’t a realistic option for us.

“Hmm, I guess that means it’s even more important for us to catch a lot of fish and bring them back with us,” said Touya. “All for the sake of eating good!”

“Mm, you’re right,” said Haruka.

“Yep!” I exclaimed.

After we agreed on that objective, we were all highly motivated to fish. The first thing we did after we finished breakfast was to go and check the traps that the girls had set up yesterday.

I asked, “How many traps did you set up total?”

“We set up three small and three large box-shaped traps along with three cages for a total of nine traps,” Haruka replied.

I hadn’t noticed at all since I had been completely focused on fishing, but the girls must have set traps all over the place with a fair bit of distance between them.

“We didn’t know what would be the best spot to set them up,” said Natsuki, “so we spaced them out.”

“There are a bunch of different locations, but let’s start with the big boxes first,” said Haruka.

With Touya and me following, the girls led us to a box that was sunk in the water with a small hole on the side for drainage. It was about one and a half meters long and thirty centimeters wide. Based on its size, it must have been to trap giant salamanders.

“All right, let’s see what’s inside.” Touya removed the rock that was holding the box down and lifted it up to look inside, but he shook his head right away. “Nothing.”

We all took a look inside of the box as well, and it was indeed empty.

“The bait’s gone as well,” said Haruka. “I wonder if it got washed away.”

“What did you use as bait?” I asked.

“Orc meat,” Haruka replied.

We had a lot of orc meat on us, including some that we had dressed pretty roughly, so it was good to make use of parts like those that basically weren’t edible.

“Wouldn’t fish have been better bait since these giant salamanders live in this

river, though?" Touya asked.

"Nah, I think animals like salamanders eat anything," I said.

"Well, we can use today's results as a reference after we're done checking all the traps," said Haruka. "Let's move on to the next one."

The next trap was located a bit downstream. Once again, Touya waded into the water to fetch the box. However, this time, when he held up the box, he grinned and returned to show us the contents.

"This looks like a couple of catfish," said Haruka.

"Whoa, they're huge," said Touya.

The two catfish were both thicker around than one of my arms and easily over a meter in length. They were lying on their sides, not moving much, although I felt like they would writhe around if we tried lifting them out of the water.

"They aren't giant salamanders, but catfish are edible, right?" Haruka asked.

"Yes, but we'll have to clean them like the softshell turtles," said Natsuki. "I've heard before that catfish are commonly used for the pan-fried fish in bento boxes."

"Wait, really?" I asked.

"Mm. It seems that their taste can differ quite a bit depending on the conditions that they were raised in, but I think the ones in this river should be delicious," said Natsuki.

"In that case, let's clean them next to the softshell turtles," said Haruka.

We filled another fish tub full of water and placed the two catfish inside before heading towards the last trap, which was even farther downstream.

"This is where we placed the last of the large traps," said Haruka.

"Hmm, let's see. Oh, this might be it," said Touya. "The box is much heavier than the first two. We might need to be careful."

We took a look through the hole in the side instead of opening the box. Inside was something that looked like the giant salamander we'd seen yesterday.

“I didn’t think we would actually end up catching one,” said Haruka. She sounded more impressed than happy. “I wasn’t expecting much.”

“Please, I gave careful consideration to the structure of the traps when I ordered them from the carpenters,” Natsuki retorted. “Of course, there was no guarantee that they’d catch what we wanted.”

So Natsuki had been in charge of the trap idea, then.

“In any case, let’s just freeze this box so it doesn’t get away,” said Haruka.

Unlike the catfish, the giant salamander could run away, so Haruka froze the box solid with the salamander still inside and then threw the box into one of our magic bags. The salamander had looked like it was easily over one meter in length, so it would probably fetch a good price.

“I guess we’ll have to set up traps again if it’s possible to catch giant salamanders like this,” said Haruka.

“Yeah, we really should,” said Yuki. “The fact that we can earn the equivalent of a few hundred thousand yen overnight just by laying a few traps... It almost scares me!”

Even as she spoke of how “scary” it was, Yuki was smiling, as were the rest of us. It was great to have a way to earn money that didn’t put our lives in danger or waste much of our time.

“Okay, let’s go pull up the small boxes next,” said Haruka.

“We were aiming for fish with these traps,” said Yuki. “We’re hoping that they managed to catch some eels too!”

“Oh, eels!” I exclaimed. “Wait, hold on, we don’t have any soy sauce, though.”

Two important factors that made eels delicious were the way they were cooked and the sauce that was served over them. I’d heard rumors that people in Britain ate jellied eels, but I had no desire to try anything like that.

“Well, we can store them for when we finally get our hands on soy sauce!” Natsuki exclaimed.

Apparently even Natsuki, with all her culinary experience, only knew the kabayaki method of preparing eel, where you covered it in sauce and then

grilled it. I had also heard about the shiroyaki method, where you grilled the eel without sauce, but you still dipped it in wasabi soy afterwards.

“Let’s go check what’s inside of the traps first,” said Haruka. “You all know what they say about not counting your chickens before they hatch, right?”

“Mm, good point. We can worry about it once we actually catch some eels,” said Natsuki.

The girls had set up the smaller boxes in the shallows. They were about the same length as the larger traps but less than fifteen centimeters in width.

This time, I was put in charge of retrieving the boxes. The first one felt a bit heavy when I lifted it; it might not have been an eel, but we’d caught *something*. “Oh, it looks like there’s something in this one,” I said.

I brought the trap back to where everyone else was waiting on the shore and then flipped it over and emptied it into a fish tub that they had set up for me. A thick eel slid out of the box and fell into the tub.

“Yay, an eel!” I exclaimed.

The eel was much thicker than the ones I’d had in mind and looked about two or three tenths longer as well, though I’d never had many opportunities to see live eels. *Actually, now that I think about it, I remember seeing some eels inside of the water tanks at conveyor belt sushi places, but I remember them being much thinner and shorter.*

“This is an eel, right, Natsuki?” Yuki asked.

“It should be; the Help Guide describes it as such,” said Natsuki. “However, I’m not sure if it will taste the same as a Japanese eel.”

“Oh, right, not all eels taste good,” I said.

“Hm? Are there a lot of different types of eels?” Touya asked. “They’re not all the same?”

“Nope, there are big differences between different species of eel. The only eels used in kabayaki grilling are Japanese eels and European eels,” said Natsuki. “There are a lot more types than that, but there are many that aren’t edible or don’t taste good.”

“Got it. Well, it seems that this eel is edible,” said Touya. “That’s what my Appraisal skill says, anyway.”

“Oh, that’s good to know,” said Natsuki. “In any case, I guess we’ll find out if they’re delicious or not when we actually try them.”

Afterwards, we went to retrieve the other two small boxes and got our hands on two more eels, but we left them alone for a bit in order to clean them, as we had done with the catfish.

“The last things to retrieve are the cages,” said Haruka. “We set up one each in a shallow area, a deep area, and a medium-deep area, but...”

“These traps were for crabs and shrimp,” said Natsuki.

“Whoa, can you actually catch them here?!” I asked excitedly.

“I’m not sure if we can catch large ones with enough meat on them to eat, but even small crabs would be fine since they can be used for soup stock,” said Natsuki. “There are also things like sawagani crabs that you can just fry and eat whole.”

I was really excited about that idea; back in Japan, an ordinary citizen like myself didn’t have many opportunities to eat crab.

“Let’s see what’s inside of the first—whoa!”

“Yay, crabs!” Yuki exclaimed. “We did it! We caught some crabs!”

There were more than ten crabs in the cage, each a bit larger than the palm of my hand. Yuki pulled on my hand and jumped for joy as she pointed at them.

“These crabs are about the same size as gazami crabs, but they look more similar to sawagani crabs,” said Natsuki. “Are they edible, Touya-kun?”

“Let me see... Okay, they’re called valley crabs, and they’re edible!”

Hell yeah! I’m so glad that we can eat them!

“All right, let’s keep these crabs as well,” said Natsuki. “Put them in a barrel.”

In our magic bags were barrels that we had previously used for making dried meat; we took one out and filled it with clean water before placing the crabs inside. A few small fish had gotten caught in the cage as well, but we released

them back into the river. *Go get bigger for when I come back to fish again.*

“Hmm, I really didn’t expect things to go this well,” said Haruka. “I was confident that we’d at least catch some things, but not this much.”

“Yeah, exactly! We’re just amateurs, so this was a nice surprise,” said Yuki.

“It’s probably because nobody comes here to fish due to how dangerous it is to get here,” said Natsuki. “However, if rumors spread about these crabs being delicious, then rich people might issue hunt quests the way they do for giant salamanders.”

“In that case, let’s keep this a secret!” I exclaimed.

Touya agreed with me right away. “Good idea!”

I looked around and saw that Yuki was nodding as well, but Natsuki chuckled in response. “We don’t know yet if these valley crabs are actually delicious or not. It’s possible that people seldom catch them because they don’t taste very good.”

I would be very disappointed in the latter scenario, especially since the crabs looked like they would have a nice flavor and crunch to them.

“Next up are the cages that we sank about halfway down to the bottom of the river,” said Haruka. “I wonder what’s inside of them.”

This time, Haruka went to retrieve the next cage. She hopped up on a rock in the middle of the river and pulled on a rope that was secured to the cage, dragging it up out of the water. I couldn’t see well from the shore, but there must have been something inside of the cage since Haruka was smiling when she returned to us.

“It looks like there are some shrimp called river shrimp inside of this cage,” said Haruka. “Touya, are these edible as well?”

“Um, give me a sec. Yeah, my Appraisal skill says they’re edible.”

I took a look inside the cage and saw a lot of semitransparent shrimp jumping around. They weren’t very big—each one had a body length of about ten centimeters—but there were plenty of them. We placed these shrimp inside of a barrel full of water as well and then headed towards the last cage. The girls

had sunk it into the deepest part of the river, so they had tied some rope from the cage to a tree on the other side of the river.

“Hmm, this feels quite heavy,” I said.

“Yeah, we attached some weights to it, and it’s quite deep as well,” said Yuki.

The cage was at a depth of over five meters underwater, and the rope wasn’t very thick. The cage also wasn’t very sturdy, so I had to be careful as I pulled it up. It would have been fine to pull with my full strength if the cage were made of metal, but these cages were wood.

“Whoa...”

When I pulled the cage up out of the water, it was full of little critters. They looked somewhat like shrimp, but they were most similar to crayfish. However, they were each about twenty centimeters long, and their shells were dark brown rather than red and appeared to be quite thick and hard.

“These are called shelled shrimp,” said Touya, “and it seems that they’re edible as well.”

“They’re shrimp, so there’s a decent chance that they taste good, but seeing so many gathered together isn’t exactly a pleasant sight,” I said.

“Either way, they’re shrimp, right? I’m sure they’ll taste good!” Yuki exclaimed.

“I really hope so,” I replied.

We returned to the bank of the river and placed the shelled shrimp into the barrels as well; they stopped writhing around once they were back in the water. The barrels were packed tight at this point.

“I gotta say, though, this sure is a good spot for catching seafood,” I said.

“Touya and I caught a lot of fish, and the traps caught a whole bunch of stuff.”

“Yeah, and luckily everything that we caught happens to be edible,” said Yuki.

From the traps, we had gotten some catfish, eels, crabs, and two species of shrimp. On top of that, based on the information from Touya’s Appraisal skill, they were all edible, so we’d been quite lucky indeed.

“Nah, I don’t think it’s that strange,” said Haruka. “Most of the animals you could catch in the average river back in Japan would be edible, though they wouldn’t necessarily all be delicious.”

“Oh, I guess you’re right about that,” I said. “Things like Eurasian carp, crucian carp, minnow, loach, sawagani, black bass, and bluegill are all edible. I’m not sure about turtle species, though.”

Natsuki had some very surprising information for me in regard to turtles. “Actually, turtles such as red-eared sliders and Reeves’ turtles can be eaten as food. I’ve never actually had any myself, however.”

“Seriously?!”

“Seriously.”

It didn’t sound like Natsuki was joking. That being the case, the word “edible” would probably pop up if Touya used his Appraisal skill on the right turtles. Softshell turtles were edible, but I wanted to avoid eating turtles if possible. Looks were important in both people and food, and food that tasted delicious but didn’t look the part would be no good. Of course, the food would probably prefer if its predators didn’t find it visually attractive.

“Our final haul ended up being much more than we expected,” said Haruka.

“Mm. I thought we would catch a decent amount myself, but this easily surpassed my expectations,” said Natsuki.

Crabs and shrimp weren’t the kind of food you could eat daily, so today’s haul from the traps would probably last us one or two months. If we continued catching seafood for the next two days, then we would probably have delicious food for quite a long time.

“Are you going to set the cages up again?” I asked.

“Yeah, for lunch, we can try out the seafood that we caught,” said Haruka. “If they taste good, we’ll set up the cages again.”

“Mm, it’d be painful and pointless to bring back a lot of seafood with us only to find out that it doesn’t taste good,” said Yuki.

In terms of the cleaning process, it would probably be best to leave our catch

in water for at least a few days, but having a taste would be a good idea as well. Yuki was right that it would be painful if our efforts amounted to nothing, since we had high expectations.

“Let’s work on catching trout until lunchtime since we know they taste good,” said Natsuki. “Nao-kun, can you lend us some fishing rods and fly lures?”

“Sure, feel free to use whichever ones you want,” I replied.

Touya and I had brought a total of six fishing rods, one for each person in our party and one spare. The two of us had also made three fly lures each. We handed everything over to the girls.

“As far as how you’re supposed to fish...you should just cast the fly lure towards a place where the currents aren’t too fast and drift it from upstream to downstream,” I said. “That should be enough to catch something, I think. Let me demonstrate.”

I cast a fly lure and drifted it for a bit before a yamame trout bit on it. I pulled on my fishing rod to bring the fish closer to me.

“Place up your rod once a fish bites and then scoop it up with this landing net once you pull the fish close to you,” I said. “It’s as simple as that.”

“It looks like something that anyone can do,” said Natsuki.

“That’s probably true since yesterday was my first time fishing,” I said. “Any advice on your end, Touya?”

“Nah, not really. I just did whatever felt right to me.”

We were both amateurs; we only had as much fishing knowledge as Tomi had told us.

“Okay, let’s all split up—wait, we only have three landing nets with us,” I said.

Touya and I hadn’t been sure if the girls would be interested in fishing, so we had only made two landing nets for ourselves and one spare. Landing nets were much harder to make than fishing rods since the knitting process took a lot of time.

“We can just split into three groups using rock paper scissors,” said Touya.

“Good point. All right! Rock, paper, scissors!”

We all held out our hands at the same time. Touya went with rock, Natsuki and I went with paper, and Yuki and Haruka went with scissors. Our first try had split us into three groups, so we distributed the nets and went our separate ways.

Natsuki and I headed towards a large rock in the middle of the river. Natsuki aimed for yamame trout in an area where the currents weren’t very fast, and I used a fishing lure in an area with slightly faster currents.

“Nao-kun, will any fish actually take bait that large?” Natsuki asked.

“Nah, this fishing lure isn’t for the fish to bite down on,” I replied. “You’re supposed to make the bait look like it’s swimming so that fish try to attack it and chase it away, and then you hook them and pull them out of the water.”

All of this information was from Tomi. *Will it actually work, though?*

“That sounds a bit difficult to do correctly...”

“Yeah, it might be. I’ll give it a try with actual bait if it doesn’t work out.”

I had regular fishing rods as well, and I could probably find earthworms for bait just by digging at random in the riverbank. However, I had spent a lot of time making this fishing lure, so I really wanted it to work out. I cast the lure upstream, the opposite of what I had done with the fly lure method, and dragged it back and forth to make it look like a fish swimming around. My movements were quite awkward, but it kind of looked like a fish to me. I was biased, though, since I was the one who’d made the lure, so I wasn’t sure if it would work. Regardless, there was no way that I could give up immediately. I tried my best to adjust my movements as I repeatedly cast the fishing lure and pulled it up in the hopes that I would get something. Natsuki sounded like she had caught a few yamame trout already—she had said “Oh, another one!” a few times by now—and that made me a bit nervous, but...

“Got one!”

I felt something on the end of my fishing rod, so I followed my instincts and pulled the rod towards myself.

“Here you go!”

Natsuki handed over the landing net, and I dipped it into the river as I continued to pull on my rod. The fish’s silhouette made it look quite big. I swiftly dragged it into the landing net and pulled it out of the water.

“Hell yeah!”

“Congrats, Nao-kun!”

I laid the landing net on top of the rock we were sitting on and sighed in relief while Natsuki clapped her hands. The fish that I had caught looked like it was over thirty centimeters long. Its shape was quite different from that of a yamame trout.

“Yay, I caught an ayu sweetfish! It looks kind of big, though...”

In fact, it looked a bit different from the kind of ayu that I knew about, but according to the Help Guide, that’s what it was.

“Back in Japan, some large ayu sweetfish could get close to thirty centimeters in length, but I’ve never seen one this large,” said Natsuki. “Well, in any case, it should be quite satisfying as a meal.”

“Yeah, there’s nothing bad about catching large fish,” I said.

“Exactly. Smaller fish will have fewer parts that we can eat, after all.”

If we ended up catching a lot of small fish, then there was still the option of using them to make tsukudani, but to catch large quantities of small fish, we would need to use cast nets. On top of that, making tsukudani would require soy sauce and sugar as well, so it wasn’t a realistic option for us at the moment.

“However, I think it’s more efficient to fish for yamame trout,” I said. It was easy to catch a number of large yamame trout in a short period of fishing, so it made sense to catch as many as we could and stock up.

“Mm, you’re rig—oh!”

While we were chatting, something tugged on Natsuki’s fishing rod. She pulled it towards her while I handed her the landing net.

“Thank you, Nao-kun. Hmm, this one looks like it’s about twenty-five

centimeters.”

“Well, it’s good to have different types of fish that we can catch,” I said.
“We’re here for a semi-vacation, after all.”

“Mm, I think having fun is the most important thing even if you don’t catch anything,” Natsuki replied.

“Ugh...”

Natsuki’s words felt kind of harsh to me in a way, but she probably didn’t mean it that way. We weren’t hurting for money or food, so we’d be okay even if we didn’t catch any fish.

“Don’t worry, I can definitely catch at least some!”

I had already confirmed that it was possible to catch fish with the lure I’d made, so I cast it once again in a spot a bit away from my last catch. According to what Tomi had told me, fishing lures exploited the territorial nature of fish, so it wouldn’t be possible to keep catching fish in the same spot forever. He had also told me that it would be a good idea to use a long fishing rod, so I was using one that was longer than the others, although it was still less than five meters. I figured I would probably need to change where I was standing from time to time, although that would require Natsuki to tag along with me.

Contrary to my expectations, I ended up catching ayu sweetfish pretty consistently without having to change where I was fishing. On top of that, I felt like I had gotten the hang of things since the interval between each catch had decreased; I was able to catch roughly one ayu sweetfish per four or five yamame trout that Natsuki caught.

“Nice, I’m on a roll!” I exclaimed.

“Mm. Let’s keep at it and obtain a lot of fish,” said Natsuki.

Natsuki and I continued to fish for a while and then temporarily stopped around noon when Haruka came over to suggest taking a break. We all gathered back at our tent to check the haul.

“How much did everyone catch?” I asked.

“I’d say that I caught a decent number of fish,” said Touya. “I managed to

catch ayu sweetfish at a good pace, though not as many as yamame trout. It seems like even fishing lures made by amateurs like us work just fine.”

“Yeah, I had the same experience,” I said. “It’d be better to aim for just yamame trout if we wanted quantity, but yeah. What about your group, Haruka?”

“Things went well for us,” Haruka replied. “Right, Yuki?”

“Yeah, it was interesting and fun to see how easy it was to catch fish!” Yuki exclaimed. “I had a good time!”

Yuki smiled as she held out a fish tub towards me. When I took a look inside, I saw that there were more yamame trout than I had caught yesterday. I felt like the main reason some people didn’t like fishing or found it boring was because they would have to wait a long time to catch fish or because they would have to use icky things for bait. Those conditions didn’t apply to our fishing spot, since it was possible to catch fish right away, and we were using fly lures as bait, so I was willing to bet that anyone would enjoy fishing here. That wouldn’t apply to people who couldn’t stand fish at all, of course, but the girls all had experience gutting fish.

“Preparing this much fish will be a lot of work, though,” said Natsuki.

“It really will,” said Haruka. “I wish we could just stuff them all into our magic bags.”

“You can’t put living beings into magic bags, right?” I asked.

“Mm, that’s what the grimoires said,” Haruka replied. “I haven’t actually tested it out, however...”

Haruka paused in thought, as if she were retroactively puzzled by her own words. The grimoire had described magic bags as being enchanted so that living beings couldn’t go inside of them, but it didn’t specify what exactly fell under the category of living beings. *Now that I think about it, everything we’ve put inside definitely has microbes on it, right? Things like fruit and vegetables go in and come out just fine, so...*

“On second thought, it is kind of strange,” I said. “Wanna give it a try?”

“Hmm. Sure, I guess,” said Haruka.

Haruka stuffed a few yamame trout into one of the hemp bags and then tossed it into one of our magic bags. It went in just fine. Haruka’s eyebrows twitched a bit when she saw that. She closed the magic bag; it seemed like things didn’t sit right with her.

“So it did go in,” said Yuki.

“Yeah. Now let’s try taking it out,” I said.

I went and took the hemp bag out of the magic bag and then poured the yamame trout back into one of the fish tubs.

“Hmm, they’re still alive,” said Haruka.

“Does the ‘living being’ restriction only apply to mammals?” Natsuki asked.

“That’d make sense. It seems like it would be easier that way than having to set up all sorts of restrictions,” said Yuki.

An enchantment for excluding all living beings would probably be difficult, so only excluding mammals or perhaps homeotherms would work just fine as a safety function. It would probably make the enchantment itself much easier too.

“Well, it doesn’t really matter exactly how magic bags work as long as they’re convenient for us,” I said.

“Yeah, we’re finally free from having to do endless fish preparation work after catching them,” said Haruka.

We had already caught a total of around one hundred fish today, so that amount would probably swell to over two hundred by the evening. All three of the girls had the Cooking skill, but the sheer number of fish would have definitely been tiring for them.

“By the way, it’s an alchemical enchantment that serves as the safety function, right?” I asked. “In that case, couldn’t you make a magic bag with no restrictions at all, Haruka?”

“Perhaps, but it’s impossible for me right now,” Haruka replied. “To put it in simple terms, it’s the difference between building a plastic model with all the

parts laid out for you and designing one from scratch.”

Oh, that’s an easy example to understand. I guess she’s nowhere close to being good enough to design a magic bag yet.

“In any case, this is convenient for us, so let’s just put everything inside,” said Yuki.

I hastily stopped Yuki before she could start putting fish inside of hemp bags. “Hold on, Yuki. The passage of time inside of magic bags is very slow, but it’s not zero, so it would be better to place the fish inside a container full of water.”

We moved all of the fish that we had caught into a barrel and filled it with water before we sealed it off and stuffed it into one of our magic bags. The fish were packed really tight, but it was better than not providing them with any water at all.

“We should probably slowly work on our stock of fish after we return to town,” said Natsuki.

“Mm, they’ll probably last longer if we freeze them after we’re done and put them back into the magic bags,” said Haruka.

Magic bags combined with Haruka’s magic could fulfill the same functions as a fridge and a freezer. The fridge that Aera-san had was way out of our price range, so it was great that we already had something we could use. *The kinds of food that are available to us are going to improve more and more thanks to this discovery!*

We had been experimenting for a bit, and apparently Touya’s hunger had started to overwhelm his patience; he voiced some complaints while holding his stomach with his hands.

“Look, I don’t mind testing things out, but my stomach’s been grumbling at me to eat some crab for quite a while now...”

“Right, tasting what we caught is important as well, since the taste will decide whether or not we’ll set up cages again,” said Haruka. “Should we just try grilling some now?”

“Yeah, let’s try grilling one crab to see how it tastes,” said Natsuki. “We

should grill two shrimp as well since each one is small.”

We quickly started a fire and placed a net over it for grilling. The valley crab and river shrimp we just put on the grill as is, but the girls split the shelled shrimp vertically. The only seasoning they used was salt, which they sprinkled over all three kinds of catch. The shrimp and crab slowly turned red, a process that was accompanied by a sizzling sound; every time their juices escaped and dripped into the fire, they created puffs of smoke and gave off a delicious smell.

“U-Um, how much longer do we have to wait?” Touya asked. “I’m really hungry...”

“I think the river shrimp should be ready. Let’s slice it up.” Haruka took the river shrimp off the net and removed its skin before slicing it into two large pieces and three smaller pieces on a cutting board. “Touya, Nao, you guys can have the larger slices.”

“Here’s a plate of salt if you want to dip it in some more,” said Natsuki.

“Let’s dig in!” we all exclaimed in unison.

I took one of the larger slices of shrimp off the cutting board and dipped it in some salt before tossing it back into my mouth.

“Whoa, this tastes really good,” I said.

Unlike, say, black tiger shrimp, the flesh of the river shrimp was soft and melted in my mouth, but it also had some umami to it and barely tasted muddy at all.

“This tastes much better than I thought it would,” said Natsuki. “We didn’t devein the shrimp before we cooked it, but it didn’t ruin the taste at all.”

“Mm, this river shrimp could probably be used for all sorts of dishes,” said Haruka. “Aside from sashimi, that is.”

“Oh, it’s no good for sashimi?” I asked.

“Eating raw seafood caught from rivers isn’t a good idea,” said Haruka. “That rule probably holds just as true in this world as it did on Earth.”

“Mm, there’s the scary risk of parasites,” said Natsuki.

Some places back in Japan served freshwater sashimi, but it wasn't recommended. Salmon was commonly used for sushi, and wild-caught salmon wasn't safe for raw consumption. The kind of salmon that could be consumed raw were raised in specific controlled conditions. To prepare river-caught salmon as sashimi, you would have to kill any parasites inside using salt and vinegar. However, even that method wasn't guaranteed to work, so the safest way to eat salmon would be to actually cook them.

"With something this delicious, one piece isn't enough," said Touya. "Can we grill some more?"

"Relax, Touya. We still have the shelled shrimp and valley crab to go through," I said. I pointed to the grilling nets. "Think about it again after we're done with those two."

I tried my best to calm Touya down, since he had started to wag his tail unconsciously. The valley crab and the shelled shrimp, the latter cracked in half, gave off some delicious sizzling sounds as they cooked.

"The shelled shrimp should be ready by now," said Haruka. "Everyone, use your own chopsticks to take a bite."

"Dibs!" Touya exclaimed.

"Huh?!"

Touya swiftly reached out with his chopsticks the instant Haruka gave out permission. He grabbed the entire tail part, threw it into his mouth, and smiled as he chewed.

"Delicious!"

"What the hell, Touya?! Show some restraint!" I exclaimed.

The tail portion was more than half of the shelled shrimp, so there weren't many parts left that were edible. It was possible that the head would taste good, but I was still mad at Touya.

Haruka sighed. "Let's just slice up the remaining parts..."

Natsuki took out a cooking knife and divided the rest of the shrimp into four equal-sized pieces.

“Sorry about this,” I said.

“Don’t worry about it,” Natsuki replied with a smile.

I thanked Natsuki and mixed my slice of shrimp with the shrimp head portion before I tossed it into my mouth. I’d only had spiny lobster a few times back on Earth, but based on my vague memories, the shelled shrimp tasted somewhat similar. It tasted a bit muddier than the river shrimp, but it probably wouldn’t be a problem if we cleaned them for a longer period of time.

“Mm, the shelled shrimp tastes good as well!” Yuki exclaimed.

“The shell was quite hard, though,” said Haruka.

“We managed to crack it in half thanks to our cooking knives, but normal knives wouldn’t have been able to get through that kind of shell,” said Natsuki.

According to Natsuki, the shell was much harder than a spiny lobster’s, so a normal knife couldn’t slice through it, and she’d only managed to crack it because the new cooking knives were so sharp—and by applying some brute force. However, there was the option of slicing through the soft underbelly, so it wasn’t an issue if cracking the shrimp open wasn’t important to the cook.

“Also, the head part has a strange and unique taste,” said Natsuki. “It’s not inedible by any means, but I think it would be better to remove it, clean it, or use seasoning to adjust the taste.”

“Really? I think it tastes just fine,” said Touya.

Touya went for the other half of the shrimp with his chopsticks after he saw that the rest of us had finished eating. Even as he kept talking, he sucked up the tomalley with no shame. Grudges over food would normally run deep, but there was no reason for me to get angry when we had a barrel full of shelled shrimp. However, if we had been eating spiny lobster back on Earth and he’d acted like this, I would have probably resorted to communicating with my fists.

“The last thing to try is the crab,” said Natsuki. “It’ll probably be hard to eat as is, so I’m going to slice it open.”

Natsuki laid out a valley crab on top of the cutting board and sliced off all of its legs before cracking the shell open. She then sliced the main body of the

crab into four and carved some bits out to make for easier eating. Her professional-looking work impressed me quite a bit. I smacked down Touya's hands whenever he tried to reach out and grab something. Eventually, Natsuki laid down her cooking knife and handed the cutting board towards me.

"Here you go," said Natsuki. "Take whatever part you want."

As before, Touya swiftly secured his portion immediately after Natsuki finished her sentence, and I felt a bit exasperated at him as I grabbed some crab legs myself. The valley crab didn't have paddle fin legs like blue crabs, and its pincers were on the small side. Its legs were shorter than the legs of a snow crab, but they were still full of meat. In fact, there was enough meat that each leg could be used to make two crab sticks, so it would probably taste quite satisfying. I sprinkled some salt on a crab leg before I took a bite out of it.

"Hmm, this tastes a lot better than crab sticks," I said.

"Well, I guess it tastes better than canned snow crab meat," said Yuki.

"I personally think snow crabs taste much better," said Natsuki.

"That would make sense in your case, Natsuki," said Haruka. "I think these valley crabs taste better than the kind of crab meat at conveyor belt sushi restaurants, though."

It seemed like each of the girls had a slightly different opinion, but it would probably be fair to exclude Natsuki's reference to snow crabs, since she was the only one of us who had eaten a lot of them. Of course, the taste of food could differ a lot depending on the quality of the ingredients, but none of the girls had said anything negative about the valley crab.

"Nao-kun used crab sticks as a comparison, and I think that's actually quite apt," said Natsuki. "This valley crab doesn't have a strange flavor, so it can probably be used for anything."

"I wouldn't exactly say it's that similar to crab sticks, but it doesn't really have the rich taste that I expected from a crab," said Haruka.

Touya was the only one of us with a differing opinion. "Huh, really? It tastes just fine to me." He was still holding a chunk of meat from the body of the crab in his hands and chewing on it. Depending on the species, the body of a crab

could have very few edible parts, but this valley crab, like a blue crab back in Japan, had a lot of body meat.

“I wonder if the leg meat tastes different from the body meat.” Haruka looked a bit puzzled as she extended her chopsticks towards the body meat, but her reaction changed to one of surprise when she took a bite. “Mm! It really tastes different!”

“Seriously?”

I took a bite out of the valley crab’s body. It had a completely different texture on my teeth. It was a bit gooey and thick, and it tasted as if crab flavor was condensed into it. Some people would love this taste and some people would hate it, but it made me personally feel like I was actually eating some proper crab. I took a bite out of the tomalley as well, and it was quite rich too.

“I didn’t expect the taste to be so different,” said Natsuki. “It might actually be a good idea to mix the meat from the body, the legs, and the tomalley all together.”

“That might get you a taste that would sit well with anyone, yeah,” said Yuki. “I personally think they’re all individually delicious, though.”

“I’d love to eat some crab fried rice,” I said. “Are there any places in town that sell rice?”

Since yesterday, our meals had been grilled fish with salt and soup made from fish stock—dishes that made me want some rice to go along with them. Bread didn’t feel right to me for that kind of dish. Fried fish went well with bread, but fish grilled with salt made me want some rice.

“I’ve mentioned this before, but according to the General Knowledge skill, the answer is no,” said Haruka. “In any case, I haven’t found any places in Laffan that sell rice. Wheat does exist here, so rice should exist somewhere in this world, but...”

“Rice can probably be found in areas with subtropical or temperate climates,” said Natsuki. “I’m not sure if there are species of short-grain rice out there in this world that are suited for fried rice, however.”

“Oh, so it’s a question of climate...”

On Earth, long-grain rice had been more common throughout history, besides which places like Japan that consumed rice as a staple food were a minority in the past. With that in mind, there was probably a long road ahead of us before we obtained delicious rice.

“I don’t really feel the need for rice if we can eat the udon noodles that Yuki made,” said Touya. “I’d get tired of having nothing but bread, however.”

“Udon noodles, huh? They can be made from wheat and can be used at the end of a hot pot meal, so they’re really good to have,” I said.

“Mm, those udon noodles that you made were closer to the real thing than I thought they would be considering what you had to work with, Yuki,” said Haruka.

“Oh, please, you’re embarrassing me with all the praise.” Yuki scratched her cheeks, which were red from embarrassment, but our praise was sincere. “Well, look forward to even more delicious udon noodles from me once our house is done!”

The udon noodles that we’d had in the morning were really delicious even though they were quite short, so I was excited to hear that I would have more opportunities to eat them. It would be nice to have some kelp stock to enhance the flavor of the noodles, but that was probably asking for a bit too much.

“Well, let’s think about rice at another time,” said Haruka. “More importantly, we should definitely try to catch a lot of crabs and shrimp here.”

“Of course!” I exclaimed.

“Let’s catch all of them!” Touya exclaimed.

It would be physically impossible to catch all of the crabs and shrimp here, and even if it were possible, it would also be better to leave some for the future, but we were eager to catch as many as we could now that we knew how delicious they were.

“All right, then. Let’s set up some traps again to catch crabs and shrimp in the afternoon while we continue fishing,” said Haruka.

“Mm, that sounds like a good plan,” said Natsuki. “If we set up traps again

today and tomorrow, then we should be able to catch enough to live off for quite a while.”

“The crabs and shrimp are delicious enough to make it worth traveling all the way here, even if we have to camp out for more than one day,” I said. “Let’s come back here again once we run out of what we have stocked up.”

Everyone nodded and agreed to my suggestion. In the end, our four-day, three-night fishing trip consisted of nothing but fishing and setting up traps in the river for catching crabs and shrimp. We also caught some char by fishing slightly upstream. We never got attacked by monsters even once, most likely due to the fact that we had exterminated an orc nest the other day.

Our final haul was a huge number of fish, crabs, and shrimp, as well as five giant salamanders. We sold four of those giant salamanders to the guild for a total of around two hundred gold coins. A lot of people had helped us on our fishing trip before we even set out, so we went and shared some of the yamame trout with Tomi, Gantz-san, Diola-san, and Aera-san. Diola-san had helped us a lot on a daily basis up till this point, so we shared a little bit more with her than the others. According to Diola-san, each trout would sell for at least two or three large silver coins, but the main purpose of our fishing trip had been to take a small vacation, so this time, delicious food was more important to us than some small amount of money. Most of what we had obtained from our trip remained inside of our magic bags.

The next day, after we had returned to Laffan, Haruka suddenly said, “Today we’re going to bring Simon-san some food as a gift. What about you guys, Nao?”

“A gift? Oh, do you mean some cooked fish?” I asked.

“Yeah, since all of us asked a bunch of big favors of him—especially Yuki,” Haruka replied.

“Oh, come on, I wasn’t asking for that much. He seemed more than happy to help us out!”

As far as Haruka was concerned, the construction of our house didn’t count as a favor since it was Simon-san’s job, but all the other things he had done for them, like crafting wooden swords and fish traps, definitely counted. They had

paid Simon-san for his time and services, but it seemed like Haruka didn't consider the amount to be sufficient in itself.

"Even so, we should express our gratitude to Simon-san for his help," said Haruka. "Right, Natsuki?"

"Mm, and we'll probably need his help in the future as well, so it's worth putting in the effort to stay on good terms."

"Well, I never said I was against the idea or anything," said Yuki. "Will you guys come with us, Nao?"

"Yeah, I'll tag along," I replied. "Also, I'm curious about how the construction is going. What about you, Touya?"

"I'll tag along too," Touya replied. "I won't be any help with the food preparation, but I'm also curious about how our house looks now."

We all headed towards the construction site. When we arrived, it looked quite different than it had on our last visit, even though only a week had elapsed. The exterior appeared to be more or less complete; it looked like the last task that remained to be done was plastering the walls. In fact, it looked like the plastering was already mostly complete and would probably be finished by the end of the day. *Actually, wait, don't walls need to be plastered multiple times?* I couldn't estimate from the outside how much work remained to be done on the interior, so I had no idea exactly when our house would be finished.

Yuki headed over to greet Simon-san, since he was the construction supervisor. "Hello, Simon-san!"

Simon smiled when he turned around and saw Yuki. "Oh, hey. I'm glad to see you again. Did you all get back recently?"

Early marriages were common in this world, so it would be fairly normal for middle-aged people like Simon-san to have grandchildren around our age. In fact, Simon-san had a somewhat doting look in his eyes as he looked at Yuki, as if he considered her similar to a grandchild.

"Yeah! We successfully completed the quest that we took on," said Yuki. "It looks like you've made a lot of progress! How close is our house to being

finished?”

“As you can see, we’re almost done painting the exterior walls,” Simon replied. “We’ll paint the walls one more time, but that’ll be done by the end of tomorrow. As for the interior work, it should be done within two weeks.”

“That’s much faster than I expected,” said Haruka.

“Mm, we’ve gotten lucky with the weather,” said Simon. “All that’s left is interior work, so the weather won’t affect our schedule, even if it suddenly changes in the next two weeks.”

If everything went according to schedule, construction would be finished a month after it had begun. We asked Simon-san why the work had gone faster than planned, and he told us that there were three main reasons. The first was that the ground was firmer and more stable than they had expected. We had left the fine details up to Simon-san, and he’d been able to make use of the foundation that was left over from the house that had previously occupied this lot.

The second reason was the six hundred gold coins that we had paid in advance. The advance payment meant that Simon-san had been able to hire a lot of laborers at once, so the work had gone smoothly and quickly. He laughed and told us that the normal thing to do was to pay depending on how the construction was progressing, but in the end, it had worked out for us: our house was going to be finished sooner than originally planned. The girls had apparently decided that Simon-san was trustworthy, and they were right; he hadn’t run away with the money.

The last reason was the weather, which Simon-san had already mentioned. According to him, it was fairly common for the weather to turn nasty at this time of the year, but so far this year, the worst days had just been cloudy or a little bit rainy. Luckily for us, there hadn’t been a single day when the rain was heavy enough to force the workers to halt construction.

“So, did you all come here today to check how the construction is progressing? Or is it for one of your usual training sessions?” Simon asked.

“We’re actually here to bring some simple food as a gift,” said Natsuki. “You can have it for lunch. It’s our way of expressing our thanks for all the help that

everyone here has provided us.”

“Oh, is it homemade food? Did you girls make it yourselves?” Simon asked. “The other guys working here will surely be happy to hear that.”

According to Simon-san, there had been a period of time when ten people were working on site, but now only five workers remained, including himself, since the remaining work required special expertise. If we included servings for the five members of our party, a total of ten people would be eating together, which seemed like it wouldn’t be too much work for the girls.

“We’ll let you know when lunch is ready, so good luck with work!” Yuki exclaimed.

“All right, that sounds good to me,” said Simon. “I’m looking forward to it.”

Simon-san patted Yuki on the shoulder before heading back to work, and the girls immediately began preparing the food. It was still a while before noon, but the girls must have wanted to finish preparations now while they still had ample time. Touya and I wouldn’t be of any help with the cooking, so walking a bit away for training would be—

“Oh!” I exclaimed.

Touya spun around when he heard me raise my voice. “Huh?! What’s up all of a sudden?!” he asked in surprise.

I sat down on the ground and pointed at a corner of the yard. “I completely forgot about this...”

“These rocks? Oh, right! I felt like I was forgetting something!” Touya exclaimed.

“Why didn’t you mention it, then?!”

“I would have if I hadn’t forgotten!”

“Ugh, yeah, you’re right...”

I was pointing at the pile of rocks that Touya and I had gathered from the grassy plains the other day. Both of us had completely forgotten about our plan to gather rocks near a mountain stream. During our camping trip, we had been preoccupied with other things, such as fishing and catching giant salamanders

along with our large haul of crabs and shrimp, and everything had gone so satisfyingly well that we had forgotten the initial reason for the trip.

“What’s the plan?” I asked. “Should we go again to gather some rocks?”

“Nah, let’s think about this again once we use up our supply of crab and fish,” said Touya.

“Yeah, good point. It’s not like we absolutely need rocks right away.”

Our plan for a kitchen garden was just one idea that we had for a hobby, after all. Anyway, rocks weren’t absolutely necessary for a kitchen garden as long as we didn’t care about how it looked.

“Oh, by the way, is it possible to make blocks with Earth Magic?” Touya asked. “There are spells like Stone Missile, so it should be possible, right?”

“Yeah, I think it’s possible, but the only one of us who can use Earth Magic is Yuki,” I replied.

“What about you, Nao? You’re an elf, so you should be able to use magic even if you don’t have the aptitude for it, right?”

“Well, yeah, it’s technically possible, but...”

Humans couldn’t use magic without the aptitude, but that restriction didn’t apply to elves. However, up to this point, I had only practiced Time Magic and Fire Magic. Thanks to the time I’d spent practicing, my control of mana was decent now, but I had no idea how long it would take me to become proficient enough at Earth Magic to make blocks.

“Well, good luck,” said Touya. “You’re not going to ask Yuki for help when you’re completely at fault for this problem, right?”

“You’re just as responsible as I am, Touya!” I exclaimed, pointing a finger at him.

Touya shrugged and laughed in response to my rebuttal. “I mean, I can’t use magic, so...”

I knew he was just teasing, but I was still irritated. “Ugh, you’re all brawn and no brain,” I said.

“Heh heh, you’re right about that,” said Touya.

“Don’t just agree with me,” I said. “You’re nowhere close to brainless. It’s just that you can’t use magic.”

His skill build was completely focused on physical combat, but Touya wasn’t stupid by any means. Neither of us were as smart as the girls, but our grades back on Earth had technically been within the top section of our class.

“I mean, yeah, but I can’t really do anything about it since it’s inherently difficult for my race!” Touya exclaimed.

“Ugh, fine, I’ll give it a try,” I said. “But when you have some free time, you should read books as well, Touya. Your Appraisal skill is based on your knowledge, right?”

“Yeah, probably. It doesn’t seem like it’ll level up from duration of use alone.”

Touya said that for a while now, he had been using his Appraisal skill on everything that crossed his vision, but it still hadn’t increased from Level 2. However, the information that Touya’s Appraisal skill displayed had changed after he’d looked up reference materials at the Adventurers’ Guild, so that was evidence for the theory that his general knowledge was what had an effect on the skill.

“Well, I guess I’ll read through something like a monster encyclopedia,” said Touya.

“Yeah, you should,” I said. “I’ll play with dirt while you’re busy with that.”

Touya lay on a mat on the ground in a relaxed position and rolled around as he started to read through a monster encyclopedia. As for myself, I sat down directly on the ground and gathered some earth to practice channeling mana through it.



“Nao? Nao! Lunch is ready!”

I heard someone calling my name at the same time that I felt a slap on my shoulder. When I glanced up, I saw Haruka. She had a slightly exasperated look on her face, so she had probably been calling me for a while now. I looked up at

the sky and saw the sun shining high, so it must have already been noon.

“Oh, sorry. I’ll come over right away,” I said.

I got up and was about to start slapping the dirt off my pants when Haruka stopped me and used her Purification spell to clean my pants and hands as well.

“Thanks.”

Haruka smiled. “Don’t worry about it.”

She led the way to an area where a makeshift table had been set up. There were a few plates lined up on the table, and everyone else was already seated around it, including Simon-san and the other construction workers.

“Sorry to keep you all waiting,” I said.

“Welcome back, Nao,” said Touya. “How did things go?”

“I think I was close to getting the hang of it. Check this out.”

I tossed the objects in my hands to Touya. He caught them and rolled them around on the table. “Oh, are these dice? This one’s six-sided and this one’s eight-sided... Is this last one supposed to be a ten-sided die?”

“Yeah. I can make up to eight-sided dice just fine, but tens are kind of hard,” I said.

The dice were made of earth. Each side had a number carved on it, and they were hard enough that pieces wouldn’t chip off easily. I had managed to make a square six-sided die and an eight-sided die that was in the shape of two pyramids with square bases joined together, but the pentagonal base for the ten-sided die was a bit difficult to get right. Since I had struggled to make a ten-sided die, there was no way that I would be able to make a twelve-sided die, which would involve pentagonal pyramids, or a twenty-sided die in the shape of multiple triangles joined together.

“Uh, you know that making dice wasn’t the main goal here, right?” Touya asked.

“Oh, of course, I haven’t forgotten what this is for,” I said.

The actual purpose of my training was to improve my mana control. I’d only

made these dice for a change of pace, since training had gotten a bit boring. It was true that I had gotten a bit absorbed in making dice, but just a bit.

“More importantly, let’s start eating before the dishes get cold,” said Touya.

The main dish that the girls had made was a large pot full of the udon-like noodles that Yuki had made back on the second day of our fishing adventures. She’d used slightly different ingredients this time, but the steaming broth and delicious fragrance were perfect for this time of the year, since the weather had started to get a bit cold.

“We were just waiting on Nao, so I guess we can start to eat now,” said Haruka. “Simon-san, you guys should feel free to start eating as well.”

“Okay, I’m digging in,” said Simon. “Whoa, this is absolutely delicious!”

“Yeah, it really is!”

“If you sold this stuff at a stall, a huge line would form for sure!”

We all liked the way the noodles were seasoned, of course, and apparently they also suited Simon-san and the other construction workers just fine. They didn’t seem to consider the udon-like noodles strange at all; they slurped them without any hesitation. I started to eat as well, and the noodles tasted better than what I’d had during our camping trip, probably because the girls were working with fewer restrictions here in town. However, from the second day of our trip onward, we’d had noodles mixed with crab meat, and those had been better than the noodles currently in front of me. Regardless, the udon-like noodles here were way more delicious than anything that was served at the average dining hall in this world. *Now that our house is done, we’ll probably have meals this good every day. I’m really looking forward to it!*

“I didn’t know you girls were good at cooking on top of everything else.”

“Wait, hold on, there’s fish in the noodles! Did you all go upstream of the Noria River to hunt greater salamanders?”

“Oh, how did you know?” Haruka asked.

“The hunt quest for greater salamanders always seems to be active, though adventurers only attempt it on rare occasions. Those occasions are the only

ones when fresh fish gets brought back to Laffan.”

Most of the time, all you could get in Laffan was dried fish, and only at a few stores. It was possible that there were places that served salted fish, but you would probably need to search long and hard to find one. In any case, neither Aera-san’s café nor The Slumbering Bear served fish at all, so it probably wasn’t a commonly used ingredient in Laffan.

“Oh yeah, there isn’t much fish available here in Laffan, but Sarstedt isn’t too far away,” I said. “Does fish from Sarstedt not get shipped here at all?”

It didn’t make sense to me; the trip from Sarstedt to Laffan was only one day by horse-drawn carriage. However, the carpenters all shook their heads when they heard my question.

“No, not at all.”

“The fish from Sarstedt taste disgusting, and they’re not cheap either.”

“Sure, Sarstedt isn’t too far away from here, but you’d need to freeze or cool raw fish, right? Another option would be to dry or salt them for shipping. Those things make the fish more expensive, and as for their taste...”

Simon-san and the carpenters all grimaced, and our party responded with a collective “Oh...”

Their answers made perfect sense. Apparently even Laffan natives didn’t care for the fish from Sarstedt. On top of that, fish was expensive enough that you might as well buy meat instead. *How come the people in Sarstedt are willing to eat that kind of fish on a daily basis without complaints? Is it a local delicacy or something?*

“This dish is delicious, but I don’t think anyone in Laffan would pay for these noodles at a stall if they knew there was fish in them.”

“Well, we don’t plan on running a stall,” said Haruka. “We’re adventurers, just like you guys are carpenters.”

“Oh, that makes perfect sense! It’d be as if we started a stall ourselves for some reason.”

“Mm, that’d be strange! It’s a shame we can’t order some of these dishes

from a stall, though...”

“We’re not going to sell these dishes at a stall, but we made more than usual for today, so feel free to eat as much as you want,” said Natsuki.

“Of course! We’re not going to hold back during the rare opportunity for food as delicious as this!”

Just as they had declared, Simon-san and the other carpenters didn’t hold back at all. In no time, they’d managed to empty the entire pot of udon-ish noodles. I wasn’t sure if it was because the meal had left them energized, but they worked hard for the rest of the day, and as a result, our house seemed to be approaching completion ever more rapidly. Unfortunately, an unexpected incident threw a wrench into our plans.

Chapter 4—Mushroom Disaster

“Unfortunately, a mushroom disaster has occurred.”

Diola-san had a serious look on her face as she made that declaration. Since we didn’t know the details, our only response was to look at each other.

However, Natsuki had a different reaction: she gasped and covered her mouth with her hands. “Um, is it because of the magical mushrooms that we harvested a while ago?” she asked.

“Oh, no, those are being cared for properly. They’re unrelated to this incident,” Diola replied. “The cause of this incident is another kind of mushroom—they’re called barrash mushrooms. The problem should be obvious once you see what happened.”

Diola-san led us to the rooftop of the guild building in order to show us what she was talking about. The building was a bit higher than other ones nearby, so it was possible to see quite far away.

“Now then, everyone, please take a look in that direction.”

“This direction? Wait, since when was there a white pillar over there?” Yuki asked with a perplexed look on her face. “I don’t remember seeing that before...”

Yuki’s confusion was natural. There was something that looked like a huge white pillar standing in the middle of town, north of the guild building. However, it wasn’t impossible that we’d simply failed to notice it until now. It was clearly visible from the rooftop, but it wasn’t tall enough to be visible unless we passed right by it on the road. In addition, the pillar was located far from the parts of town where we were usually active.

“Mm, it suddenly appeared yesterday,” said Diola. “That’s the barrash mushroom that I just mentioned.”

“Huh...?” We were all shocked and at a loss for words.

When Diola saw our reactions, she chuckled and nodded. “Yes, I know it’s hard to believe. Unfortunately, this is reality.”

According to Diola-san, barrash mushrooms normally grew in dark places; their mycelia would spread underground for years. After a period of growth, the mushroom would suddenly extend its sporocarp and begin growing with incredible speed and power. In fact, it would even be strong enough to break through buildings made of stone.

“Um, so do dangerous mushrooms like that just grow in this town?” Yuki asked.

“No, they aren’t native to this area. The spores probably floated here from somewhere else or were accidentally carried here by travelers inside of their luggage,” Diola replied. “Mushroom disasters of this kind happen only on rare occasions.”

“Yikes, that’s really scary!” Touya exclaimed. “Are they really dangerous?”

“Well, as I just mentioned, incidents of this kind are quite rare, so not particularly,” said Diola. “However, I’m not certain whether it’s because of the climate, but barrash mushroom incidents tend to result in chain growth, and—”

Diola-san’s words were interrupted by the sound of something collapsing, and a new pillar appeared a short distance away from the first one. We all fell silent when we saw it.

“...As I was saying,” said Diola. She kept a straight face as she pointed at the new pillar, but none of us were calm enough to comment on her aplomb.

“Isn’t this a serious problem?” Haruka asked. “Will buildings like our inn be okay...?”

“Oh, these incidents seldom affect ordinary citizens,” said Diola. “Most houses have earthen floors, and the ones with underfloors don’t have very wide ones, so there isn’t much space for mycelia to grow. The worst that can happen is some small barrash protruding out from between the floorboards.”

According to Diola-san, a lot of underfloor space was necessary for barrash mushrooms to build up enough resources to grow to incredible size. Effectively, it was only possible in large houses owned by rich people.

“Now that you all understand the situation, let’s return downstairs.” It was a bit cold on the rooftop of the guild building, so Diola-san led us back inside before she continued. “What I’d like to request is that your party gather the materials required to make the medicine for withering the barrash mushrooms,” said Diola. “Or rather, I’d like to request that your party take on an escort quest to protect the people who will be heading out of the city to gather the materials. In any case, this incident is somewhat relevant to your party’s interests.”

According to Diola-san, the mushroom withering medicine would only have an effect on the barrash mushrooms before their sporocarps were fully formed. It sounded like the proper procedure was to spread the medicine over areas where barrash mushrooms could start growing, such as underfloor areas; doing so would prevent the mushrooms from taking root. If this was done before the sporocarps were formed, then the medicine would wither the mushrooms.

“What about those mushrooms we saw?” Haruka asked. “They’re already enormous.”

“They must be cut down. If left alone, a barrash mushroom will swell up, explode, and spread spores all over town like ash,” Diola replied. “Due to this risk, there are punishments for leaving barrash mushrooms alone.”

“Yikes, that’s awful,” said Yuki. “Does the person who owns the house that the large barrash mushrooms grew out of need to pay to have it cut down on top of getting their house destroyed?”

“The owner of the house does have to pay for the mushroom to be cut down, but it’s often a net gain for them—the barrash mushrooms can be sold for quite a lot of money after they’re cut down.”

“Wait, what? A mushroom that size actually sells?” I asked.

“Yes. It’s edible.”

All of us raised our voices in surprise. “Edible?!”

Diola-san nodded. “Mm, apparently barrash mushrooms are quite delicious. Bigger ones are said to taste even better than smaller ones. I’m not certain, but it seems that there are very few regions where barrash mushrooms can actually

grow to that size.”

According to Diola-san, there were some regions out there in the world where people cultivated barrash mushrooms, but those would only grow up to thirty centimeters. That in itself was quite large, but it was nowhere near the size of the mushrooms we had seen earlier.

“So does that mean those large barrash mushrooms will be delicious?” Natsuki asked.

“That seems to be the case, though I’ve never actually eaten any,” said Diola. “I should add that it’s forbidden to cultivate barrash mushrooms here in Laffan.”

It made sense that people weren’t allowed to cultivate barrash mushrooms here, since it would be impossible to grow such large ones in a secluded area. In addition, it would probably be nearly impossible to completely prevent the spores from spreading. There was no way that the lord who ruled over these lands would allow for an agricultural product that could potentially destroy the town.

“Well, there’s no reason for us to reject your request,” said Haruka. “Besides, you’ve helped us out a lot, Diola-san, so it’s only fair that we repay the favor.”

“Mm. Also, it would be horrible if our newly built house were destroyed by these mushrooms,” said Natsuki.

If everything Diola-san had just told us was true, then it would be at least a few years before our house was exposed to any danger from the barrash mushrooms. However, it would be unpleasant to go about my daily life while worrying that my house might someday be destroyed by mushrooms while I was asleep.

“Diola-san, can we also obtain some of that mushroom withering medicine?” I asked.

“Of course. When the medicine is distributed, the citizens who subsidized this quest have priority, but there should be enough for the adventurers who take on the quest as well,” said Diola. “Frankly, there aren’t many competent adventurers in Laffan, so I’d truly appreciate it if your party were willing to take

on the quest.”

“In that case—”

I was about to reply that we were willing when someone suddenly slammed open the doors of the guild.

“Is there still no mushroom withering medicine available?!”

The person yelling those words was a fat, balding middle-aged man. He seemed to be very anxious, and as a result, he’d ignored us and stomped right up to Diola-san, asking her that question in an intimidating manner.

Diola-san had a perfect business smile on her face. She replied calmly, “I’m afraid that there’s none as yet. Furthermore, even if and when the guild obtains the medicine, I highly doubt that there will be enough for you, Baronet of Reed.”

“Why’s that?! That giant barrash mushroom grew out of the house three doors away from mine!”

Oh, is that why he’s so anxious? It was only natural, but it was still no excuse for him to yell at Diola-san. I was about to take a step forward to object, but Diola-san gave me a look that told me not to intervene, and then continued her response to the baronet in the same tone and with the same business smile.

“The people who paid the guild to issue the quest have priority in the distribution of the medicine,” said Diola. “The guild will sell the leftover medicine, but I believe it would be better to pay for a quest yourself, baronet. You still have the money that you obtained from selling your land the other day, correct?”

Hm? Oh, is this baronet the original owner of the plot of land that we own now? I remember Diola-san making it sound like the owner was annoying to negotiate with, and now I understand perfectly.

The baronet was briefly at a loss for words, but then the expression on his face abruptly changed, as if a great idea had popped into his mind, and he yelled, “Ugh! O-Oh, hold on, I sold my land to a party of adventurers, correct? Make them gather the materials for the mushroom withering medicine!”

Is he talking about us? I don't mind doing the work if he's willing to pay, but there's no way we're doing it for free.

Diola-san's business smile turned somewhat scary. "That transaction was a fair and proper one conducted with the guild as the middleman," said Diola. "You have no right to force the buyers to do your bidding. If that's all you have to say, then please leave."

"Huh?! You know that I'm a noble, don't you?!"

"Indeed. What of it?"

Whoa, that's a strong and confident riposte! Diola-san was still maintaining the same business smile.

It seemed that the baronet had no response. He cursed in a low voice and then yelled "Make sure to sell mushroom withering medicine as soon as you get some in stock, understood?!" before wheeling around and heading out of the guild. Apparently he wasn't willing to subsidize a quest himself.

Diola-san dropped her smile as soon as the baronet was out of sight and breathed a sigh of relief. Turning to us, she said, "I'm sorry about that interruption. Let's get back to what we were discussing."

"Um, Diola-san, was it really okay for you to chase him away like that?" Haruka asked in a worried tone.

Diola-san blinked in surprise but then smiled. "Hm? Oh, it's not an issue at all. He's just a baronet, after all. I would have to act differently around a viscount or higher-ranked nobility, however."

Diola-san's smile looked genuine this time, so she probably wasn't lying. *Maybe the nobility in this world don't have as much power as I thought they did, at least not in this country.*

"So, is your party willing to take on this escort quest?" Diola asked. "It is an escort quest, so it might be a bit troublesome, but..."

"I don't mind at all," I replied. "We need to get our hands on some mushroom withering medicine of our own as a precaution for the future."

Yuki agreed with me immediately. "Yeah, we're absolutely willing to take this

quest on!” she exclaimed. “There’s no way we’re going to allow mere mushrooms to destroy our house, right?”

Everyone else nodded in agreement as well. There was no way we would refuse this quest. Our only alternative would be trying to obtain mushroom withering medicine on our own, but there was no good reason for us to do so. In addition, this quest probably wasn’t that dangerous since it was Diola-san who had suggested it to us, which meant she believed we were more than capable of completing it.

Diola-san sighed a breath of relief and slowly bowed to thank us. “Thank you very much for saying yes. I truly appreciate it. There isn’t much time, but the people you’ll be escorting have to prepare as well, so please come back to the guild in the morning two days from now.”



Immediately after we left the guild building, Natsuki furrowed her brow and put a hand to her cheek. “Mushrooms suddenly exploding out of a house, huh? That’s a bit scary to hear about.”

“I’ve heard stories about mushrooms growing in the corners of dirty rooms, but this is way more extreme than that,” I said.

“I can’t believe such a huge mushroom actually exists!” Touya exclaimed cheerfully. “We really are in a fantasy world!”

“Why do you sound so happy, Touya?” Haruka glared. “Do you realize those mushrooms could just as easily destroy *our* house?”

Despite Haruka’s glare, Touya didn’t seem to care; he wagged his tail and continued to smile. “I mean, this really feels like something that would happen in a fantasy world, right?! Doesn’t it make any of you feel excited?!”

“Hmm, I guess I kind of get what you’re trying to say,” said Yuki. “Things like dindel trees defy common sense too, but in the end, they’re just large trees. However, the huge size and rapid growth of the barrash mushrooms don’t make any sense at all.”

Yuki was completely right—a towering mushroom somehow seemed much more unrealistic than a tall tree.

“Hey, why don’t we go get a closer look?” Touya asked. “Or rather, that’s the only logical course of action, right?”

“I don’t really approve, since we’d be onlookers and it’s none of our business, but I can’t deny that I’m curious,” said Haruka.

“It’ll be informative, I believe,” said Natsuki. “Let’s just make sure we don’t get in the way.”

“Yeah, it should be fine. This seems like it’s not an emergency in the way a fire is,” said Yuki.

Everyone seemed to be down for getting a closer look. I voiced my agreement as well, since I couldn’t really come up with a reason to say no, and we headed towards the mushroom site. Once we got close to the part of Laffan where there were large mansions—an area we normally wouldn’t go anywhere near—we saw a tall pillar looming up in the air and steered towards it. Eventually, we began to hear the sounds of people bustling about and talking to each other.

“There are a lot of curious onlookers—or not?” said Touya.

“Mm, it looks like the professionals have already gotten to work,” said Natsuki.

There were a lot of people gathered around the remains of a mansion in the middle of a large plot. It looked like the rubble of the destroyed mansion had already been removed, and footholds had been constructed around the huge mushroom. There were a few other onlookers in addition to us, but most people only took a glance at the mushroom before passing by, presumably because they had work to do at this time of the day.

“It looks like the workers are using those footholds to chop down the mushroom starting from the top,” said Natsuki.

“That makes sense, since it’d probably be dangerous to start chopping from the bottom,” said Yuki. “The people at work here are probably lumberjacks, right?”

The plot would just barely have enough space for the huge barrash mushroom if it were felled properly, but there were upper-class houses nearby. The person whose house had gotten destroyed was most likely of similar social

standing. It would be a disaster on several different levels if the task wasn't executed properly. With that in mind, the owner of this plot probably wanted to avoid taking any risks.

"Hm? Isn't that Iwanaka's party over there?" Touya pointed.

I looked where Touya was pointing and saw three familiar faces among the people helping out with the cleanup work. *Did they get a job at this site as a result of the quests they've taken on escorting lumberjacks?*

"Yeah, it is them," I said. "So they're still alive, huh?"

"We told you guys before that we didn't kill them, remember?" said Haruka.

"We might have ended their lives as boys, however." Yuki smiled as she said that. "Well, they're probably fine, but who knows?"

That smile of yours is really scary, Yuki. It looked like Iwanaka's party had noticed us as well, but they grimaced and looked away from us.

"It looks like they've learned their lesson," said Natsuki.

"Surely they have, right? Only an idiot wouldn't have," said Touya.

"Are you sure about that, Touya?" I asked. "They're definitely idiots, so..."

If they weren't idiots, they wouldn't have tried to assault the girls.

"I mean, yeah, you make a good point..."

"Don't worry about it too much," said Haruka. "None of them are a threat to us. Their kung fu was way too weak."

"Why are you talking like some martial artist in a movie, Haruka?!" Yuki exclaimed. "But, well, actually, I completely agree."

I wanted to take Haruka's word for it that I could rest at ease, but I had a feeling that things weren't over just yet. It seemed like Iwanaka's party were glancing at us from time to time while discussing something furtively with each other. However, the foreman soon began yelling at them, so they had to return to work.

"I wonder what that huge barrash mushroom actually tastes like, though," said Haruka. "Diola-san told us that the taste gets better with size, but this

one's absolutely huge."

The lumberjacks were using tools like hatchets to chop off chunks of barrash mushroom that were as large as an average person. Even if they were absolutely delicious, I felt like the result would be an excessive supply.

While we were talking among ourselves, a guy approached us from the plot and addressed us. "Oh, it's you guys. I guess you didn't know, but barrash mushrooms shrink a lot after they're dried." He looked somewhat familiar, but I couldn't quite place his face.

On the other hand, Yuki recognized him right away. "Mister? Oh, wait, you're one of the carpenters!"

"Yep. I'm done with the work that I was assigned, but thanks for the work that your house provided."

"Oh no, we should be the ones thanking you for your hard work," said Yuki. "So you were saying that barrash mushrooms actually shrink a lot?"

"Yeah, they'll shrink to about one-hundredth of their original size if you dry them for a bit."

According to the carpenter, the normal barrash mushrooms that were sold on the market could be eaten as they were, but huge barrash mushrooms had to be dried and soaked in water first. Apparently a chunk of barrash mushrooms the size of a person would shrink to the size of a plastic bottle after it was dried—the perfect size for consumption. Even after they were soaked in a bit of water, the barrash mushrooms would only double in size, so in that way, they were much better than dried wakame seaweed.

"Anyway, don't say this out loud to anybody else, but these huge barrash mushrooms are expensive, so whether or not ordinary citizens like us will be able to afford any depends on how much bigger the disaster gets!"

The carpenter laughed as if the disaster wouldn't impact him, and it probably wouldn't. In general, the barrash mushrooms would only destroy the houses of rich people. If the disaster grew in scale, there would be more demand for manual laborers to chop the mushrooms down, and the increased supply of mushrooms would reduce the price until it was affordable for ordinary citizens.

According to the carpenter, it would be an issue if the barrash mushroom disaster spread out of control, but for the time being, it would serve as a sort of special procurement boom.

“Mm, that’s definitely something to avoid saying in public,” said Haruka.

“Right? In any case, mushroom disasters only happen once every few decades, and they usually only affect ten houses or fewer. That just means that the nobles whose houses get destroyed are plain unlucky.”

The carpenter whispered those last words, then chuckled, said goodbye, and headed off.

“I guess this means we don’t have to worry too much about the barrash mushrooms affecting our house,” said Haruka.

“Well, it’s probably only because of the mushroom withering medicine that the number of houses is seldom more than ten, wouldn’t you think?” Natsuki asked.

“That means it’s all the more important for us to complete the quest that we took on!” Yuki exclaimed. “For the sake of protecting our house as well!”

“Mm. In a way, it’s a good thing that this disaster happened now, before construction on our house is finished,” I said.

Because of the timing, we could take precautions against this problem ever affecting our house in the future.

“All right, let’s head back!” Touya exclaimed. “We need to prepare properly for this quest, after all!”

Two days later, we headed to the Adventurers’ Guild. We were greeted by Diola-san and, standing next to her, a suspicious person who was about as petite as Yuki and was completely enveloped in a robe with a hood that hid their face. Diola-san was the one introducing this stranger, and we could probably trust her judgment, but otherwise, I wouldn’t have wanted to come anywhere near someone who looked so suspicious.

“This is the alchemist who your party will be escorting,” said Diola.

“H-Hello. P-Please c-call me Riva,” the hooded figure muttered. The voice

sounded like a girl's. Based on her physique and the pitch of her voice, she was probably the same age as us or a bit younger.

"Nice to meet you. My name's Haruka. So you're an alchemist, huh?" Haruka asked. "I am too, although I've only dabbled in it."

"I'm also an alchemist!" Yuki exclaimed. "Oh, right, my name's Yuki! Nice to meet you!"

"I-Is that so? What an interesting coincidence," Riva replied.

Riva had sounded a bit nervous at first, but she seemed relieved to hear that our party contained two other girls around her height who were both alchemists as well. However, she still wouldn't look up at us, so we couldn't see her face.

"My name's Natsuki, but I'm not an alchemist," said Natsuki.

"I'm not either. My name's Nao," I said.

"My name's Touya!" Touya exclaimed. "Let's get along!"

Natsuki and I had both nodded and introduced ourselves normally, but Touya was being a little loud. As a result, Riva flinched and dashed behind Diola-san to hide.

Diola-san had a bitter smile on her face as she explained things to us. "As you can all see, she's a bit shy, which is part of why I wanted you to be the ones to escort her—your party happens to include a number of girls."

Diola-san's reasoning made sense to me. Here in Laffan, it would probably be difficult to find another party of adventurers with three girls who were around the same age as Riva.

"Riva-san, everyone in this party is trustworthy, including Touya-san. There's nothing you need to be afraid of," said Diola.

"I-I understand that, but..."

Like us, Riva must have trusted Diola-san's judgment up to a point, but she still looked scared of Touya. To deal with that problem, I grabbed Touya's hand and hid him behind me. That seemed to make Riva feel a bit more relaxed; she came out from behind Diola-san.

“This doesn’t feel fair to me for some reason...” said Touya.

“Sadly, this is a reality that you have to face, Touya-kun,” said Natsuki. “You do come off as a bit scary to the average girl.”

It would make sense for a timid girl to be slightly afraid of Touya. Ever since being transported to this world, he had become a lot more muscular. Girls with a fetish for muscles would probably react differently, but that didn’t seem to be the case for Riva.

“He might not look like it, but Touya is actually pretty reliable,” said Haruka. “Can you please put up with him for a bit, Riva?”

Riva’s response was barely audible. “O-Of course I can...”

That doesn’t sound very reassuring. However, our job was to protect her for the duration of the escort quest, so she had no choice but to learn to put up with Touya’s presence.

“Uh, well, let’s get going,” said Yuki. “If we take too long, the barrash mushrooms might damage more houses.”

“Yeah, good point. I feel like some people would be happy to have more mushrooms and more work to do, though,” I said.

Earlier in the morning, we had heard a loud sound reverberate through the air, so there were good odds that another house had been destroyed by a barrash mushroom. I wasn’t sure if the mushrooms would spread more rapidly now, but we definitely didn’t have any time to waste.

“Just so you’re aware, the citizens subsidizing this escort quest are the ones who are unhappy about the damage caused by the barrash mushrooms,” said Diola. She laughed dryly.

We all nodded.

“Mm, we know,” I replied. “We’ll do our best to get things done as fast as possible within reasonable limits.”

“That’s good to hear. Please take care of yourselves out there,” said Diola.



The ingredients for mushroom withering medicine could only be obtained deep within the south forest. Our party was responsible for escorting Riva all the way there and ensuring her safety while she gathered the ingredients. Considering the current situation in Laffan, we probably should have hurried, but we had no choice but to walk at a normal pace due to a certain reason, namely the huge stack of luggage that Riva was carrying on her back. We offered to carry her luggage for her, but she declined, saying it was all alchemical implements. Even if she'd taken us up on our offer, it probably wouldn't have worked out. When we got into combat, we would immediately discard whatever luggage we had on our backs, so it wasn't a good idea for us to be carrying anything fragile.

After walking beyond the fields that spread out south of Laffan, we eventually reached the entrance of the south forest. Ordinarily, there would be lumberjacks around, but there didn't appear to be any today, probably because they had all been assigned to chop down the barrash mushrooms.

"Hmm. This forest feels a lot brighter than the east forest," I said.

We weren't very deep into the forest yet, but even so, it was a conspicuous difference from the east forest where we hunted orcs. To me, it seemed halfway between a wild forest and a more open, cultivated forest.

"It's probably a result of people harvesting wood here," said Haruka. "However, we might encounter monsters that we haven't fought before, so don't let your guard down."

"Of course we won't!" Yuki exclaimed. "You can run into monsters like brancheater spiders and slash owls here, right?"

"Mm. However, I'm fairly certain that brancheater spiders won't be that dangerous as long as we notice them before they notice us," said Natsuki.

As their name implied, these spiders gnawed on the branches of trees—not for sustenance but to bring down prey. One of the methods they used was to gnaw away at branches until they were close to snapping under their own weight; they then secured the branches in place with gossamer. If any other creature got on top of a branch that had been booby trapped like that, it would get entangled in the thread and then plummet to its death when the branch

broke. However, even if the creature survived the fall, the brancheater spiders would just immobilize it with more thread and then deal the final blow with their fangs.

Another method that the brancheater spiders used was to snap a branch when a prey animal walked beneath it. This was a hazard for lumberjacks and adventurers, so we had to be alert. However, for those involved in the forestry business, the main nuisance caused by the brancheater spiders was the fact that they would damage valuable timber. As a result, it was recommended that adventurers slay any brancheater spiders they came across, and the Adventurers' Guild offered a reward for proof of the kill.

"So slash owls are dangerous, huh? They don't sound that strong, but I'm a bit worried," I said.

The feathers on the edge of a slash owl's wings were as sharp as knives. When they sighted prey, they would descend from a perch high in the treetops and, gliding past their target, use their feathers to slash it. If you couldn't dodge them, getting your arms slashed was actually the best case scenario. If you were unlucky, you could get your carotid arteries slashed open and bleed out. It was possible to block slash owl attacks with thick leather armor, so they wouldn't be a threat if you could protect your face and neck, but...

"Should we be wearing things like neck guards just in case?" Yuki asked.

"Well, we have healing magic, so I don't think we'll die even if we get our carotid arteries injured," Haruka replied. "However..."

"That's only if one of us can react right away," said Natsuki.

It was possible to heal dissected blood vessels if you acted quickly. The question was how much blood you lost before the injury was healed. I wasn't sure if we could clamp down on that kind of injury with our hands. The sudden loss of blood could lead to anemia and fainting, so I was a bit scared of the possibility.

"Also, we're on an escort quest this time, so we should keep in mind that we can't fight the way we usually do," I said.

There was a chance that Riva would get injured if we dodged attacks without

thinking. Depending on the scenario, there was also a chance that I would have to act as a meat shield, although I would have preferred to leave that duty to Touya, since he was much tankier than I was.

“I-I’m sorry for being a burden...”

“Oh, there’s no need for you to feel bad about it, Riva,” I said. “It’s our job to protect you, after all.”

Touya agreed with me right away. “Yeah, I’ll make sure to protect you at all costs, even if I have to put my life on the line.” He smiled at her.

Okay, thanks for volunteering for meat shield duty, Touya.

However, his words and smile didn’t seem to have a positive effect on Riva at all. She replied in a feeble voice, “Th-Thank you very much...”

The moment she was done replying to Touya, she hid behind me. Clearly she was still afraid of him. As for Touya, his smile didn’t falter, but he seemed a bit depressed by Riva’s reaction. On a side note, Riva was hiding behind me, but it wasn’t because she was any more used to my presence than she was to Touya’s. Apparently she wasn’t quite as afraid of me as she was of Touya, but that was just because our current walking formation put me between her and him. Yuki seemed to be the person who Riva was the least nervous around, probably because Yuki was around the same height as her and was an alchemist as well. In fact, on our way to the forest, Riva had chatted with Yuki from time to time, with Haruka occasionally joining in as well.

I wasn’t sure if it was because she had hit it off with Riva, but Yuki joined the conversation with a slightly playful tone in her voice. “Mm, make sure you do your best to protect delicate and fragile girls like us, Touya.”

Touya grinned; it seemed like he was willing to play along. “‘Us’? I don’t see any delicate and fragile girls here aside from Riva.”

“Oh, are you trying to pick a fight with me, Touya?” Yuki asked.

“Hold on, Yuki,” said Haruka. “If we’re talking about fragility, then I’m way more fragile than you are.”

“Oh, are you forgetting about me, Haruka?” Natsuki asked. “I’m the very

definition of delicate and fragile.”

“Nah, I think you’re exaggerating,” Haruka replied. “I’d be willing to agree if we were talking about how things were back on Earth, but now you’re the healthiest and most energetic person among us after Touya.”

What does any of this have to do with being an adventurer? Unfortunately for me, my thoughts seemed to attract unwanted attention somehow.

“Hold on, why don’t we let Nao be the judge?” Touya asked. “He’s standing there with a look on his face like he has nothing to do with this.”

“Huh?”

Why did you put it on me, Touya?! I gulped when I felt the girls all turn towards me.

“W-Well, isn’t it obvious that you’re all delicate and fragile?” I said. “On the outside, that is.”

“Huh? What do you mean by that?” the girls asked in unison.

“Now then, let’s get going!” I exclaimed.

My honest feelings had slipped out at the end of my sentence, so in order to avoid having to explain further, I changed the subject and then marched on ahead.



About an hour had passed since we’d entered the south forest. Luckily for us, we hadn’t encountered a single slash owl yet. On the other hand, we had encountered normal goblins as well as stronger forms of goblins, such as goblin scouts and goblin fighters. However...

“The stronger forms of goblins weren’t as strong as I thought they would be,” said Haruka.

“Right? They were a bit faster than normal goblins, but that was about it,” I said.

Goblin scouts would have been a bit of a challenge to find, but my Scout skill made it quite easy, so I just slew them on sight with my Fire Arrows, which

made it easy for us to retrieve their magicites. The magicite was the only part of a goblin that you could really sell, so they almost weren't worth the effort required to slay them, but magicites from stronger forms of goblins would fetch us an amount equivalent to the lodging fees for one night at an inn; that being the case, their magicites were worth retrieving.

"You know, you three mages slew goblins with magic, so Natsuki and I haven't gotten a chance to slay any yet," said Touya.

"Hm? Did you want to fight goblins, Touya?" I asked. "I don't mind if you do, but you'll be responsible for retrieving their magicites."

Goblin magicites were located inside of their skulls, so if you didn't blast their heads off with magic, you'd have to extract the crystals with your bare hands, which I definitely didn't want to do. *Why do some monsters have their magicites inside of their heads?*

"Nah, I'll pass. There's no point in fighting weak opponents," Touya replied. "I was ready to help if needed, but they ended up being pretty weak..."

"Um, I think it's more that everyone in your party is quite strong..."

Riva sounded a bit hesitant as she joined our discussion, but she must have been a little less nervous around us now. It was mostly thanks to Yuki's excellent communication skills that Riva had gotten to the point of actively participating in conversations now.

"Is that so? The goblins felt much weaker than the orcs we've fought before," said Haruka.

"You can't really compare goblins with orcs," Riva replied.

"Oh yeah, I guess you're right about that," said Yuki. "We've mostly been fighting orcs recently."

The average adventurer in Laffan wasn't capable of slaying orcs, so the ones who could were considered decently strong.

"I'm really amazed that you're an alchemist and also an adventurer who can slay orcs, Yuki-san," said Riva. "I'm nowhere strong enough to slay orcs. I can barely afford to buy orc meat either..."

“Heh heh, thanks for the compliments!” Yuki exclaimed. “Wait, do alchemists not earn much money?”

“It varies from person to person, I think,” Riva replied. “I’m a bit shy, so, you know...”

We all responded with an “Oh...” when we heard Riva’s quiet response. None of the people in our party were that intimidating, but Riva was still nervous around us, so dealing with customers was probably quite difficult for her.

“All right, we’ll treat you to a lot of orc meat for lunch!” Yuki exclaimed confidently, slapping her own chest. “Consider me your big sis and leave everything to me!”

“Th-Thank you very much,” Riva replied, but then she tilted her head in confusion. “Big sis...?”

Yuki, I understand those protective feelings of yours, but based on the chats we’ve had so far, I’m fairly sure she’s older than us.

“I-In any case, we should be just fine if goblins are all we have to deal with,” I said. “That’s only if things stay this way, though...”

“What’s wrong?” Haruka asked. “Is there something bothering you?”

“Yeah, kind of. There are some other adventurers in the forest, and they’re acting weird.”

My Scout skill had detected them as soon as we entered the south forest. They’d spent the entire time running around, not even trying to slay monsters in their way. That in itself wouldn’t be weird if they were headed towards the exit of the forest, but for some reason, they weren’t. On top of that, I was concerned about the fact that my Scout skill had detected them in the first place. My Scout skill could detect signals from life-forms that weren’t hostile, but that didn’t seem to be the case here.

Just as I’d come to that conclusion, the signals from the other party of adventurers suddenly began moving towards us, with the monsters still chasing them.

“Enemies inbound!” I exclaimed. “From behind! There are a lot of them!”

The moment I shouted that warning, everyone shifted into their assigned positions. Natsuki and Touya moved towards the rear to face whatever was coming our way head-on, while Haruka and Yuki moved to the left and right of Riva. I moved to a spot slightly in front of Riva. We started to hear the sounds of something making its way through the bushes and then saw the silhouettes of some people in the distance. I used my Hawk's Eye skill to try to identify them.

I frowned when I discovered the answer. "Uh, this might be hard to believe, but it's Iwanaka's party that's approaching us," I said.

"Is that so?" Natsuki had a cold tone in her voice. "We happen to be outside of town right now, don't we?"

I felt a bit scared when I realized what Natsuki was implying. Even though she had her back to me, I could feel her silent anger towards Iwanaka's party, so I was really glad that I couldn't see what kind of facial expression she was wearing at the moment.

"Well, they might just be running away from monsters," said Haruka. "Let's give them one last chance, but only one."

"Yeah, it'll be their last chance for sure," said Yuki. "Heh heh..."

"U-Um...?"

Haruka and Yuki were just as scary as Natsuki, and Riva sounded a bit confused as to what was going on.

Of course, Riva didn't know what had happened. I went ahead and explained things to her. "Those guys assaulted the girls."

Riva gasped and then raised her voice. "Isn't this a huge problem?!"

"Yeah, it is," I replied. "The girls defeated them without breaking a sweat, but..."

"I guess we'll just have to deal with them," said Touya. "Let's act accordingly if they attack—"

Touya's words were cut short when Iwanaka's party got close to us and threw three objects that looked like rocks in our direction. Touya was ready and alert, so he deflected one of the objects with his shield, while Natsuki sliced another

in half. The last object didn't quite reach us and fell to the ground. However, as it turned out, we couldn't stop what Iwanaka's party had planned. The third rock hit the ground with a crash and began to vent a cloud of smoke.

"They used a decoy bomb!" Natsuki exclaimed. "Monsters are swarming towards us!"

Natsuki later explained to me that adventurers usually used decoy bombs when fleeing from monsters. When thrown, the bombs generated smoke that attracted monsters, so they could delay and slow down anything pursuing the adventurers. The smoke only affected weak monsters, but most of the monsters in the south forest fell under that category. Iwanaka's party ran right in front of us and then swerved to the right and fled, and the monsters chasing them slowed down when they hit the smoke from the decoy bombs.

"They dumped a mob train on us!" I exclaimed.

I was pretty pissed. Iwanaka's party had even smirked at us before they made their escape. If we'd only had our usual party members here, we would have had the option of catching up to Iwanaka's party and leading the train of monsters back to them, but this time, Riva was accompanying us. If Iwanaka's party had taken that fact into consideration, then it was actually a pretty clever strategy.

"Well, weak monsters like these aren't a threat to us!" Touya exclaimed.

Immediately after declaring that, Touya proved his point by slaying a couple goblins in short order, but his moves weren't as fluid as usual. He normally wouldn't care about his surroundings while he fought, but we were in the middle of an escort quest. The rest of our party was around to back him up, but he was probably feeling the pressure of needing to prevent even one monster from getting past him.

"This is good exercise for us. We've had it easy until now," said Natsuki. "However, there are some slash owls that we need to watch out for!" As she spoke that warning, she lunged forward with her spear and stabbed an owl out of the air.

Slash owls were silently flying towards us at high speed, but they weren't that hard to deal with if we kept our heads in the game. However, we couldn't let

our guard down in a battle where we had to face off against all different sorts of monsters. On top of that, there were other dangers that we had to be wary of.

“Branch eater spiders are approaching us as well!” Haruka exclaimed. She had just loosed an arrow and sniped a spider in the treetops. On their own, they weren’t a threat to us, but they were a nuisance as part of a mixed group of monsters.

“*Fire Arrow!* I’m honestly a bit impressed at the number of monsters gathering here!” Haruka exclaimed.

“It’s probably because of those decoy bombs!” I exclaimed. “They just keep coming and coming! *Fire Arrow!*”

As far as my Scout skill had been able to detect, fewer than twenty monsters had been pursuing Iwanaka’s party, but now we were fighting way more than that. They were individually weak, but fighting them while protecting Riva was far more difficult than I had expected. If that had been Iwanaka’s plan, then I had to admit that it was quite effective.

“Nao, Yuki, the two of you absolutely have to protect Riva!” Haruka exclaimed. “The rest of us will whittle down the mob!”

“Understood!” we both replied.

“I-I’m sorry for being a burden,” said Riva.

“No need to apologize,” Yuki replied. “However, it’s dangerous for you to move around, so please crouch down, okay?”

“O-Okay!”

Riva obeyed Yuki’s instructions without hesitation, while Yuki and I held our ground to the left and right of Riva. Haruka backed us up with her magic. Just as we’d finally reduced the horde of monsters to a more manageable number, an arrow came flying straight for Riva. The person who had fired it was Tokuoka; he’d returned seemingly out of nowhere. I wasn’t sure if he had deliberately aimed at Riva or if it was a stray shot, but regardless, I had no intention of forgiving him.

I smacked the arrow out of the air with my spear and yelled at the culprit.

“Tokuoka! What the hell did you just try?!”

“Whoa, seriously? You’re able to deflect a flying arrow? Guys, throw rocks or whatever you can find!”

An arrow fired by Haruka would have been difficult for me to intercept, but Tokuoka’s arrow had been no challenge. However, it was pretty annoying to have to deal with arrows from Tokuoka and rocks from Maeda and Iwanaka at the same time. I did my best to smack the objects they were throwing, and then I focused and shot two Fire Arrows at them. One of my Fire Arrows went flying towards a goblin scout and the other towards Tokuoka; both he and the monster had circled around Touya and were trying to flank me. The Fire Arrow that I’d shot at the goblin scout landed right on target, but the one that I’d shot at Tokuoka hit a tree behind him and blasted a chunk out of its trunk.

“Damn it.”

“Kamiya, are you trying to kill me?!” Tokuoka exclaimed.

“Of course,” I replied. “Or rather, why would you think I wouldn’t try to kill you?”

It wasn’t like I was throwing sticks and stones at him. If I wanted to minimize the risk of losing my own life, I had to be serious about trying to kill him. Iwanaka’s party deserved death for the very fact that they had tried to assault the girls, after all.

“We’ll be done with these monsters shortly, and you guys are next, so wait right there!” Yuki exclaimed. She sounded almost joyful.

When Iwanaka’s party heard Yuki’s words, their faces turned slightly pale.

“Dude, Iwanaka, are we in trouble here?” Tokuoka asked. “They’re easily chipping away at the monsters!”

“Didn’t you say that it would be easy if we gathered enough monsters?!” Maeda exclaimed.

“I didn’t expe—argh!”

Iwanaka’s party had lost their composure, so their attacks had relented a bit, and Yuki took advantage of that opening by shooting a Fire Arrow right at

Iwanaka's face. He fell to the ground and rolled around, clutching his face. However, there had been some shrubs in Yuki's line of sight that had reduced the potency of the Fire Arrow, so Iwanaka's face was still intact.

"Damn it, just a scratch, huh? I can't believe you guys left such an obvious opening," said Yuki. "You were underestimating us."

"Yuki, leave some for me to finish off!" Natsuki exclaimed.

Yikes. I mean, I'm planning on killing them too, but that's still scary to hear.

"I-I'm getting out of here!" Tokuoka exclaimed.

"W-Wait up, Tokuoka!" Maeda exclaimed. "Don't leave me behind!"

Iwanaka's party started to flee for real after they realized that they were at a disadvantage.

"I'd like to chase them down and put an end to them," I said. "However..."

I glanced at Yuki, and she shook her head; she looked disappointed too. We'd slain most of the monsters, but some were still alive, so we couldn't leave Riva's side. Meanwhile, Haruka silently shot an arrow in the direction that Iwanaka's party had fled. *From this distance, it's bound to fall short, right?*

"Argh!"

Or not? However, my Scout skill indicated that all three were still up and running, so apparently they'd survived. After that, it didn't take us long to slay the remaining monsters. Meanwhile, Iwanaka's party had escaped beyond the range of my Scout skill.

Touya had been fighting on the front line, so he was completely covered in blood. Natsuki was a bit bloodied too. Haruka used her Purification spell on both of them. "Whew. This sure is a mess," she said.

Glancing around us, Haruka sighed at what she saw. The monsters that we had slain with magic, arrows, and spears were in decent condition, but the ones that Touya had slain were an absolute mess. Some had their skulls crushed or their torsos torn asunder. It was like a splatter scene in a horror movie. We were somewhat accustomed to this kind of sight, but I still felt slightly nauseous.

“Um, is it okay for me to stand up again?” Riva asked.

“Yeah, it’s fine, but our surroundings are a complete mess,” I replied. “Will you be okay?”

“Um, I—ugh!”

When Riva stood and saw the carnage all around us, she covered her mouth with her hands. Somehow she managed to hold herself back from vomiting. I would have vomited if I’d seen something like this a few months ago, so perhaps she had more emotional fortitude than you’d think at a glance.

“Can you stand a ways away from us, Riva?” I asked. “We’re going to retrieve the magicites from these monsters, so...”

“U-Um, I’ll be fine,” Riva replied. “I was just a bit surprised, that’s all.”

“Really? In that case, I guess we’ll be quick about this,” I said. “Touya, Natsuki, go retrieve the magicites from the monsters that aren’t goblins. Haruka, you help me with the goblins. Yuki, come here next to Riva.”

I couldn’t detect any monsters nearby, but time was still of the essence here. I’d assigned Touya and Natsuki to the monsters with magicites that were easy to retrieve with knives, while Haruka and I used magic to blast the heads off the goblins. I didn’t feel comfortable with my actions—it was as if I were defiling the dead—but I had no choice but to get used to it; it was part of being an adventurer.

“Man, it’s a shame that we missed an opportunity to end Iwanaka’s party,” said Touya. As he sliced into the monsters’ carcasses, he sounded quite irritated, like he was venting his anger on them.

Haruka tried to calm him down, although she sounded unhappy as well. “It’s not like we had any other choice—we can’t just abandon our current quest to chase them,” she said. “It’d be great if we could get their faces printed on wanted posters, but that doesn’t seem to be possible for conflicts between adventurers...”

It was truly unfair that we still had no way to get Iwanaka’s party punished, even after all the things they’d done to us. However, we were soon blessed with help from an unexpected source.

“Um, I think you can get wanted posters issued if I provide testimony about what just happened,” said Riva.

“Wait, really?” I asked.

“Mm. I’m not sure it’ll be enough to get bounties placed on their heads, but it should be enough to get their adventurer cards revoked,” Riva replied.

Unlike us, Riva was actually a proper citizen of Laffan, so Iwanaka’s party had broken the law when they attacked her. She explained that if she offered her testimony to the Adventurers’ Guild, the guild would have just cause for punishing Iwanaka’s party. However, she also warned us that bounty rewards were disbursed from the guild budget; apparently it was difficult to get bounties issued if the culprits had only caused a few incidents.

“In that case, can we ask for your help once we return to Laffan?” Natsuki asked.

“O-Of course. After all, they put me in danger as well,” Riva replied in a low voice.

I breathed a sigh of relief once I heard Riva’s affirmative answer. “They got away, but I feel a bit better now. Thank you, Riva.”

Riva gently shook her head. “Oh, um, it’s just the right thing to do.”

We finished cleaning up the battle scene and advanced deeper into the forest. We all felt relieved now that we had a way to punish Iwanaka’s party. We were also quite surprised that we didn’t get attacked by any more monsters on the way to our destination. It was probably due to the decoy bombs that Iwanaka’s party had used on us earlier. Those bombs had summoned all the nearby monsters; there probably weren’t any left alive in the vicinity. On the other hand, although I wasn’t sure if it was related to the lack of monsters, we did encounter something else.

“Oh, there are some here as well,” said Touya. “We’ve found a lot!”

The objects that Touya had happily picked up were chestnuts. Near the outskirts of the forest, there had only been empty burrs, but as we ventured deeper, we started finding whole chestnuts. There were walnuts everywhere too; there must have been a lot of walnut and chestnut trees in the south

forest.

“Lumberjacks and the adventurers escorting them probably pick these up near the outskirts of the forest,” said Haruka.

“Were walnut trees and things like that planted here for their wood?” Yuki asked.

“Apparently there were already a lot of those trees growing here in the past, but the lumberjacks planted more of them after they cut down the original trees,” said Riva. “The lumberjacks also planted kutto trees like this one here. However, unlike walnuts, the fruits from kutto trees aren’t worth much money even if you bring them back to town with you.”

Despite what she had told us, Riva happily picked up the fruits that were lying on the ground under the tree and tossed them into the leather bag on her back. The kuttoes were quite small, about the size of my thumb.

“Kuttoes, huh? We’ve had them in dishes at Aera-san’s café,” said Natsuki.

I hadn’t heard about kuttoes before, but apparently Natsuki knew about them. She picked up one of the fruits out of curiosity.

“Oh, are you talking about those fragrant and delicious things?” Touya asked. “Why aren’t they worth any money? They’re absolutely great!”

“It’s because the trees are easy to grow, and each tree produces plenty of fruit, so a lot of people plant them in their own yards,” Riva replied. “Because they’re so cheap and abundant, they’re a common snack for children in Laffan. I always look forward to eating them at this time of year.”

“Oh yeah, I saw some growing in our yard,” said Natsuki. “Do you have some growing in your own yard too, Riva-san?”

“Um, my house doesn’t even have a yard...”

We all lapsed into an awkward silence. It seemed that the alchemist’s life was much more of a struggle for Riva than we had expected.

Yuki hastily tried to change the mood. “U-Um, feel free to come to our house to harvest some if you want, Riva!” she exclaimed. “There are a lot of these trees around our house, and we can’t eat them all, so yeah!”

Haruka nodded in agreement. “Y-Yeah, that sounds like a good idea. What do you think, Riva?”

“Um, is that really okay?” Riva asked. “Although they’re not worth that much, you can get *some* money for them...”

“D-Don’t worry about it! We’re not exactly desperate for money! Besides, we’d like to continue being friends with you since we’re fellow alchemists,” said Yuki. “Well, Haruka and I aren’t really full-time alchemists. It’s kind of like a side gig for us, but you get the idea.”

Yuki had tried her best to sound confident as she answered Riva’s question. Riva glanced up at Yuki. “Friends? Oh, I’m more than glad to be friends. I barely have any acquaintances in Laffan...”

“Mm, we don’t really have many other friends who are also girls, so we’re happy too,” said Yuki.

I noticed that Riva had smiled a bit when she said the word “friends,” but when she noticed that I was looking at her, she looked down and completely covered her face with her hood. *Hmm. We can kind of have conversations with her now, but I guess it’ll take a while before she can look us in the eye. Hopefully having alchemy as a common interest to talk about will help her get closer to the girls.*

“By the way, I think we should be getting close to our destination,” I said. “How close are we, Riva?”

“Oh, yes, the trees are starting to thin out, so we’re almost there,” Riva replied.

Riva was right about the fact that there were fewer trees around us. That also meant that there were fewer fruits and nuts for us to pick up. Soon after I asked that question, a grassy plain opened up in front of us.

“This is our destination,” said Riva.

“Oh, I’m quite surprised that there are grassy plains in the middle of a forest,” I said. “I wonder why there are no trees around here.”

“Um, please watch your step here. This place might look like a plain, but it’s

actually a wetland,” said Riva. “It’s kind of like thick layers of grass that are floating on top of the water, although you can’t really sink into the water.”

“Oh, so that’s why the ground doesn’t feel very stable!” Touya exclaimed.

He jumped up and down, looking like he was having fun, but the ground supported his weight just fine.

“Now that you mention it, I get what you mean, but it’d be hard to notice at a glance,” I said.

“I didn’t know there were wetlands inside of the south forest,” said Natsuki. “When I looked it up in the guild’s reference room, there was no information about this.”

“Adventurers don’t usually come here; there’s practically no reason to,” said Riva. “However, there are things like gaps or holes here and there, so people who aren’t used to this place can easily—”

Riva’s words were cut short when she abruptly disappeared into the turf, followed by a splashing sound.

“R-Riva?!”

I hastily ran towards where she had disappeared and saw her arms protruding out of a gap in the mat of grass. She had fallen into one of the holes right as she was warning us about them. Now she was flailing around.

“N-Nao, I’ll grab that hand, so you grab the other hand!” Yuki exclaimed.

“Okay! One, two, three!”

Yuki and I grabbed Riva’s hands and pulled her out of the hole. She was completely soaked.

“Cough! Bweeh, I can’t believe I fell into a hole here...”

As Riva coughed up water, her hood fell back, exposing her face. Her hair was light pink, and her hazel eyes were full of tears. She had a cute baby face, but the main thing that caught our attention was the pair of long ears that popped out of her hood. They looked like actual bunny ears.

Touya yelled in surprise. “A beastwoman?! A girl with animal ears?! Hell

yeah!"



“Eep!”

“Gosh, Touya, calm down!” Yuki exclaimed.

“Argh!”

Riva screamed in fear when she heard Touya yell. She crouched on the ground while covering herself with her sopping-wet hood. The moment Yuki saw that, she punched Touya in the gut. We all gave him exasperated looks as he clasped a hand to his stomach. *Look, I know you’re excited about finally meeting a beastwoman, but you completely messed up.*

“Um, first off, let me use the Purification spell on you,” said Haruka. “Sorry about this. You see, Touya is somewhat sick in the head, so...”

“It’s not a sickness!” Touya exclaimed. “It’s pure love!”

“Shut up, idiot!” Just as Touya was recovering from Yuki’s punch, Haruka dropped him again with a kick. Then she held a hand out towards Riva. “Can you stand? Did you hide your face because you’re a beastwoman? If that’s the case, it’s unnecessary—this guy right here is technically also a beastman, so you’re safe around us.”

“Th-Thank you. Um, well, I’ve always been rather shy, but it got worse when I came to Laffan,” Riva replied. “A lot of people would stare at me when I passed them in the street...”

“Oh, right, beastmen are kind of rare in Laffan,” I said. “What was it like for you, Touya?”

“Me? Well, there were definitely a lot of people who glanced at me, but there weren’t any who *stared* at me,” Touya replied.

Touya’s response made sense to me: he was a muscular guy, and he was usually armed. Even if he was an oddity in Laffan, there probably weren’t many people who’d be brave enough to stare at him for an extended period of time. On the other hand, Riva was a cute and timid girl, so it was only natural that some guys would ogle her. That was probably the reason that her shyness had gotten worse.

“Let’s deal with Riva-san’s clothes before anything else. They’re soaking wet,”

said Natsuki.

“Good point. Nao, Touya, set up a tent for us,” said Haruka. “Yuki, Natsuki, please start preparing lunch.”

Haruka’s Purification spell could only clean her target, not dry it out. It was similar to wiping your body with a damp towel; after we’d been training, it would get rid of the sweat and dust clinging to our bodies, but we’d still be a little wet. It was possible Haruka would eventually be able to clean and dry us at the same time once she became more proficient at using the spell, but for now, it was more convenient to remove our clothes and use the Dry spell on them. As soon as Touya and I had finished erecting the tent, Haruka took Riva inside for that purpose.

Touya and I walked a bit away from the tent to help with preparations for lunch.

Touya folded his arms as if he were pondering a discovery. “Man, I had no idea that Riva was a beastwoman this entire time...”

The rest of us glared at him.

“Touya, you need to get yourself under control,” I said. “Riva was really scared when you yelled earlier.”

“Yeah, we get that you’re excited, but she’s really shy,” said Yuki.

“And even if she wasn’t, the way you acted was quite creepy,” said Natsuki.

Touya clutched his chest as if our words had inflicted a lot of pain. “Ugh! Well, yeah, I know, but still...”

“Listen, the way you acted, any normal girl would get scared,” said Yuki. “Well, I hope she’ll cheer up after eating some orc meat.”

“Mm. She’s probably cold after getting drenched, so she should feel free to eat as much hot food as she wants,” said Natsuki.

We had already started a fire and placed a net over it with pieces of orc meat on top. By the time the meat was starting to give off a delicious smell, Haruka and Riva emerged from the tent. Riva’s hood was still down; apparently she didn’t feel the need to hide her face anymore now that we had all seen it.

However, the seat that she chose was the farthest away from Touya, so she still didn't want to get anywhere near him. *Too bad for you, Touya. You're probably gonna have a hard time if you want Riva to be your wife with animal ears.*

"I'm sorry for causing so much trouble," said Riva, sounding a bit uneasy. She lowered her head.

Yuki waved her hands around and laughed cheerfully. "Please, there's no reason for you to feel bad. By the way, you're really cute, and your hair is really pretty too!"

"O-Oh, not at all..."

Riva blushed and looked down at the ground, but she definitely was cute. Her ears were slightly droopy and were partially covered by her light pink hair, which was in an attractive shoulder-length cut. It looked like she didn't get much sun—she was quite fair skinned—and she was actually shorter than Yuki. All of those factors made her look like the type of girl who would bring out people's protective instincts. On top of that, those fluffy ears of hers were very attractive. I honestly did want to touch them, but the girls would probably treat me like a molester if I voiced that desire, so I kept it to myself.

On the other hand, there was someone else here who was way more frank about his desires. "U-Um, can I tou—ugh!"

"Okay, the orc meat is ready to eat," said Natsuki. "Riva-san, feel free to take as much as you want."

Natsuki was the one who had silenced Touya by punching him in the ribs. She was smiling as she spoke to Riva.

"U-Um, thank you, I will have some. Whoa, this is delicious!"

Riva seemed a bit hesitant at first when she saw that Touya was in pain, but she took Natsuki's offer and threw a piece of orc meat into her own mouth. As soon as she began chewing, she seemed to forget about Touya completely and became very happy.

"I-I've never had orc meat that was this delicious!" Riva exclaimed.

"Well, the orc meat we serve is wild caught," said Yuki. "We also have some

skilled cooks here.”

The delicious taste of the orc meat wasn't just because it was fresh. I wasn't sure exactly how it worked, but the Cooking skill seemed to play a role in aging the meat perfectly.

“Is it really okay for me to eat this?” Riva asked. “If it's this good, then surely it's expensive, right...?”

“You don't have to worry about that,” said Haruka. “We have plenty of this orc meat and enough money saved up for the near future.”

“Yeah, feel free to eat as much as you want!” Yuki exclaimed. “It won't hurt us even if you eat a lot!”

“Okay, I'll do my best to eat as much as I can!” Riva exclaimed. “After all, I don't know when I'll ever get a chance to eat this kind of delicious meat again!”

The words that Riva had blurted out hinted at her financial woes. She started to devour the orc meat with wild abandon, but ultimately, the capacity of her stomach was the same as that of an average girl's. She hadn't even eaten half as much as Touya when she stopped and went over to the tent to lie down for a bit.

We finished our lunch later than usual. Soon, Riva crawled out of the tent, her face red from shame. “I'm very sorry for causing trouble once again...”

“Don't worry about it,” said Natsuki. “We're happy that you enjoyed the meal.”

“Mm, it's nice to see someone enjoy what we cooked,” said Yuki. “Now then, if you're ready, we should probably get to work.”

“Of course,” Riva replied. “Let's get to work.”

“Okay. So, we were told that the ingredients for the mushroom withering medicine can be found here,” said Yuki. “This grass over here—would that happen to be it?”

“No, but you're close. It's the grass under here.” Riva pointed at some floating grass, then took a handsaw out of her luggage. “You're supposed to stick a saw into the grass and cut through like this, and...”

She tried to saw into the turf, but it didn't budge at all.

Touya offered to help out right away. "Um, want me to do it?"

Riva flinched briefly, but it looked like she understood that she wasn't capable of doing it herself. She drew the saw back and then slowly handed it over to Touya. "Y-Yes, please. Cut the turf in a square shape."

She held the saw at arm's length to maintain her distance from Touya. He seemed a bit hurt, but the better half of it was his own fault, so I didn't really feel bad for him. He took the saw and began cutting through the grass with ease.

"All right, this should do it," said Touya.

He grabbed the layer of grass that he had cut through, which looked like it was about twenty centimeters thick. The layers of grass were clearly visible in cross section.

"Is this what you need for the medicine?" Touya asked.

"O-Oh, no, it isn't necessary. Please discard it over there."

Still keeping her distance, Riva pointed. Touya's tail drooped sadly as he followed her instructions. It looked like Riva felt a bit bad for him when she saw that, so she forced herself to smile awkwardly before she gave out more instructions.

"U-Um, the ingredients can only be found deeper under the layers of grass," said Riva. "Please dig about a meter down."

"Oh yeah? Leave it to me!" Touya exclaimed.

Her smile seemed to be enough to cheer Touya up. He happily sawed deeper into the turf. Eventually, the green layers of grass gave way to brown and blackish layers.

"That should be deep enough. Can you gather the grass that's located at that depth?" Riva asked.

"So it's this grasslike stuff here?" Touya asked.

"Yes. Adventurers usually supply it to the guild in fulfillment of gathering

quests, but we need a lot, so...”

“Is that why you had to come here in person, Riva?” I asked.

“Mm. The only way to make it in time is for me to perform the extraction process here.”

According to Riva, there was always steady demand for mushroom withering medicine, but the amount that was needed this time was way more than usual, so she had to visit the forest herself and gather the raw materials for the medicine.

“Can we help out, Riva?” Haruka asked. “Yuki and I have some experience as alchemists...”

“Oh, that’d be great,” Riva replied. “It would be a lot of work to do by myself.”

“Don’t worry, you can count on us!” Yuki exclaimed. “This is relevant to our own futures as well!”

“In that case, I guess I’m responsible for digging up the raw materials,” said Touya. “You said you need a bunch?”

“Yes. It’ll be a difficult task, so we require your help,” said Riva.

“I have plenty of stamina and strength!” Touya exclaimed. “Leave it to me!”

Touya grinned and then resumed his work. However, the total amount of grass needed was enough to fill an entire room, and it was all located deep beneath the surface of the wetlands. Even Touya didn’t have enough stamina to do all of the work, so the rest of us had to help out. We ended up camping out for a total of two days due to the time-consuming process. However, that was still faster than Riva had initially expected us to work, so we had some free time to gather fruits from the trees on our way back to Laffan, so our return trip was pretty relaxing.

Diola-san had a look of relief when she saw us. “Welcome back, everyone!” Diola exclaimed. “I’m so glad that you returned today!”

“We’re back. Um, did the situation take a turn for the worse?” I asked.

“Not quite, but almost. After a certain point, barrash mushrooms begin to spread more rapidly.”

According to Diola-san, the barrash mushrooms had destroyed eight houses and continued to destroy one to two per day. Once their growth accelerated to the point that they were destroying three to four houses per day, they would be difficult to stop. Apparently the deadline for avoiding that outcome was two to three days from now. Even if there was enough medicine to begin withering all of the mushrooms today, we were down to the wire. Each individual mushroom was enormous, so they took a lot of time and effort to chop down; as they proliferated, they would quickly outpace people's ability to destroy them.

"I see. We wanted to discuss something with you, Diola-san, but I guess it'd be better to save it for another time," I said. "By the way, have there been any problems with the person who came here yelling the other day?"

Diola-san smiled sardonically. "Oh, are you talking about the baronet? His house was burned down."

We were all taken aback. "Huh?"

"He's a cheapskate, so he was slow to deal with the mushroom problem."

According to Diola-san, barrash mushrooms were a nuisance to the town, but even so, they were quite valuable if dealt with properly. However, the disposal process required a lot of labor, which required a lot of outlay. Early on in a barrash mushroom incident, plenty of workers would be available, but that number would decrease as the number of mushrooms grew. On top of that, each worker would become sleep-deprived due to the sheer amount of work that they had to do, so the cost of labor would skyrocket over time. The barrash mushrooms still had to be dealt with regardless of how expensive labor became, but it seemed that the baronet had refused to pay the laborers working to save his house.

"Barrash mushrooms will swell all the way up to the ceiling if they aren't dealt with in time, and at that point, the local official appointed by the lord of these lands has the legal right to deal with the problem via incineration," said Diola.

"Oh, right, I believe you mentioned before that the barrash mushrooms would explode and spread their spores everywhere if left alone," said Haruka.

"Mm. Such cases need to be dealt with in order to prevent damage to the entire town. And the fire scene was quite beautiful to look at," said Diola. "The

flames roared and shot up all the way to the rooftop. It proved a popular spectacle among the townspeople! Well, the baronet himself was sobbing as he looked on, but he had no one apart from himself to blame.”

According to Diola-san, the stalks of barrash mushrooms would hollow out right before the mushroom was ready to explode and eject its spores, which made them easy to burn. However, that would destroy their value as mushrooms, so it was important to deal with them before they reached that point. In order to ignite mushrooms that were close to exploding, you would open a hole near the bottom of the stalk and throw in fuel like charcoal. After that, the flames would spread all the way to the top of the cap and last for quite a while; the spores would get blown out and burned to ashes. *Hmm, that sounds kind of similar to a giant version of tezutsu fireworks back in Japan.*

“Incineration is also the method used to deal with barrash mushrooms if there isn’t enough labor available,” said Diola. “I suppose you could say it’s something of a tradition here in Laffan.”

“Oh, huh. By the way, what happens after a house gets burned in order to deal with barrash mushrooms?” I asked. “Does the homeowner get paid any compensation for the damage?”

“Nope. The local official is responsible for protecting the town, after all,” said Diola. “It seems that the baronet sold his remaining property and fled from Laffan after he received the money from the sale.”

Land wasn’t usually an asset that you could sell instantly, but Diola-san told us that the local official had bought the property from the baronet as an act of mercy. The baronet had received enough money to buy a small house, but he must have cared enough about his reputation as a noble that he refused to stay here in Laffan after the humiliation he’d suffered.

“In any case, the baronet is a rare exception. The lumberjacks have been continuously working for days and are tired as a result, so they can’t last for much longer,” said Diola. “Riva-san, you’re playing a crucial role in resolving this situation.”

“O-Okay, I’ll do my best to finish the medicine as soon as I can!” Riva exclaimed. “Um, Haruka-san, Yuki-san, would the two of you mind helping me

out a bit more?”

“Of course we don’t mind helping out,” said Haruka. “In fact, it’ll be a good opportunity for us to get more practice and experience as alchemists.”

“Mm, there’s a limit to what we can learn from books alone,” said Yuki.

“Is that so? Well, I truly appreciate the help. Please come with me to my store.”

The three of them spent the rest of the day working hard, and due to their persistence, they managed to finish making the mushroom withering medicine by the next day. As a result, the mushroom disaster that had struck Laffan was peacefully resolved.

“So this is our house, huh?” said Yuki.

“Yeah, we finally have our own house!” Touya exclaimed.

“It was such a long journey to get here...” said Yuki.

“Yup. We had to overcome so many hardships, and—”

“Enough playing around, you two,” said Haruka. “Let’s head inside.”

Three days had passed since the end of the mushroom disaster. Construction had slowed down a bit, since many of the workers in Laffan had been busy dealing with the barrash mushrooms, but our house had ended up being completed more or less on schedule. Yuki and Touya had been enacting some sort of skit in front of our house, but they stopped and shrugged when Haruka told them off.

“Well, actually, we didn’t struggle that much,” said Touya. “It took us less than half a year to get this house.”

“Mm, it kinda feels like everything happened in no time,” said Yuki. “There weren’t enough milestones along the way for me to hype myself up.”

“Oh, so you feel the same way, Yuki?” I asked. “Weren’t you the one who was the most excited when we obtained this plot?”

“Don’t make it sound like I was the *only* one who was excited!” Yuki exclaimed.

I never said or implied that you were the only one. Well, that word did cross my mind, but yeah.

“It’s just, you know, we saw the whole construction process,” said Yuki.

We had routinely dropped by the plot for training, which meant we’d see the construction process each time. In fact, the workers had periodically asked us for confirmation about what we wanted for the interior, so we already knew more or less what our house looked like even on the inside. As a result, it was probably harder to get as excited as we would have been about a dramatic before-and-after difference.

“It doesn’t change the fact that this is a fine house, though,” said Natsuki. “It’s perfectly fine to feel happy about this.”

“True. From the outside, our house actually kind of looks like a noble’s mansion,” I said.

Our house was a large two-story Western-style home with exterior walls covered in lime plaster. Most ordinary houses in this world just had plain wood or earthen walls, but the reason we had requested lime plaster in spite of the additional cost was to improve the durability and airtightness of our house. It wasn’t possible to achieve the high levels of airtightness and insulation that we’d expect in modern-day buildings back on Earth, but we could probably achieve similar results—similar enough to have a comfortable living space—by using magic in our daily lives.

On a side note, our house didn’t have any pointless decorations; we had requested that the carpenters prioritize practical features above all, and they’d told us that people in the know could easily tell the difference between our house and the houses of nobles or wealthy merchants. However, we didn’t care at all about the likelihood of people comparing our house to a noble’s, since we were just adventurers. If anything, it was better and safer than people looking at our house and assuming we had a lot of money, and besides, we liked the simplicity of the house’s appearance.

The final sum of money that we had to pay the carpenters was around one thousand gold coins. We’d allocated a budget of twelve hundred gold coins, but we’d ended up saving money and had only had to pay five hundred gold coins

for the second installment because no major issues had come up during construction, and we hadn't requested weird additions after the work was underway. Relative to the cost of living in this world, the total cost seemed pretty cheap to me, but there was probably no point in comparing a house built in this world to one back on Earth; they were too different. However, in the Japanese countryside, there had been some abandoned one-story houses with yards that were technically available to any claimant for free, so the cost of a house could vary quite a bit even back on Earth. In any case, it was weird to look at the fine house in front of me and consider that I could now call it home.

“I gotta say, though, I never thought I'd own my own house in my teens...”
said Touya.



Touya sounded amazed and moved, but Yuki ruined the moment for him. “It’s not just your house, Touya. You know that this is a shared property owned by all five of us, right? Well, I guess you can technically say that you own one fifth of this house.”

“Of course I know that!” Touya exclaimed. “It just feels like I own a house, okay?”

“In a way, it’s kind of like a shared house,” said Haruka.

“Shared houses are usually rent-only, though,” I said.

“Even a few months ago, I never imagined we would own a house in a few months,” said Natsuki. “The idea certainly never occurred to me back when Yuki and I were still in Sarstedt.”

“Mm, both of you struggled a lot back then...” said Haruka.

Natsuki teared up a bit as she recalled her days back in Sarstedt, and Haruka gave her a big hug. My first days in this different world with Haruka and Touya hadn’t been that bad, but Yuki and Natsuki had been more or less abused as wage slaves until they managed to join up with us. Those kinds of working conditions were probably normal for the average person in this world, but they were awful from our perspective. With that in mind, Yuki and Natsuki had definitely gone through a lot of hardships to get here and obtain a house that they could call home.

“Actually, though, now that I think about it, we could have afforded a house even back in Japan if the five of us had worked for a few months and pooled our money,” I said.

“Purely in terms of earnings, yeah,” said Haruka. “However, that’s only if we ignore all other considerations, like taxes or the fact that we’re minors.”

“Mm, we would need to pay property tax and registration and license taxes when buying a house on top of all sorts of commissions,” said Natsuki.

There was no way high school students like us would realistically have been able to purchase a house back in Japan, but it was technically possible that we could have earned the cost of a house if we’d ignored all other factors that

Haruka had just mentioned. In any case, the idea of earning money and pooling it to purchase a house would never have crossed our minds if we hadn't been transported to a different world. *Actually, now that I think about it, there's no way I would ever consider pooling money for a home if I got transported with people other than my four friends here.*

"Man, I'm really glad that I got transported near you, Haruka," I said.

Those words came from the bottom of my heart, and Haruka blinked in surprise when she heard them. "Huh? Where did this come from all of a sudden?"

"Oh, just, like, there's no way we'd pool money for a house if we got transported alongside someone like Iwanaka, right?"

"There's no way I would have grouped up with someone like him in the first place, but you're right about that," said Haruka.

"The reason that we managed to avoid having to do difficult part-time jobs was because we swiftly took action and started our lives as adventurers," I said.

"Yup. And if we'd been taking breaks from time to time, we would have probably had to take on part-time jobs for low wages like Yuki and Natsuki did," said Touya.

It would have probably taken us more time to find and group up with Yuki and Natsuki if we'd taken breaks in the beginning, and if that had been the case, I had no idea if we would have been too late to save them—both of them had looked quite worn out when we finally found them. On top of that, if we'd found them any later, it would probably have made it difficult for us to obtain a house.

I was nodding to myself, pondering over those what-if scenarios, when Touya suddenly grinned as if something had popped up in his mind. "Haruka told us to repeat after her when she said 'Obey all of Haruka-sama's orders!'—and she was completely right about that!" He gave a thumbs up in her direction.

"O-Oh, um, that was just a joke, so..."

Haruka was struggling to come up with some excuses, but Natsuki smiled as if she'd just heard something interesting and interrupted her. "Oh, Haruka, I

didn't know that you said something like that."

"There's nothing wrong with that if that's how you guys managed to stabilize your lives, though," said Yuki.

"Yeah, it's all thanks to Haruka," I said. "We wouldn't have been able to survive without Haruka-sama's help."

"All praise Haruka-sama, all praise Haruka-sama!"

Touya and I clasped our hands together and prayed in Haruka's direction. Yuki and Natsuki immediately joined us.

"It was all thanks to Haruka-sama that I was saved from having to eat disgusting food," said Yuki. "All praise Haruka-sama!"

"It's all thanks to Haruka-sama that I'm still alive," said Natsuki. "All praise Haruka-sama!"

Haruka was flustered when she saw all of us praying towards her. She blushed and turned her face away from us. "Enough of that! Let's hurry up and head inside!" She sounded quite embarrassed.

Haruka headed inside of our house first, and the rest of us looked at each other and chuckled, then followed behind her. We were greeted with a fairly large entrance hall. There were some stairs in the front leading up to the second floor, and there were doors to the left and right. The door on the left led to the parlor, while the door on the right led to the toilet. Past the stairs was a corridor that extended to the left and right. The kitchen, dining room, and living room were located on the left side, while the rooms for work and research, along with the laundry area that doubled as our bathroom, were located on the right side.

On the second floor, there were five rooms each on the left and right side, all slightly longer than wide. Each room had an area of about thirty square meters, and due to the size of the house, there were two more rooms than had initially been planned. Our house didn't have any fancy features, but it was very practical, and that was what mattered the most to us; we wanted a house that was comfortable to live in over something with a fancy design.

"Hmm. Should we decide on our own rooms first?" Haruka asked.

“Yeah, that’s a great idea!” Yuki exclaimed. “They should all be the same in terms of size, though. Does anyone have a preference for certain rooms?”

“The only difference is how close a room is to the stairs, right?” I asked.

“Yeah, that’s about it.”

None of us had any important reasons to prefer specific rooms, so we ended up assigning the rooms on the left side of the second floor, starting from the room farthest to the left, to Yuki, Natsuki, Haruka, me, and Touya in that order. Touya and I were assigned the rooms closest to the stairs so that we would be the first ones available to defend ourselves against a home invasion, although I wanted to hope that we’d never be in such a situation. As for the five rooms on the right side, we left them all empty for now. We planned on converting them into guest rooms if we ever had the spare time and money, but it was also possible that we would end up using them for storage.

“It looks like our beds and the table for the dining room already got carried in,” I said.

“Yeah, just as we requested. We placed an order for futon mats as well, so we just need to go pick them up later,” said Yuki. “We can just individually place orders for other furniture that we want, so let’s go purchase kitchenware today! We have utensils for cooking while camping out, but we don’t have enough for making proper dishes at home.”

“I think we should also go shopping for curtains and carpets,” said Natsuki. “The interior is a bit too dull and dreary as is.”

“Yeah, we definitely need curtains,” said Haruka. “Are they all made to order? Windows are the same size in most houses, right?”

“More or less. It’s different for the mansions that nobles own, but our house has standard windows,” Yuki replied. “I’m not sure if we’ll find curtains that are to our liking, so we might need to get them made to order.”

Well then, this is gonna take a while. Girls can easily spend days just choosing one sheet of curtains. Luckily for Touya and me, there weren’t that many different styles of kitchenware on offer in this different world. However, we would be lucky if it only took the girls one day to decide on the carpets,

curtains, and kitchenware. Touya and I looked at each other and nodded. We both knew what we had to do in order to avoid hell.

“Hey, we’re technically supposed to move in here today, right?” Touya asked. “Let’s split up the work for who goes to get what.”

“Yeah. Touya and I will go pick up the futon mats, so you girls can go and purchase the other furniture,” I said.

Not too long ago, I would have felt uneasy about sending the girls off by themselves, but my concerns had been more or less assuaged after we discussed things with Diola-san. When the mushroom incident was resolved, we had told Diola-san about what Iwanaka’s party had done to us during our escort quest, and thanks to the testimony that Riva provided, we’d managed to get their status as adventurers revoked. However, Iwanaka’s party never showed up again at the guild for their punishment. In fact, there wasn’t any trace of them having returned to Laffan. Apparently the last time they had been spotted was the day before we had headed out to the south forest for the escort quest. It was possible that they had died in the forest, but it was more likely that they had fled to a different town. I felt kind of annoyed that this was how things had turned out, but regardless, it was now safe for the girls to walk around town unchaperoned.

“If you guys are willing to go pick up the futon mats, that’d be great, but are you sure?” Haruka asked. “There are a lot of them, and you’ll probably have to do two round trips since you can’t use magic bags at the store.”

“We’ll be just fine. Right, Nao?”

“Yeah, Touya. It’s a light load for us.”

The task of tagging along with the girls on their shopping session would be a much heavier burden than just carrying futon mats, after all.

“In that case, thanks for the help,” said Natsuki. “We need all the time that we can get, after all.”

Touya and I sent the girls off with a smile and then headed out to pick up the futon mats. However, when we returned home with the mats on our second round trip, we were greeted by Haruka.

“H-Huh? Are you already done shopping, Haruka?” I asked.

“For the kitchenware, yeah. We came back to drop it off before heading out to purchase furniture for interior decoration.” Haruka paused for a moment and then looked at me with puppy dog eyes. “Also, I want to choose furniture with you since it’s for a new house, Nao...”

“O-Oh, I see. In that case, I guess I’ll tag along.” *How am I supposed to say no to those eyes?!*

Haruka switched from a sad face to a smile the moment she heard my response. “Mm, let’s go together.”

When Touya saw Haruka’s smile, he took a step back. “You guys have fun! I’ll stay here—I’d just get in the way.”

“Oh, don’t worry, Touya. We’ll join up with Natsuki and Yuki when we get there, after all,” said Haruka.

“Yeah, let’s have fun shopping for furniture together, Touya!” I exclaimed.

I had no choice but to tag along with Haruka, and it was going to be exhausting for sure. With that in mind, there was no reason for me not to drag Touya down with me. I only had myself to blame for not being strong enough to say no to Haruka, but we were all in this together. *You’re not getting away, Touya.*

“Damn it, Nao, you traitor!” Touya exclaimed.

“Ha ha, I have no idea what you’re talking about!”

We spent the rest of our day finishing up the preparations. When evening rolled around, we parted ways with The Slumbering Bear and moved into our new house.

Side Story—Jade Wings: Episode Two

“Whoa, it’s actually completely healed! Is it really just five large silver coins?”

“Yes,” I replied.

After I’d healed his injury, the muscular guy in front of me happily started to stretch himself. I was glad that he was feeling energetic, but I wished that he’d walked away from me before doing this; it was kind of annoying. However, dealing with customers like this was part of my job, so I forced a smile as I accepted the payment from him.

“I appreciate it! Thanks to you, I won’t have to take days off work!”

“Thank you for choosing my clinic. Feel free to visit again if you ever need injuries healed,” I said. After he’d departed, I breathed a sigh of relief. “Whew.”

My clinic was located outside of Sarstedt’s east gate. Business today was decent as usual. Kaho and Sae had helped me make a proper building for the clinic by hand; it was a decent hut with earthen walls, although it only had two rooms. As for how things had come to this, it was all because the guard who we’d encountered when we first arrived had suggested to us that it would be a better idea to head to the east gate if we wanted to make money off healing magic. In order to do that, we’d had to enter Sarstedt through the south gate and cross the river. However, there had been a lot of troubles awaiting us on our journey, such as the toll for entering Sarstedt itself, the registration fee for obtaining cards at the Adventurers’ Guild, and the ferry fee for crossing the river. When we had finally arrived at Sarstedt’s east gate, we’d only had twelve hundred Rea left on us, and that amount would have disappeared right away if we’d stayed at an inn for one night.

We hadn’t planned on spending so much money, but it hadn’t been possible to haggle for cheaper fees since each of us had to pay the same amount. We would’ve had more money left on us if we’d skipped out on registering at the Adventurers’ Guild, but we didn’t really have a choice; failing to register would probably have hurt us in the future. In the end, we had to sleep in the open

outside of town. Sae had used her magic to create earth walls to provide shelter for us, and that was what had eventually led to the creation of our hut. I actually felt somewhat nostalgic now when I thought back to the period when the three of us had had to squeeze inside the enclosed space and chew on hard rye bread before forcing ourselves to sleep together under a single thin blanket.

The guard's advice had ended up being quite useful. A lot of customers had visited my clinic on the very first day that I'd opened for business. As a result, we were able to afford two more blankets by the end of our second day. Kaho had also collected some branches from the trees in the nearby forest and created a makeshift roof for our hut. In this way, we had slowly improved our living conditions. In time, we no longer felt any desire to stay at an inn inside of Sarstedt. Based on the information we had gathered, the lodging at inns in Sarstedt was actually somewhat expensive, so not staying at an inn had saved us a decent amount of money. We had to prepare our own meals, but our lives were actually somewhat comfortable by now because Kaho and Sae, having ample free time, had bought tools like hatchets and saws and improved our hut. In fact, I personally felt like our hut was better than the average room at a cheap inn.

However, living in a hut outside of town came with some disadvantages as well. The first major disadvantage was the lack of safety. We had been operating this clinic for over a month now, so news had spread about the fact that three girls were living here by ourselves. As a result, some people had appeared with malicious ideas in mind. Unfortunately for them, we'd already earned enough money to purchase a greatsword. Kaho had Level 8 Greatsword Fighting, so those ruffians were no match for her. She broke all of their arms and legs and then kicked them out of our hut. She also had Level 3 Peerless Strength, so even if she hadn't had a greatsword, the result would likely have been the same. On a side note, Kaho hadn't been feeling that well at the time and had been in a bad mood, so she hadn't held back at all. As a result, the injuries those ruffians had suffered were quite brutal, but I didn't feel bad for them at all. People who attempted to rape girls deserved death. There had been no reason for me to heal them, so we'd abandoned those ruffians outside of the east gate.

The very next day, one of the guards had come to our hut to ask about what had happened, and when we'd explained everything, he'd dragged the ruffians away with him. There were a few more incidents like that, but then the rumor had gotten around that it was a bad idea to attack the three of us. After about half a month, our lives became peaceful once again, but we'd also started to receive invitations to join adventuring parties. We had turned all of those offers down so far, however.

In regard to our health, I didn't have any issues with our current lifestyle, but Kaho and Sae would get sick from time to time as a result of unfamiliar conditions and food. The difference between them and me was probably the fact that I had the Robust skill and they didn't. We had done our best to take precautions, such as boiling water before drinking it, but we had to eat rye bread, which we weren't used to, plus strange seasonings and freshwater fish that we had never eaten on Earth. Only a person with an iron stomach could have avoided getting an upset stomach with what we had to eat. I would use my magic to heal Kaho and Sae whenever they felt sick, but I wasn't always ready and waiting at their side. There were times when I'd hear a rumbling sound and see "rain" pouring to the ground before I could intervene. It would have been absolutely awful if I hadn't been able to use the Purification spell to clean things up afterwards.

Whenever we had an incident like that, I felt glad that we weren't in a party with boys. Kaho and Sae would never have lived it down as girls if some boys saw them in that condition. Neither one of them ever got too sick, since I always healed them right away, but healing magic wasn't capable of restoring their energy, so they'd have to take the day off afterwards. That wasn't a problem for us since my clinic business provided us with a decent income, besides which we had our own hut where they could rest, but things would have been quite different if we had been staying at an inn. I felt like my other classmates who didn't have healing magic and the Robust skill would be doomed if they ever got sick. With that in mind, I felt like the three of us were doing quite well for ourselves so far in this different world. However...

"I really want to improve our meals somehow," I said.

We'd been cooking our own meals over a simple stove that we'd made in a

corner of our hut, but the meals didn't taste good at all. I wasn't exactly great at cooking, but Kaho was decent at it, so I was a bit disappointed. According to Kaho, there was no way for her to make delicious dishes on a makeshift stove, especially given the lack of proper seasonings and ingredients. After I gave it some thought, this made sense to me. The only seasonings we could obtain in Sarstedt were salt and some unfamiliar herbs. There was no way Kaho could use those herbs to their full advantage when she had no previous experience cooking with them.

However, the food that we cooked ourselves was still better than what was available in Sarstedt. For example, rye bread was hard and had a bad smell, and none of us enjoyed the taste either. The only upside to rye bread was that it would take a long time to go bad, but I preferred the fake naan that Kaho kneaded out of flour dough. It tasted way better. In fact, most of our meals consisted of fake naan along with some soup. The soup didn't have much flavor apart from salt and some vegetables. There was one other meal that we would eat as a treat on rare occasions, namely meat grilled with salt. However, meat was so much more expensive than other kinds of food that we didn't have the option of buying it.

Kaho happily hefted her greatsword in the air. "Yoshino, have you finished your work for the day? If you have, then let us venture forth and slay some animals to feast on!"

The meat that was available to us was from animals that we hunted ourselves. We couldn't even afford proper adventurer gear, so meat from a butcher wasn't anywhere close to affordable for us. As a result, we had to pray that we were lucky enough to encounter boars in the forest. Since Sarstedt was a town next to a river, there were also fish available in town, but we'd learned our lesson after we'd bought some and discovered how muddy they tasted.

I stood and prepared to head out. "I hope we can actually find some boars to hunt today. All right, let's go tell Sae and—"

"I know, I heard you two," said Sae.

Sae came out of the room farthest inside of our hut. Just as she'd said, she seemed to have already finished her preparations for heading out. However,

those preparations were pretty minimal: she just needed the clothes that she'd had on her when we were initially transported to this world, along with a staff that she had made from a branch. My equipment was similar to Sae's; the only difference was that my weapon was a mace that I had bought from a weapon shop in Sarstedt. The mace was only slightly better than a crude wooden club, however. As far as my own preparations, all I had to do was pick up that mace and place a signboard outside of our hut to indicate that my clinic was closed for the day.

"I've gotten used to exploring the forest by now, but hunting is pretty difficult," said Sae. "It's hard to *find* game to hunt down."

"We are but amateurs at the art of hunting," said Kaho. "We can hardly expect to be as successful as a seasoned hunter. It simply is not realistic."

Most animals would probably be no match for Kaho and Sae if we could just find and fight them. However, finding game was the difficult part of hunting. Most wild animals would flee the moment we got close to them. We tried our best to approach our quarry from downwind, but it was hard to get close enough to attack without them noticing us. As a result, tusk boars were a boon to us: they would sometimes rush towards us and attack instead of fleeing. However, they were a rare exception, and we hadn't succeeded at catching game like birds or rabbits even once.

"Also, even when we're lucky enough to hunt down a tusk boar, I feel like we're being taken advantage of when we sell the spare meat," I said. "Kaho, are you capable of gutting boars yet?"

"You're asking for the impossible, Yoshino. To date, we've slain only four boars," Kaho replied. "The guild didn't prevent me from watching the gutting process, but they also didn't provide any lessons as to the proper procedure. Learning this art will not be easy."

"In a way, we're a cheap source of meat for the guild," said Sae. "They'll lose out on profits if we learn how to gut boars by ourselves."

We had slain a total of four tusk boars so far, and all we knew about dressing them was how to drain their blood, so that was all we did before bringing the boars to the Adventurers' Guild. Even so, I had a feeling that the amount of

money we'd received wasn't fair. Even factoring in the fees for the gutting process, the information from my General Knowledge skill made me suspect that we should have been paid more. Sadly, we still had no choice but to bring the dead boars to the guild. Sae was probably right that there was a high chance we were being treated as a cheap source of meat, and that was why I hoped that Kaho would eventually learn to gut animals.

"Just in terms of hunting, monsters are much easier than animals," I said. "Monsters at least don't run away from us."

"Indeed. Monsters always charge us on sight, so my only task is to strike them down with my greatsword," said Kaho.

"I can contribute a lot more in combat with monsters as well," said Sae. "I'm still not used to the magicite retrieval process, though."

In terms of making our meals for the day better than usual, monsters were a great choice of game for us. As Sae mentioned, the only problem with slaying monsters was the fact that retrieving their magicites was pretty gross work, but only people with money could complain about that. Poor people like us had no choice but to retrieve the magicites in order to earn money. The retrieval process honestly didn't feel *that* bad to me, but I wasn't sure if it was because I was used to common sense in this different world by now.

"It appears that few quests are available at the Adventurers' Guild here in Sarstedt," said Kaho. "The weapons and armor on offer are also of poor quality, so I believe it might be advisable to aim for a different town soon."

"Yeah, you make a good point," I said. "My mace is just this cheap thing, after all."

The mace was basically a club reinforced with three metal rings around the end. I felt like it was closer to a club than a mace. *Am I some kind of barbarian swinging around a cheap club?*

"We've already obtained the minimum that we need to live," said Sae. "I think it'd be a good idea to make a decision before winter rolls around."

"Mm, yeah, that's also a good point," I said. "It's not like my clinic provides a lot of income either..."

The clinic was a good business in the sense that there hadn't been any start-up costs, but there was a limit to the number of people who traveled to Sarstedt. There weren't that many local patrons either; the town had a pretty small population. Almost the only customers who visited my clinic were adventurers. I wasn't sure if the issue was that ordinary citizens of Sarstedt didn't know about my clinic or that they didn't trust it. We still made a living, since we weren't paying for lodging, but this lifestyle probably wasn't sustainable in the long term.

"Hmm. We haven't gotten any armor yet, but what do you two think about just heading to a different town now?" I asked.

Kaho and Sae paused in thought.

"Before doing so, I believe we should purchase the tools necessary for camping out," said Kaho. "We are, after all, capable of combat."

"Yeah, considering the level of our skills, I doubt we'll come across any monsters that we can't deal with," said Sae.

"Right, that makes sense based on the average strength of the adventurers we've encountered so far here in Sarstedt," I said. "In that case, we'll need to decide whether to head towards Kiura or Laffan."

Kiura was farther east of here. Apparently the road to Kiura wasn't exactly safe—you could get attacked by monsters on the way. Of course, it was thanks to those monsters that I was able to earn money from healing. However, based on the injured adventurers who visited my clinic and the would-be rapists who Kaho had easily defeated, the monsters on the road to Kiura probably weren't that dangerous for us.

As for Laffan, it was located in the opposite direction, west of Sarstedt. It sounded like it was a fairly large town that would be relatively safe to live in, but it didn't seem like a good place to earn money as adventurers. Based on what I'd learned, Kiura was the better town for adventurers like us, since we were probably strong enough to make a living there. I had asked the adventurers who visited my clinic in order to gather information, and they had told me there were a lot of orcs in the vicinity of Kiura. Apparently adventurers capable of slaying orcs could earn a lot of money.

I was a bit curious about how my other classmates were doing, but I hadn't encountered any of them over the past month despite the fact that I had spent some free time walking around Sarstedt, and none of them had visited my clinic either. I had been transported to this world alongside Kaho and Sae because we had been close to each other as souls, so it was possible that those of our classmates who hadn't been near anyone else had been scattered far and wide across this world. Maybe I would bump into some of them at Kiura, but the likelihood seemed pretty low. However, I couldn't think of anyone I actually wanted to meet since I already had Kaho and Sae with me. A chance encounter with our other classmates could turn bad, after all.

"Okay, if our next hunting session is successful, let's just leave Sarstedt," I said. "I'd feel uneasy about our prospects in a different town if we didn't have a decent amount of money on us to start with."

"Indeed. I hope that we can live inside of a proper building when we arrive in Kiura," said Kaho.

"Mm. I've grown attached to our hut here, but having a proper wooden roof over our heads would be much better," said Sae.

Considering we were amateurs at building, our hut was pretty decent, but it would definitely be cold when winter arrived. With that in mind, this was a good opportunity to head for a different town. All we had to do was hunt tusk boars as soon as possible in order to stock up on money.



Luckily for us, our hunting session that day was a success. However, in a different way, we also got hit with some bad luck, and I ended up feeling a bit uncomfortable. The trouble was that the tusk boars we'd encountered were a pair with their young. The two adult boars had charged us in an attempt to protect their young, but Kaho and I didn't hold back at all and quickly slew them. After we had slain the adults, four small tusk boar piglets had charged at us as if they were trying to get revenge, and we didn't hold back with them either. Hunting wasn't something that you could do if you showed mercy and spared game just because they were cute, after all. The only thing I could really say about the piglets was that they were delicious. *We sincerely thank you for*

the meal.

Kiura was a small town surrounded by forests that extended from the foot of some mountains. However, it was only small from my perspective; Kiura was larger than Sarstedt, and apparently it was also the major town of the fiefdom we were in, so there was a chance that Kiura was one of the larger towns in this whole world. The name of the duke who ruled the area around Kiura was Ohnick, and the town's main industry was the processing and sale of orc meat. A considerable amount of orc meat was exported to nearby fiefdoms as well. As a result, Duke Ohnick was also known by the name of Duke Orc. *I kinda feel bad for the duke even though I've never met him. The name he's known by isn't a good one, but his actual name also seems kind of weird to me as a Japanese person. I bet only my classmates would understand this feeling.*

The main kinds of work available to adventurers in Kiura were orc hunt quests and escort quests protecting meat transports from orcs, which commonly appeared along the highways. Ensuring the safety of highways would normally be the responsibility of the lord who ruled over this region, but completely exterminating the orcs wasn't an option due to the fact that orc meat was Kiura's main industry. In terms of exactly how frequently you would encounter orcs, we had run into one ourselves on our way to Kiura. I had been quite scared—it was my first time seeing an orc—but Kaho had just considered them something like large tusk boars. Sae had blasted the orc's head off with ease using her magic. In fact, our encounter with that orc ended up being the reason our lives as adventurers in Kiura had started quite smoothly. We'd brought the dead orc with us to town, and the sight of a girl as petite as Kaho carrying a large orc with ease must have been quite impressive and intimidating, since other adventurers hadn't tried to bother us even though we were three beautiful girls. In the end, we'd used the money that we had obtained from selling the orc to rent a small house that was spacious enough for the three of us.

However, apparently another reason that no other adventurers had tried to bother us was because rumors had spread about the “victims” who had tried to sexually assault us at my clinic back in Sarstedt; a lot of the patients who had visited my clinic at the time were from Kiura. Some of those adventurers had

asked me about whether I was going to start a clinic here in Kiura as well, but there was no way I could open a clinic inside town without permission. However, money was still money, so I had no qualms about healing injured people who I encountered outside of town and accepting payment. For some reason, whenever we headed out for work, injured people would follow us outside of town, but that was surely just a coincidence.

On a side note, hunting orcs had ended up being a perfect vocation for our party. Our party had members with a lot of firepower per attack, so we were able to slay orcs instantly whenever we found them. Afterwards, all we had to do was bring those orcs back to town, and we'd earn about thirty gold coins on average. That amount of money was more than enough for a day's work, but our efficiency had increased after we'd paid a blacksmith to make us something similar to a bicycle trailer. The bicycle trailer allowed us to carry three orcs back to town, and that added up to a total of four orcs per day, since Kaho was capable of carrying back one orc by herself. As a result of all this, the largest amount of money we had earned in one day was slightly over 150 gold coins. If we worked hard at hunting orcs for about a week, then the amount of money we could earn would be enough to allow us to survive for at least a year, as long as we didn't splurge on anything. It was such a huge difference from our days of earning chump change from prying open the heads of goblins. I felt like crying whenever I thought back to those days. *Thanks for providing us with everything we needed to earn fat stacks of cash as adventurers, "evil" god!* Proper adventurer weapons and armor scaled in price to match the income that we had earned from orcs, but none of us had hesitated to spend money on equipment, since it was a necessity.



A few months had passed since we began earning money by turning in orc meat, and we'd managed to obtain stable lives and had ranked up to Rank 2 adventurers as a result of our hard work.

"Oh, isn't that the Orc Eaters party?"

"That's them? Seriously? They're capable of slicing orcs in half despite how short they are?"

“There are rumors about how they can behead three orcs at the same time too!”

“The rumor I heard was that they can blast a large orc to pieces in one hit with magic.”

Other adventurers would start to gossip about us whenever we entered the Adventurers’ Guild building. *Am I supposed to introduce myself as Yoshino Kitamura, a member of the Orc Eaters party? I never really wanted an alias, but if I can’t avoid it, I sure wish I had one that sounded cooler!*

I tried my best to ignore the gossip about us as I headed to the counter and greeted the guild receptionist who we usually talked with. “Hello, Sara-san.”

Sara-san chuckled before replying to me. “Hello, Orc Eaters.”

“Please, not you too, Sara-san! Our party name is Jade Wings! I’d appreciate it if you could help spread that name instead!”

On a side note, there wasn’t any deep meaning behind the name Jade Wings. We had simply needed a party name for ourselves in order to counter the unpleasant name for us that was spreading around Kiura, and we had decided on Jade Wings because at some point a jade feather had fallen to the ground in front of us.

“Indeed. Only fools with no sense of naming would refer to three lovely maidens such as ourselves by the name *Orc Eaters*,” said Kaho.

I agree completely with you, Kaho, but you’re one of the main reasons why we got this alias! Sae, you’re responsible as well! Don’t just stand there next to me smiling and pretending to be innocent! I’m the only one here who isn’t responsible—I’m just a harmless healer! As for the other reasons that people had started to refer to us as Orc Eaters, one was that we had eaten orc meat out in public. It was back when we had first started attempting to gut orcs ourselves. None of us had had the Disassemble skill back then, so we’d made a mess of things. All we had managed to obtain for our efforts was a pile of meat scraps that hadn’t been worth any significant amount of money. The guild would probably have purchased them off us if we had actually tried to turn them in, but it would only be in exchange for chump change. With that in mind, we had decided to put those meat scraps to better use by cooking them

teppanyaki-style and eating them beside the highway where we had slain the orc. We had also offered to share the meat with adventurers passing by. In addition, Kaho's small body was capable of consuming a lot of meat, so it sort of made sense that we had obtained the alias of Orc Eaters.

Another important reason was probably that we had slain a large number of orcs at a very rapid clip. Most adventurers wouldn't slay orcs routinely, and the average adventurer definitely wasn't capable of bringing back four orcs per day. On top of that, we were a party of three girls, so we stood out in a bad way because of how diligent we were about hunting orcs. However, those factors alone would have probably only given us a reputation as strange but talented adventurers. With that in mind, Kaho and Sae must have been the main reasons why Orc Eaters had stuck as a name for our group. Unfortunately, the rumors earlier about how we'd cut orcs in half and blasted their bodies apart were all true. Those incidents had occurred when Kaho had gone ham after getting a new greatsword and when Sae had failed to adjust the potency of her magic, so the orc meat had ended up being worthless. We didn't have those kinds of accidents anymore, but they had definitely left a strong impression on the people who had witnessed them. It would probably be very difficult for us to get people to start calling us Jade Wings rather than Orc Eaters if we couldn't accomplish something to overwrite that reputation.

I sighed. "Ugh. This would never have happened if the two of you didn't stand out so much."

Kaho and Sae stared at me.

"Don't avert your eyes from reality, Yoshino," said Kaho. "Your contributions towards our reputation have been quite significant as well."

"Mm, this is something that we've 'accomplished' all together as a party of three," said Sae.

I blinked; I didn't understand what they were talking about. "Huh? What are you two talking about? I'm just a normal adventurer."

"That might be the case in combat, but your healing abilities are far from normal," said Kaho. "Surely you're aware that one adventurer characterized you as 'unfazed no matter what kind of injuries she sees, so she's a bit scary

even though her healing is cheap and effective’?”

“W-Well, actually, there are some injuries that have freaked me out before.”

As far as why I hadn’t felt like vomiting or passing out when I had seen those injuries, it was probably a result of my Robust and Disease Resistance skills.

“It seems like there are adventurers out there who respect you, but there’s a catch,” said Sae. “One adventurer commented about how you were ‘smiling as she adjusted the positions of bones to set fractures.’ Did you also know that that adventurer thought you were definitely a ‘natural-born sadist,’ Yoshino?”

“I mean, a healer isn’t supposed to make her patients feel uneasy, right?!” I exclaimed. “All I did was smile in order to make them feel at ease!”

“In fact, even among the adventurers who hold you in high esteem, there are some whose admiration is peculiar in character. One adventurer sounded quite excited when he heard that you heal bone fractures, Yoshino,” said Kaho.

“Apparently he exclaimed that he was going to break his bones in order to get healed by you.”

“Wait, seriously?! That sounds really creepy!” *I don’t want to get anywhere near someone like that!* “Or rather, when did you two gather testimony from other adventurers?!”

“It just happened to reach my ears,” said Kaho. “These fantastic and beautiful ears of mine.”

“Yep, my ears picked up on this kind of information as well,” said Sae.

Kaho and Sae wagged their ears as they answered my question. *Okay, sure, you two have much better ears than me, but you don’t have to show off...*

“Wh-What do you think, Sara-san?” I asked. “I’m plain and normal compared to the other two girls here, right?”

Sara-san crushed my last hope without any hesitation. “You’re more or less the same as them, Yoshino-san!”

I don’t get it. Surely I didn’t stand out as much as Kaho and Sae, right?!

“All three of you have individual aliases, after all,” said Sara. “As of right now, only a few people refer to the three of you with those aliases, but it’s just a

matter of time.”

“Wait, I have one as well?” I asked. “This is my first time hearing about this.”

“Indeed. I haven’t heard about this either,” said Kaho.

“Do you want to know what your aliases are?” Sara asked.

Sara-san looked to me for confirmation, and I felt a bit hesitant, but I nodded. “S-Sure, I guess?” I was scared to find out what those aliases were, but it would be scarier to remain ignorant.

“All right, then. Kaho-san’s alias is Little Executioner. It’s because of the way you behead orcs and slice them cleanly in half,” said Sara.

“Hmm, is that so? Beheading orcs is a convenient way to slay them, but I suppose my attempts at slicing them in half backfired,” said Kaho.

You actually sound kind of happy about your alias, Kaho. I guess that makes sense, since you like these kinds of names.

“As for you, Sae-san, your alias is Crimson Eliminator,” said Sara.

“Huh? My hair’s not that red,” said Sae.

The color of Sae’s hair wasn’t even close to crimson; it was more like a pale pink. The nickname might have referred to orc blood, but she burned orcs with her magic and never got splattered in blood like Kaho, so that didn’t make sense either.

“People probably came up with that alias because of your magic, Sae-san,” said Sara. “You’re talented at the use of Fire Magic, after all.”

“Oh, that’s the reason? Wait, hold on, Sae hasn’t burned orcs with huge flames, though,” I said. “She’s blasted orcs to a crisp, but that’s a bit different.”

“Aliases come from the impressions that other people have, so it’s nothing unusual,” said Sara. “Last of all, Yoshino-san, your alias is Angelic Sadist.”

“Hold up.” *I have too many questions about this!* “Those two words don’t fit together at all! Also, why is my alias so different from the ones that Kaho and Sae have?! Besides, I’m not a sadist!”

“As I just explained, it’s based on the impressions that other people have of

you.”

“Is that really what other people think of me?! These are harmful rumors!”

I slammed my hands on the counter as I ranted, but Sara-san merely responded with a bitter smile. *Ugh! Kaho and Sae have embarrassing aliases, but they can at least call themselves by those names if they really want. My alias is way too embarrassing!*

“Trust me, only some people refer to your party members by those aliases,” said Sara. “Those aliases aren’t as well known as the Orc Eaters one.”

“That’s also a bad thing!” I exclaimed. “Hmm, should we introduce ourselves as Jade Wings more often?”

“Um, I don’t think there’s any point in doing that unless your party takes on quests other than orc meat delivery quests,” said Sara. “When you turn in orc meat, the only people you interact with are the guild staff after all.”

“Oh, right!”

In other towns, adventurers would slay orcs by themselves and exchange the meat for money, but things were a little bit different here in Kiura since orc meat was the main local industry. There was an organization here that would issue quests to the Adventurers’ Guild for the delivery of orc meat, and that organization was in charge of safely obtaining and distributing orc meat. As a result, delivery quests would count towards the number of quests that you’d completed for the guild, but unlike with regular quests, we would never have a face-to-face meeting with the client who had issued the quest. *Ugh, as things stand, there’s no way that we can spread the name Jade Wings. I might need to come up with a plan to overwrite our party’s current alias...*



We returned to our house after we were done with our business at the guild, and I sighed as soon as I sat down in a chair. “I can’t believe we have individual aliases as well. Ugh...”

“Indeed, hee hee.” Kaho nodded as if she agreed with me, but her laughter was quite audible even though she was covering her mouth with her hands.

“You’re actually happy about this, aren’t you, Kaho?!” I exclaimed.

“N-Not at all! Believe me, Yoshino—it was a bit of a humiliating experience for me as well.”

“You’re lying! I know you’re happy about this because you like those kinds of cringe names, Kaho!”

“Trust me, nothing could be further from the truth! I don’t at all care for the ‘Little’ part of my cognomen!”

“So you do like the alias itself, don’t you?!”

Kaho and I argued with each other a bit before Sae hesitantly interrupted us. “Um, by the way, what are aliases supposed to be?”

“Oh, hmm. Well, it’s probably more than just a nickname,” I said. “Maybe it’s something like a title?”

“Indeed. They are most likely the mark of exceptional adventurers,” said Kaho.

The act of describing aliases made them feel even more embarrassing, however.

“Are we actually exceptional adventurers?” Sae asked.

“I would say so. I highly doubt, for example, that any other adventurer in this town is as talented at magic as you are, Sae,” said Kaho.

“People who can use magic are already rare enough,” I said. “Your talent at using a greatsword is also far beyond anyone else’s, Kaho.”

“Indeed. It’s the benefit of having highly specialized builds!” Kaho exclaimed.

“You’re right about that,” I said. “However...”

It was thanks to our specialized builds that we had been able to slay orcs with zero difficulty and obtain a stable livelihood. If we hadn’t had high-level skills, then we would have had to put up with poor living conditions while taking on small jobs and slowly earning money over a longer period of time.

“We’re kind of weird overall as adventurers,” I said.

“Mm. We lack true expertise, after all,” said Kaho.

“We also don’t have that much stamina,” said Sae.

In fact, the only thing that our party had going for us was raw firepower. We were extremely lacking in stamina, so Kaho would have to rest for a bit after performing acrobatic moves to chop the head off an orc. It was kind of like our bodies didn’t match the proficiency that our skills had provided us. One analogy would be installing a Formula 1 engine in a normal car. We would probably damage ourselves if we forced our bodies past their limits. Heading out to the highways to slay orcs was just fine, but issues would probably crop up if we tried to head deep into a forest.

“Hmm. I suppose we have no choice but to work out in order to improve our bodies,” said Kaho.

“There’s also the option of taking on rookie quests in order to learn the ropes while building up stamina at the same time,” said Sae.

Our abilities had been granted to us in an unnatural way in the form of skills, so as things currently stood, there was no room for us to grow.

“Well, we don’t need to change anything if we’re just going to continue our current peaceful lives here in this town,” I said. “However, I’ve been kind of useless during combat lately...”

Kaho and Sae could easily slay orcs with their greatsword and magic, respectively, so my new mace had barely seen any use so far.

“That might be the case in combat, but outside of combat, your contributions are crucial, Yoshino,” said Kaho.

“Mm. Our daily lives depend on you, Yoshino,” said Sae.

“I mean, yeah, I guess that’s true,” I said. “Our daily life abilities are really bad, after all.”

The three essentials for survival were food, clothing, and shelter. For the food part, I was a Japanese person, so of course I knew about the five fundamental seasonings, but the only one we could actually obtain was salt. Sugar was expensive, and the only kinds that were available in this different world weren’t that good; they tasted a bit different from white sugar. The only form of vinegar we could find was wine vinegar, and that was expensive as well. Despite the

fact that she was the best cook among us, not even Kaho had experience cooking with wine vinegar. In my household back in Japan, we'd only ever used rice vinegar and grain vinegar. The last two seasonings, soy sauce and miso, didn't seem to exist in this world at all. Knowing about these seasonings didn't matter if we couldn't get our hands on the ingredients to make them.

As for clothes, we had spent a bit of money to obtain bespoke clothes. It seemed like ordinary citizens were generally capable of sewing their own clothes, but none of us were; we had only done a bit of sewing at school back in Japan. I could sew a running stitch, but that was the limit of my abilities.

In regard to shelter, we had managed to fulfill that need by renting a house. However, the house we were renting wasn't that comfortable to live in, and we had discussed the possibility of saving up money to buy our own house. It didn't cost us anything to dream, and there weren't really that many things we could do to have fun in this world.

The only aspects of daily life that were more convenient here than back on Earth were laundry, cleaning, and bathing. The Purification spell dealt with all three of those instantly. But although bathing wasn't an issue, we all wanted to take a proper bath if it was possible. However, we knew that it was a luxury we couldn't afford.

Some of our classmates out there probably weren't in a group with someone who could use the Purification spell. With that in mind, Purification almost seemed like the whole purpose of my current existence, though I kind of hoped that wasn't true. Cooking didn't count since it was something that all three of us would take turns doing, but I was confident that I had contributed the most of anyone even though I had been useless during combat lately.

"Oh yeah, now that I think about it, neither one of you has gotten sick recently," I said.

Kaho and Sae's stomachs had been struck by "thunderstorms" quite often in the beginning, but they didn't seem to need my services as routinely nowadays. It was a good thing that they were healthier now, but it also meant I was less important to our party than before.

"Ha ha ha! Nothing is eternal, Yoshino! I have evolved beyond my past self.

Recently, I finally learned Level 1 Robust!” Kaho exclaimed.

Kaho was looking quite smug, but Sae looked exhausted. “I’ve also learned the Robust skill. It was about time, really. I just wish I learned it sooner without having to feel sick so many times...”

They hadn’t ever suffered for an extended period of time, since I would always heal them as soon as they started feeling sick, but nausea was uncomfortable regardless of how long it lasted. There was also the risk of dehydration if it was left untreated, so it was actually quite dangerous.

“Is that kind of like ‘what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger’?” I asked.

“Well, if you choose to phrase it that way, it doesn’t sound very good, but I suppose that’s on the right track,” said Kaho.

“Robust is definitely essential for life in this different world,” said Sae. “I really regret not getting it during character creation...”

“Yeah, it was easy to overlook,” I said. “You wouldn’t need to worry about characters in a game getting sick, after all.” I wasn’t exactly sure, since I didn’t know much about games, but there probably weren’t any games where a player-controlled character would get sick from drinking untreated water.

There were some things out there that were technically safe to eat but wouldn’t sit well with most people. Freshly pressed olive oil was one of those things for me. I wouldn’t feel bad when I was actually consuming something that had olive oil in it, but on one occasion, I’d ended up vomiting it all up a while after I finished eating. That experience had been quite painful for me, so I’d tried my best to avoid eating anything with olive oil in it ever again. Similarly, there were probably things that I needed to be wary of here in this different world. My Robust skill would probably protect me from most things, however, since it was Level 2.

“In any case, if we plan to take on other types of quests, then I suspect we’ll need access to other methods of transportation in addition to our bicycle trailer,” said Kaho.

“Mm, we can only use bicycle trailers on the highway, and we probably won’t be able to return to town within a short period of time,” said Sae.

“Hmm. Thinking of standard items in tabletop RPGs, I guess we’ll need things like adventurer bags,” I said.

Those bags also needed to be large enough to fit other items such as a tinderbox, rope, torches, oil, and rations.

“We’ll also need things like ten-foot poles if we ever plan to venture into dungeons, but that’s not really relevant for us at the moment,” I said.

“For camping out, we will require cloaks and tents, among other things,” said Kaho.

“We can’t forget about securing potable water either,” said Sae. “Lack of water can easily lead to death.”

“Water, huh? The ideal would be to have at least two liters available for drinking each day, and we’ll need more for cooking,” I said.

I wanted to avoid having to carry around a lot of water if possible, but it wasn’t like we would always be able to find a source of water while we were traveling, and if we did, there was no guarantee that it would be safe.

“Oh, I have an idea for how we can resolve this problem,” I said. “Sae, can you learn water magic? You should be able to since you’re an elf, right?”

“I can’t learn it right away, you know? Well, I’ll give it a shot if you can buy me a grimoire for Water Magic,” Sae replied.

“Grimoires, huh? If I recall correctly, each one costs at least ten gold coins, right? That’s a bit expensive, but I guess they’re worth their price.”

If Sae could learn Water Magic from a grimoire, then it would solve our water issue on top of making all sorts of other spells available to her.

“As for torches and tinderboxes, I believe Fire Magic can serve as a substitute,” said Kaho. “However, that doesn’t change the fact that we would still have to carry around a great deal of luggage.”

“Mm. We don’t really need that many changes of clothes, but I bet adventurers who can’t use magic have it much worse than us,” I said. “I guess we should just start with quests that won’t require us to travel too far, so we won’t need to carry a lot of luggage. That way, we can get used to these kinds

of quests.”

“Oh yeah, by the way, I happened to hear about this at the Adventurers’ Guild the other day—it seems the guild sells some unusual bags that can fit a lot of luggage inside,” said Sae.

“Unusual bags? What exactly do you mean by unusual?” I asked.

“Well, to put it simply, they’re like backpacks,” Sae replied.

That explanation is really easy to understand!

“Oh, now that I think of it, I can’t recall seeing anyone wearing a backpack until now,” said Kaho. “They’ll most likely be better than standard adventurer bags, I believe.”

“Did one of our classmates make these backpacks?” I asked.

“I’m not sure,” Sae replied. “I didn’t get an answer when I asked about it.”

Kaho nodded but looked a bit disappointed at Sae’s response. “Well, that makes perfect sense. Providing information to anyone who asked after the creators of those backpacks would only invite trouble.”

Backpacks would sell like crazy if they were popular among adventurers. If the Adventurers’ Guild were willing to reveal the names or locations of the people who had struck gold with that idea, I wouldn’t have trusted the guild as an institution.

“I guess it’s fine to spend money on backpacks if they’re useful,” I said. “How much does one cost?”

“Twenty-four gold coins,” Sae replied.

“Whoa, that’s expen—or not? Considering the fact that they need to be sewn by hand, maybe that’s a fair price...”

Backpacks were probably harder to make than a lot of textiles. Designer bags back on Earth had been pretty expensive too, after all.

“We should absolutely spend money on backpacks,” said Kaho. “Backpacks are vastly more useful than regular bags.”

“Right. We can easily make up the cost of three backpacks by bringing back

two to three orcs,” I said. “Can we buy them right away at the guild, Sae?”

“No, these backpacks seem to be made to order,” Sae replied. “We can request what kind of functions we want. We’ll also need to get our measurements taken.”

Oh, I see. It made sense that backpacks were made to order; it would be awkward if both Sae and Kaho had to wear backpacks of the same size. If the backpacks were handmade rather than mass-produced, then a made-to-order system wouldn’t be that much extra work, besides which it would improve customer satisfaction.

“All right, in that case, let’s go place orders for backpacks and prepare the items that we’ll need on other quests while waiting for the backpacks to be completed,” I said.



We spent the next few days earning money from hunting orcs while we looked around different shops to purchase the items that we would need for other quests. However, we already had weapons and armor on us, so the only expensive purchase was the backpacks. We finished our preparations rather quickly; only a day had passed since we’d had our discussion and decided it was about time for us to start looking for a good quest to take on.

After returning to our house from the guild, Kaho exclaimed, “Hark! I have found just the quest for us!” She sounded quite energetic as she returned to our house, and she had something in her hands that looked like a poster.

“Uh, it’s true that we talked about looking for a quest yesterday, but did you already accept a quest for us as a party?” I asked.

“Of course not. Far be it from me to do such a thing without first consulting you and Sae,” Kaho replied. “This is just a copy that I borrowed from Sara.”

Apparently the poster that Kaho had brought back with her was a copy that was kept at the guild, not the poster that was tacked to the bulletin board. According to Kaho, these copies weren’t something that an adventurer could normally borrow, but Sara-san had allowed her to do so because our party was trustworthy—and because nobody had been willing to take on this quest.

“A good quest, huh? Is it a goblin hunt quest?” I asked.

“Indeed. That is a standard kind of quest for the beginning of a campaign, after all!” Kaho exclaimed.

Oh, right, she loved these kinds of quests during tabletop RPG sessions. There’s one other person here who doesn’t know much about tabletop RPGs, however.

“What do you mean by campaign?” Sae tilted her head in confusion. “Is it something like a sales campaign?”

I paused for a moment before I replied to Sae’s question. “No, Kaho’s talking about a continuing story line or set of adventures like in a game.”

The word itself meant something like a series of activities to achieve something, and that would apply to a sales campaign as well, so it was only natural that someone like Sae would get confused.

“If we follow that logic, then is this quest the beginning of a story?” Sae asked.

“More or less, yeah,” I replied.

A quest like this was a rather cliché way to start things, but that wasn’t necessarily a bad thing. A fresh and innovative approach wasn’t guaranteed to be interesting, after all.

“Wait, no, this isn’t a game! This is reality!” *I almost unconsciously went along with what Kaho said!* “I don’t want to get involved in large-scale stories that involve the resurrection of a demon lord or a conspiracy that engulfs an entire kingdom!”

My peaceful life would be ruined if this quest became the start of an actual RPG story line. I was an ordinary person at heart, so I had no intention of becoming the heroine of a story and no desire to try. All I wanted was a peaceful life that was slightly better than average here in this world. *I don’t need a prince in my life! Go away!*

“I jest, Yoshino,” said Kaho. “This is merely a goblin hunt quest. There’s no way it will drag us into a world-shaking affair.”

Kaho had shrugged in response to my desperate plea for a peaceful life, but I was well aware of her personality, so I stared hard at her to make sure.

“Is that what you really think, Kaho?” I asked. “Be honest. You’re a bit excited about the possibility of getting involved in a large-scale story, aren’t you, now that you know an ‘evil’ god really exists?”

“True. I can’t deny it...”

“I knew it! I would have expected no less from you, Kaho!”

“This goblin hunt quest is recommended for rookies, right?” Sae asked. “I think it’s an okay quest for us to take on.”

“I mean, yeah, goblin hunt quests are a typical starting quest for adventurers, but...”

“But what, Yoshino?” Kaho asked.

“Well, you know, this quest requires us to go to a town near Kiura, right? Orcs are pretty common in the vicinity of Kiura, so I have a hard time believing that this is a normal goblin hunt quest.”

Goblins were extremely weak compared to orcs, so it seemed strange to me that a goblin hunt quest had been issued in an area where orcs were common.

“You seem to be misunderstanding, Yoshino. Orcs are mostly located to the west of Kiura,” said Kaho. “It’s quite rare to come across them to the east of Kiura, and that happens to be where our destination is.”

“Oh, is that so?” I asked.

“Mm. Being surrounded by orcs in all directions would make travel to Kiura impossible, after all. Such conditions would increase the cost of transporting exports, as well as necessitating that travelers hire a large number of bodyguards,” said Kaho. “In any case, it seems that it is common sense among the inhabitants of this world to use the east highway when they want to travel to Kiura.”

“O-Oh, I see. I guess that means we lacked common sense since we traveled to Kiura from the west highway...” My General Knowledge skill hadn’t provided me with this kind of local knowledge, unfortunately.

“Regardless, if we plan to take on a quest other than delivering orc meat, I believe that this one represents a good opportunity,” said Kaho. “However, the reward is a mere ten gold coins.”

“Well, the reward isn’t something we should really be taking into consideration,” I said.

We lacked expertise and experience as adventurers, so orc meat delivery quests were the only quests that we were able to earn money from in an efficient way. Other quests would provide us with less income in comparison, but we had no choice but to accept that fact. After all, our goal was to take on rookie adventurer quests in order to learn the ropes and build up experience.

“I guess you’re right that this is a good quest for us, Kaho,” I said. “Let’s do it.”

We headed out of Kiura from the east gate and made our way northeast up a mountain road that was barely wide enough for a cart to pass along. The road itself wasn’t that steep, but it didn’t seem to be well maintained. It took us about two to three hours of walking before we finally reached an open area.

“Oh, the land here looks like it’s all terraced!” I exclaimed. “It’s a rural village!”

The sight in front of me was similar to landscapes that had been common back in Japan in the past, but it was also slightly different. The land had gentle slopes and none of the individual fields were very large. There were a few people in the fields who looked like they were plowing the soil to prepare for planting; after all, spring wasn’t far away. This village seemed like the kind of place that outsiders wouldn’t have many opportunities to visit, unlike rural areas back on modern-day Earth, which had turned into tourist attractions. As a result, we stood out quite a bit, and the first person we met sounded like he was quite suspicious of us.

It was a man at work in the fields. “Hello. What business would you happen to have here in our remote village?”

“Um, we’re here for the goblin hunt quest.”

“Oh, of course, the quest!” After we explained who we were, the man happily dropped his hoe and walked towards us. “I’m glad that some adventurers

arrived here so fast. Keep this to yourselves, but the village elder is a real skinflint, so very few adventurers have come here in response to the quest. And just to make sure, your companions are a beastwoman and an elf?”

“Indeed,” Kaho replied. “Is that any trouble?”

“No, not at all. However, this is a rural village, so not everyone here is open-minded. Well, it should be fine. I’ll guide the three of you to the village elder, so follow me.”

“Oh, okay, thank you.”

As we followed him towards the village, I started to feel a little bit uneasy about what he’d told us. However, Sae was looking around as if something had caught her eye.

“What’s up, Sae?” I asked.

“Oh, I’m just curious about the irrigation channels here,” Sae replied.

“The irrigation channels? Oh, yeah, I see them. They look like they’re properly maintained.”

Based on what I knew, farming in this region relied on rainwater, and it was only if there were a long spell of dry weather that the field workers would irrigate by hand using tools like buckets. However, contrary to my expectations, it looked like there were irrigation channels running through the fields here.

“Maybe it’s because rain isn’t that common here due to the geography?” Sae asked.

There were regions in the world where mountains blocked the movement of rain clouds and regions where dry winds would blow down slopes. It was possible that this village was arid for those or similar reasons.

“Nah, this village gets plenty of rainwater,” said the man. “The reason for the irrigation channels is that we need a lot of water for growing aquatic wheat.”

“Aquatic wheat?” Sae asked.

“Mm. It’s wheat that grows in fields filled with water. It isn’t very popular and doesn’t sell for much, but it’s a crop that we can plant year after year with no trouble, so we grow it to stave off famine in hard times.”

After hearing that explanation, the three of us exchanged a glance.

“It sounds similar to rice,” I said.

“Perhaps aquatic wheat is no more than another name for rice,” said Kaho. “There is, however, the possibility that it’s a completely different grain, one unique to this world.”

“We’ll need to actually see it to find out,” said Sae.

“Oh, are you girls curious about what aquatic wheat looks like? Give me a second—I’ll go bring some.”

The villager headed inside a nearby house and returned with a handful of aquatic wheat. Each grain was about the size of a soybean and had a brown hull and protruding awns. If you ignored their size, you could have mistaken them for either wheat or rice.

“This is what aquatic wheat looks like. After you break it and remove the hull with a sieve, you boil it before you eat it. It’s hard to turn aquatic wheat into flour since it’s tougher than normal wheat, and it’s not worth the effort, anyway, since the flour isn’t suited for making bread.”

“Kaho, Sae, what do you two think?” I asked.

“Rice and wheat are somewhat similar to one another,” said Kaho. “It’s quite difficult to tell if they’re not in a familiar shape.”

“Apart from the visible differences, the way you can distinguish rice and wheat is whether or not they have gluten and how hard they are,” said Sae. “Can we keep this aquatic wheat as a sample?”

“Sure, go ahead. It’d be great if you could somehow help us improve the sales for aquatic wheat, but...”

Sae peeled back the hull of one grain of aquatic wheat. Inside was a cluster of brown kernels. “Mm, I think this is more like rice than wheat—the cereal germ isn’t in the middle.”

“Oh, right, the wheat germ is located in the middle in puffed cereal,” I said.

Not that I’d had a lot of opportunities to see wheat grain back on Earth, but the difference was obvious after I recalled what wheat or rice looked like when

they were puffed to make things like chocolate-covered wheat and cereal coffee.

“Based on that information, this is likely a form of rice despite its large size,” said Kaho. “The only mystery that remains to be solved is how it tastes.”

“Oh, you’ll probably get to taste some aquatic wheat at the village elder’s house. You girls will be staying in this village for a few days, won’t you? The elder probably won’t provide you with bread or anything like that. As I said, he’s awfully stingy!”

There weren’t any inns in rural villages, so outsiders would have to stay in empty houses or, if none were available, in the village elder’s house. The village was responsible for providing us with lodging and food while we were here for the goblin hunt quest, and it sounded like there was a high likelihood that the meals they served us would include aquatic rice. I was curious about the taste, but I also felt increasingly uneasy about the fact that the village elder who had issued the quest was apparently stingy.



“Welcome. My name is Lazarus. I am the village elder.”

When we arrived at the village elder’s house, we were greeted by a guy who looked like he was in his forties. He appeared to be less healthy than the other villagers; he was slightly plump. I felt like I detected a tinge of arrogance behind his gaze, but I wasn’t sure if that was a biased impression based on the information about him that we’d gotten on our way here. In any case, work was work, so we started to discuss the details of the quest right away.

“Our party name is Jade Wings, and we’re here for the goblin hunt quest,” I said. “Can we confirm the details of the quest with you right now?”

“Of course. Your job is to exterminate the goblins that are located in a cave near this village. We will assign you a guide to lead you to the cave,” said Lazarus.

“Mm, all according to the quest poster,” said Kaho. “We ought to confirm, however—we are not responsible for any goblins that are not present at the cave when we arrive, correct?”

“That’s fine. The villagers are capable of dealing with stragglers as long as there are no more than a few,” said Lazarus.

I wasn’t actually sure how many goblins would remain after we were done exterminating the ones at the cave, but I was glad that our job was simple. There was no way that I would have said yes to a quest that required us to deal with all of the goblins in the nearby forest.

“Understood. Who will be our guide?” I asked.

“One of the hunters who lives in this village,” said Lazarus. “I already sent someone to call him over, so he should be here at any mo—oh, there he is.”

The man who was now approaching us looked a bit older than the village elder. His face was covered in wrinkles, but he was muscular, so he seemed more youthful than the village elder.

“Nice to meet you. My name is Dale, and I’m a hunter. I’ll be your guide to the cave where the goblins are.”

“Nice to meet you, Dale-san,” I replied. “Let’s get going.”

“Oh, already? It’s close to lunchtime, so I wouldn’t mind providing you with some food first if you need to eat,” said Lazarus.

The poster had mentioned that the village was responsible for providing us with lodging and food, but the village elder’s tone was quite haughty. Kaho slightly raised her eyebrows in annoyance. However, she remained silent and walked out of the village elder’s house. Sae followed her.

“It’s fine. We’d prefer to get this quest over with as soon as possible,” I said. “Is that all right with you, Dale-san?”

“Y-Yeah, it’s all right with me,” Dale replied. “During patrol shifts, I usually eat lunch in the forest anyway.”

Dale-san looked a bit apologetic about the village elder’s attitude, so I urged him to come with us as we left the village elder’s house.

We remained silent as we walked, but once we had gotten a bit away from the village, Dale-san sighed and lowered his head. “I’m sorry about the way that the village elder acted towards you girls. Unfortunately, despite that personality

of his, he is the authority in this village.”

Kaho sighed and relaxed the stern look on her face. She then took some dried meat out of her bag and began to chew on it. “No need to apologize. That village elder is no more than a big fish in a little pond, wouldn’t you say? We’ll depart as soon as we’ve completed our task, so it need not become an issue.”

“It’s probably much worse for villagers like you, isn’t it, Dale-san, since you have to live here?” Sae asked.

“Well, yes. We don’t really have the choice of leaving the village during our daily lives.”

“It sounds like life is quite difficult for the average villager,” I said.

“Adventurers like you girls probably lead more difficult lives,” said Dale. “Although, actually, you girls look like you’re doing just fine, so...”

Dale-san seemed a bit confused when he looked at us and saw that we were neatly dressed and were carrying decent equipment. He was probably comparing us to his mental image of adventurers, and we were fortunate that we didn’t fit that stereotype.

“Honestly speaking, we have it pretty easy,” I said.

“Mm. Far be it from me to boast, but we slay orcs with ease,” said Kaho.

“Well, based on that greatsword, I figured that you girls weren’t rookies,” said Dale. “But in that case, why did you take on a goblin hunt quest?”

Kaho brushed off his question. “Let’s just say that we have ample reason of our own.” It seemed like even she knew that it would be weird to talk in terms of a “campaign” around an ordinary person.

“Is that so? Well, it works out for us villagers, so I’m not gonna pry,” said Dale.

“More importantly, can you tell us about the forest here, Dale-san?” I asked.

“Hm? Oh, sure. I don’t really know that much, but I can tell you what I know.”

Even if he didn’t know much, Dale-san was an experienced hunter, so any information he had would be quite valuable to us. We listened to his stories as we advanced through the forest. At some point, we took a break for lunch.

After about an hour of walking, Dale-san put his hands in the air to get our attention. “We’re close to our destination, so we need to be careful from here on out.”

We all nodded and began walking more stealthily. After a bit, a cave came within view. There were three goblins outside. I wasn’t sure if they were lookouts or if they just happened to be loitering around.

“This is it, huh? How should we approach this?” I asked.

There was the option of just storming the cave, but that seemed kind of boring. The interior of the cave didn’t appear to be very spacious either, so Kaho would probably have a hard time swinging her greatsword.

“Should I just blast the cave with my magic?” Sae asked. “My Explosion spell can probably do the job.”

“Well, you could probably collapse the cave that way, but we won’t know if all of the goblins inside are actually dead,” I replied.

There was a chance that the cave had other exits as well, so it wasn’t a good way to complete the quest.

“Even if we storm the cave, I highly doubt that we’re in any danger of defeat. All the same, there’s no reason for us to join battle under unfavorable conditions,” said Kaho. “What if we smoke the goblins out?”

“Smoke them out? Do you girls have any tools on you that you can use for that purpose?” Dale asked.

“I remember seeing some tools in stores that could be used to create smoke, but we don’t have anything like that on us,” said Sae.

“All we need to drive them out of the cave is some source of smoke. I believe we can gather branches, light them on fire, and cast them into the cave,” said Kaho.

Dale-san had an awkward look on his face as he listened to our discussion, like he thought we weren’t taking this seriously. “Well, you girls can do whatever you want as long as you get the job done, I guess...?”

“Let’s just give it a try and then think of a different method if it doesn’t work,”

said Sae.

“Indeed. We should begin by dispatching the goblins in front of the cave,” said Kaho. “Let’s do this, Sae.”

The moment she’d finished speaking, Kaho sprang into action. The goblins opened their mouths when they saw her, but Kaho sliced off the heads of two goblins before they could raise their voices, and Sae slew the other with her magic at about the same time. Kaho continued to hold her greatsword at the ready as she stared inside of the cave. Once she had confirmed that there were no goblins charging out of the cave, she sighed in relief and lowered her sword.

“Hmm. It appears that the goblins inside of the cave have yet to notice the commotion outside,” said Kaho.

“Whoa, amazing...”

Dale-san sounded quite surprised by the results of the skirmish, but Kaho shrugged. “It was an easy task compared to beheading orcs.”

“Yeah, orcs have thicker necks than goblins,” I said. “All right, let’s hurry up and move on to the next step.”

We rolled the goblins’ heads to one side of the cave entrance, stacked up their bodies, and then split up and started to gather wood from the surrounding trees. After we’d filled the cave entrance with wood, we covered it with oil and Sae lit a fire with her magic. Some of the resulting smoke drifted towards us, but most of it drifted deeper into the cave.

“Success, I guess? I wonder if there are air holes deep inside of the cave,” I said.

“Possibly. You should by no means let your guard down,” said Kaho. “Powerful goblins could leap out at any moment.”

“Of course I won’t let my guard down! I *want* some goblins to jump out so that I actually have something to do!” I exclaimed.

A few minutes had passed since we’d started our smoke-out operation before we started to hear some squeaking noises from inside of the cave. Soon, goblins began jumping out, avoiding the burning wood.

“There’s one!”

I smashed the first goblin with my mace and then helped Kaho deal with the rest. It wasn’t long before we were surrounded by goblins that had had their heads crushed by my mace or cut off by Kaho’s greatsword. It was somewhat of a gruesome scene, but there was no way to avoid this part of our work. The two of us left the cleanup to Sae and Dale-san and continued to slay goblins. We ended up slaying over fifty of them. We all breathed a sigh of relief when they stopped jumping out of the cave.

“Our job’s not done yet,” I said. “We still need to go inside to check.”

“Indeed. Dale, will you accompany us?” Kaho asked.

“Y-Yeah, that’s part of my job,” Dale replied. “But—is it really this easy to slay goblins?”

“Goblins are easy quarry, especially since they emerged in small groups,” said Kaho. “Yoshino, light the path, if you will.”

“Gotcha. *Light!*”

We ventured inside, Kaho leading the way. The cave extended deeper into the rocks than we had expected. We saw dead goblins scattered all over the place; they looked like they had collapsed for some reason. *Did these goblins die from carbon monoxide poisoning?* We had planned to smoke them out of the cave, but it seemed that the smoke itself had also whittled down their numbers. However, we weren’t sure whether the goblins that had collapsed to the cave floor were actually dead, so as we ventured deeper into the cave, we periodically stopped to deal killing blows with our weapons and magic just as a precaution. Luckily for us, it seemed like most of the goblins had already escaped the cave and met their end at our hands outside, so we didn’t have that many to finish off inside of the cave.

“Hmm. I think it looks like we’ve completed this hunt quest,” I said.

“Not exactly,” said Kaho. “There appear to be a few stragglers.” She was holding her greatsword at the ready and staring into the darkness; her ears twitched.

There were some faint sounds from deeper within the cave. I kept the Light

spell afloat in front of us, and we continued until we arrived at a dead end. It was a relatively wide area compared to the rest of the cave. There were a few goblins that were twitching on the ground, as well as four goblins that were energetic enough to stand on their own two feet. Those four goblins squinted in the sudden brightness from my spell and then held up what looked like clubs and stone axes. They screamed at us in a threatening manner.

“Oh, these aren’t normal goblins, are they?” I asked.

“Mm, I’ve seen these kinds of goblins in books. They’re probably stronger forms of goblins,” said Sae.

“No matter! They’re still mere goblins!” Kaho exclaimed. “Charge!”

After it was all over, there wasn’t anything worth describing about Kaho’s skirmish with the goblins. It was true that they were stronger than regular goblins, but the fact that they faced Kaho head-on in a fairly open area ended up being their downfall. Their slight advantage in strength over regular goblins didn’t matter for Kaho as long as she had enough space to swing her greatsword, and it wasn’t long before they were reduced to four more corpses.

“Hmm. Just as I thought. It seems that combat is no challenge, not even against stronger variants of goblin,” said Kaho. “Dale, will this suffice to mark the completion of the hunt quest?”

“Yeah, good work,” said Dale. “Thanks for the help. Stronger forms of goblins would’ve been very hard for us villagers to defeat.”

“Also, these goblins had some weapons on them,” said Sae. “Is this a stone tool?”

Sae used her staff to poke at one of the stone axes that the goblins had been wielding. It seemed to have been knapped from some kind of lustrous stone, maybe something like obsidian.

“This axe looks to be quite sharp indeed,” said Kaho. “Was it crafted from rocks that can be found in the vicinity?”

“Yeah, it was probably made from a type of stone that you can occasionally find here,” said Dale. “There should be some inside of this very cave. Oh, over there.”

We looked in the direction that Dale-san was pointing and saw some exposed rocks. They did, in fact, look like the material that had been used to make the axes.

“Are these rocks worth any money?” I asked.

“I don’t think so,” Dale replied. “I’m no expert on rocks, but you can find these anywhere just lying on the ground.”

“I figured. All right, let’s get out of here,” I said. “It stinks inside of this cave.”

“Mm, the putrid smell here is more or less what I expected from goblins,” said Sae.

“Air can easily become stagnant in caves, after all,” said Kaho. “Dale, I ought to confirm—we need not bring any goblin parts back to the village as proof that we slew them, correct?”

Dale-san nodded, so we turned our backs on the messy scene and started to head out of the cave, but we stopped in our tracks when he asked us a question. “Hold on, are you girls going to ignore these dead goblins?”

“Hm? Yeah,” I said. “Oh, do they turn into zombies or something if left alone?”

Apparently there were some places in this world where corpses would rise as undead if they were left alone. If that were the case here, we would have an obligation to clean up the dead goblins. However, fortunately, those cases were supposedly quite rare. It would have been very troublesome if all monsters turned into undead.

“Nah, I’ve never heard any stories about that happening in this area,” said Dale. “I’m just asking if you girls don’t plan on retrieving the goblins’ magicites.”

The three of us exchanged a glance.

“I don’t think there’s really a need,” said Sae.

“I am in agreement. A single orc is worth far more than a few goblins, after all,” said Kaho.

“I feel the same way. So yeah, Dale-san, we’re going to leave these dead goblin bodies alone,” I said. “I’m sorry about burdening you with this, but can

you retrieve the magicites yourself when you have some free time?”

“Are you sure about that? You slew some stronger forms of goblins, so the magicites from all of them should add up to a hefty sum,” said Dale. “At least, it’ll definitely fetch you girls more money than the reward that the village elder is going to pay you for the hunt quest.”

“Ha ha, don’t worry about it,” I replied. “For us, it’s just not worth the time.”

The actual reason we didn’t want to retrieve the magicites from goblins was because of how emotionally draining we found the work. We had gotten somewhat accustomed to it by now, but the act of opening holes in the heads of monsters was still quite uncomfortable for us. With that in mind, Kaho was absolutely right that hunting orcs was a better option for us. It provided us with more income and also required less time and emotional fortitude.

“Is that so? In that case, I’ll come back in the near future to retrieve the magicites,” said Dale. “Thanks.” He sounded pretty happy—he’d just unexpectedly obtained the rights to an additional source of income.

The four of us headed back towards the village. It was almost sunset when we arrived, and we were greeted by the village elder, who was in a good mood the moment he saw us.

“Oh, have you already completed the quest? In the past, there were some adventurers who came here to take on a quest and wasted a few days for no good reason, so your party has exceeded my expectations,” said Lazarus.

“...Thank you for the praise.”

The village elder was probably in a good mood due to the fact that he didn’t have to pay our lodging and food expenses over multiple days. I was fairly sure that his attitude was the other reason, in addition to the pitiful reward, that no other adventurers had been willing to take on this quest for quite a while.

We hadn’t really minded when we’d seen Dale-san act happy earlier, but the sight of this village elder in a good mood was pretty repellant. In fact, Kaho and Sae both seemed like they were in a bad mood; they remained silent. I really wanted just to head back to Kiura right away, but it would probably have been dangerous to traverse a mountain road at night, so we forced ourselves to stay

for one night at the village elder's house. We pretended to listen as he rambled on and on about various topics. When dinnertime rolled around, another guy showed up.

"This is my son, Boas," said Lazarus.

Oh yeah, I think he said something earlier about how his wife isn't with him anymore, and he's living with his son.

"I'm Boas. Oh, hmm, so you girls are a party of three with two demihumans, huh?"

I sensed some nasty insinuations behind the guy's choice of words, but I forced a smile onto my face before I replied. "Hello. Our party name is Jade Wings."

I had introduced ourselves with our party name because I didn't like the way that he was looking at us. *There's no way I'd ever tell someone like him our actual names!* It seemed like he was ogling us, and I felt absolutely disgusted. Kaho and Sae looked like they felt the same way. Their faces were expressionless; neither of them was forcing herself to display a business smile. I wasn't sure whether or not the village elder was aware that they were displeased, but either way, I doubted that he cared.

"I've prepared some of this village's finest products for tonight's repast. Please feel free to try them out," said Lazarus.

The dishes on the table in front of us were soup with meat and vegetables and a brownish-looking porridge. The village elder had claimed that these dishes were made from the village's "finest" products, but based on what we'd heard from one of the villagers earlier, it was obvious that he was being stingy about food expenses. However, I didn't really mind since I'd had no expectations and wanted to try out some aquatic wheat anyway.

The taste of the porridge was hard to describe, but the closest thing that came to mind was the result of a failed attempt at cooking porridge. There weren't any visible grains, so it was kind of like a viscous paste that still had some starch along with a strong smell from the miller's bran. *Okay, I can see why aquatic wheat doesn't sell well.* The vegetable soup was also bad enough that I had nothing positive to say about it. In fact, the soup that we'd made

ourselves back when we had been camping out near Sarstedt had tasted way better than this. However, I was still collected enough to remain silent and avoid complaining about the food out loud as I finished my meal.



As soon as we finished dinner and went to the rooms that we'd been assigned, I sighed and voiced my complaints to Kaho.

"Ugh. Was this really a worthwhile quest, Kaho?" I asked. "Also, both you and Sae left most of the talking to me."

Dinner earlier had been nothing but torture. I'd had to eat bad-tasting food while pretending to listen to the village elder ramble about his "accomplishments."

"I sincerely apologize for my mistake," said Kaho. "Precisely because no other adventurers were willing to take on this quest, I ought to have done more research."

Kaho sounded like she felt pretty bad, so I sighed once again and shook my head. "Oh well, it's over now. Let's go to bed early to prepare for tomorrow. Sae's probably already asleep by now."

"Indeed. We should return to Kiura as soon as possible," said Kaho.

Kaho and I had been assigned the same room, while Sae had been assigned a room of her own due to the limited number of beds. None of us felt upbeat enough to gather in one room and chat with each other for a bit, so we all turned in early, and I fell asleep quite fast; I had been active all day starting in the morning. However...

"EEK!"

A scream woke me in the middle of the night. Kaho reacted much faster than I did; she leaped out of our room and charged towards Sae's room. When I followed to see what had happened, I saw Kaho right before she brought her fists down on the body of a guy who had been on top of Sae; Sae had been struggling to kick him away. The guy made a big thud when he crashed to the floor.



I used my Light spell to illuminate the room so we could identify the assailant, who was rolling around on the floor. It was Boas. He was groaning in pain, but actually, Kaho had probably held back quite a bit when she punched him. She was capable of swinging around a greatsword with no strain, so this guy would have been dead if she had punched him with full force.

“Are you okay, Sae?” I asked.

“Mm. I was asleep, but there’s no way I wouldn’t notice if someone entered my room,” Sae replied.

I wasn’t sure if Boas had tried to assault Sae because she was the most beautiful girl among us, or if it was because he thought that, as an elf, she would be easy to pin down, but it didn’t matter. Unfortunately for him, this wasn’t the first time that we had repelled guys who had tried to assault us in our sleep and made them regret their actions, so someone like Boas, who wasn’t even an adventurer, was no threat to us.

“What should we do with this guy?” I asked. “Should we dish out the same punishment that we did to the guys who tried to assault us in the past?”

“Hmm. I’m not sure,” said Kaho. “This happened inside of a village, so...”

“What’s the ruckus?! Expl—”

The parent of the sex offender had arrived at the scene of the crime, and he grimaced when he saw his son on the floor.

“Welcome, village elder,” said Kaho. “Your son tried to assault us. How do you intend to resolve this situation?”

“Well...”

Kaho grabbed her greatsword and hoisted it onto her shoulders as she glared at the village elder, and he averted his eyes. Village elders had the authority to punish crimes in small villages that didn’t have guards or civil servants, but I wasn’t sure if this elder was capable of doing so given that the criminal was his own flesh and blood.

“Hmph! Demihumans like you have no right to wail about small matters,” said Boas. “This is just rural tradition in this village.”

Boas clicked his tongue as he staggered to his feet, and the village elder nodded. “Yes, it seems that there’s been a slight misunderstanding here. It’s nothing to get angry about, surely?”

A monster parent?! I had a feeling that was the case, but still! However, none of us were willing to play along with that reasoning.

“Are you implying that attempted rape is merely a rural tradition?” Kaho asked.

“There are some areas in the world with such traditions,” said Lazarus. “You happened not to know about it.”

“This is how you defend your son after he attempted to assault the adventurers who came here to complete the quest that you yourself issued, eh?”

Boas must have recovered from the pain, because he yelled at Kaho. “Shut up, demihuman!” He made sure he was some distance from her before yelling, though.

“Racism against demihumans, eh? I believe such discrimination is forbidden by law, but...”

“Yeah, Kaho, it is,” I said. “It’s part of the law of the land, so rural traditions are no excuse.”

The country we were in had adopted appeasement policies due to the fact that the population was composed of all sorts of races. Discrimination was not something that was tolerated.

“In any case, village elder, if that is your final answer, very well. We’ll have to report to the Adventurers’ Guild about your conduct and the fact that such a ‘rural tradition’ exists in this village,” said Kaho. “Should you ever wish to hire adventurers in the future, I wish you luck finding any who will be willing to step foot in your village.”

“...There’s no need to report to the guild about something so trivial, is there? Oh, now that I think about it, I haven’t signed the poster to indicate completion of the quest yet.”

Oh yeah, I forgot about that. We had originally planned on obtaining the signature of completion tomorrow morning right before we left. Quests that adventurers took on through the guild required them to obtain a signature from the client; otherwise, there was no way to get paid. The village elder knew that just as well as we did, and he had a nasty smile on his face, but Kaho merely raised an eyebrow in response.

“Did you truly believe that that would be enough to silence us? Fool!” Kaho exclaimed. “We have no need to accept a pittance from scum who tried to assault us! We’ll be leaving at once!”

Kaho seemed quite irritated. She smashed the floor with her greatsword, grabbed Sae’s backpack, and headed out of the room.

“Mm, there’s no reason for us to stay here if we can’t sleep in safety,” said Sae.

“It’s still dark outside, but we’ll be fine with my Light spell,” I said.

It would be a different story if we were in an area where we could run into orcs, but the vicinity of this village wasn’t that dangerous as long as we didn’t stray off the mountain road. I went to retrieve Kaho’s backpack and my own backpack, then pushed aside the village elder and his son and exited the house with Sae.

Boas must not have expected us to leave. “D-Do you really think you’ll get away with—” He hastily chased after us, only to freeze in place and fall silent when Kaho drew her greatsword and pointed it directly at him.

“You truly are a fool. What made you imagine that you have any authority whatsoever over us?” Kaho asked. “We’re not villagers here, and the moment you dare to step outside of this village, you’re nothing more than a sex offender. Feel free to chase us—at your own peril.”

“In the dark, it’s hard to tell what’s a person and what’s a monster,” said Sae. “And if I get attacked and burn something to a crisp, it’ll be impossible to identify the remains.”

“Since I’m weak, I have no choice but to smash the heads of orcs in order to get the upper hand,” I said. “And by that, I mean smashing them to a pulp.”

The village elder and his son had authority in this village, but even Sae was physically stronger than either of them, so there was no way they could prevail in combat. Both of them gulped in fear and took a step back after they heard our clear threats.

“Hmph. I was wondering if one sex offender in this world would rush to his death, but I suppose not,” said Kaho. “Farewell.”

We looked away from the village elder and his son as we swiftly departed the village under the cover of dark.



“Hello, Jade Wings. The investigation has been completed,” said Sara.

“Oh, Sara-san. What were the results?” I asked.

Once we’d returned to Kiura, we had reported to the Adventurers’ Guild in detail about what had happened to us at the village. We hadn’t been sure if the guild would trust our word, but the way that they had handled this case had exceeded our expectations. In fact, apparently personnel in the service of the local duke, the lord of these lands, had also participated in the investigation.

“The former village elder and his son have been exiled, and a new village elder has been appointed,” said Sara. “Your party will also be fully reimbursed for the goblin hunt quest.”

“Oh, is that so?” Kaho asked.

“Mm. It’s because everyone in your party is a Rank 2 adventurer, and you’ve contributed a lot to the local economy by supplying the guild with orc meat,” Sara replied. “In addition, although discrimination based on race may be hard to punish if it comes from an ordinary citizen, it cannot be allowed to slide coming from an authority like a village elder. At least, that’s how it is in this region, but...”

Sara-san seemed to be implying that even though racial discrimination was forbidden by national law, cases could be handled very differently depending on the lord who ruled over a region.

“Racism never affected us back in Sarstedt or here in Kiura until now, but I

guess it does exist,” I said.

“Unfortunately. I should add that I have a message for your party from Duke Ohnick,” said Sara. “The duke declared that he has ‘no intention of allowing discrimination in this region,’ and that he wishes for Jade Wings to remain active here in Kiura.”

“Really? A message from the duke himself to a mere party of adventurers like us?” Sae asked.

“Yes. The reason is obvious: some of the members of your party are stronger than your actual ranks reflect, and such adventurers are beneficial to any region where they’re active,” said Sara.

“Hmm. Life here in Kiura has been quite comfortable for us, so we have no intentions of moving to a different town, at least not for some time,” said Kaho.

Sara-san smiled; she seemed quite relieved. “I’m really glad to hear that. It would’ve been awkward if your party had moved right away. I’d have to go and tell the duke. I look forward to continuing to work with your party for the near future.”

We all nodded; we had smiles on our faces too.



We returned to our house after receiving our compensation for the goblin hunt quest. I started to joke around with Kaho as soon as we were in the door.

“Well, I guess things turned out just fine in the end,” I said. “But it’s a shame that this didn’t lead to a campaign, right, Kaho?”

Kaho muttered an “Ugh” in response and then shook her head. “Are you absolutely certain? There remains the possibility that the village elder and his son will develop into powerful antagonists as a result of a grudge agai—”

“Nah, not happening,” I said.

“Yeah, there’s no way,” said Sae.

It was highly unlikely that the former village elder and his son would be capable of leading ordinary lives from now on. They might recover if some of the other villagers helped them out, but it hadn’t seemed like any of the

villagers had positive feelings towards them. On top of that, if the elder or his son had used “rural tradition” as an excuse to assault village girls, there was no way they’d ever make it alive to another village or town.

Kaho sighed after she heard our responses. “Oh well. I suppose you’re both right. And to be clear, I have no desire for powerful antagonists to appear in front of us.”

Sae and I looked at each other and chuckled.

“Well, in any case, there are two key takeaways from this experience. One, there are bad clients out there advertising quests. Two, racism against demihumans is a real problem,” I said.

“Mm. In the future, if we ever plan to move to a different town, we should probably do some research first to figure out whether discrimination is common there,” said Sae.

“Also, one good result of this experience is that the duke of this region learned about our party as Jade Wings instead of Orc Eaters,” I said.

“There’s a distinct possibility that this entire episode was pointless, but there’s a beginning for everything,” said Kaho.

“Yeah, let’s take things step by step and do our best until people forget about our current aliases!” I exclaimed.

Kaho smirked and laughed. “I believe the only way to accomplish that is by overwriting our current cognomens with others. Do you plan on proclaiming a new cognomen for yourself, Yoshino?”

“Ugh! Well, no, that’d be embarrassing to do,” I replied. “But the current ones are so embarrassing. It’s a hard choice.”

“If you introduce yourself as Yoshino, the Angelic Healer every time you heal someone, then I’m sure that new alias will spread and stick in no time,” said Sae. “You could also tack on, like, a peace sign and some kind of pose during your introduction for greater impact.”

“That’d be like self-inflicting a mental wound that I’ll never recover from!” I exclaimed. “Besides, there’s no need for something like a pose, right?!”

“Hmm. The key is to leave a strong impression when introducing oneself. Something like a staff of the kind wielded by magical girls could be useful,” said Kaho.

“No, that’s not what I need at all! Come on, take this seriously!” I exclaimed. “My reputation is at stake here!”

It seemed like Kaho and Sae weren’t very enthusiastic about overwriting their current aliases, which weren’t that bad, but my current alias was awful, so I had no intention of giving up on obtaining a better one. *Even if I have to fight this battle by myself, I’ll do my best to persevere to the very end!*

Afterword

Hello, Itsuki Mizuho here. Thank you all for your continued support of my works. *To Another World... with Land Mines!* has now reached volume four. This volume is quite different from the web version. If you're the type of reader who ordinarily begins by reading the afterword, then I highly recommend reading the actual volume first, since there are spoilers ahead.

All right, with that warning out of the way, I'm going to carry on. You see, about half of this volume consists of original content that wasn't in the web version. I've rewritten and revised the script a bit for each volume so far, though I've kept the general plot the same. However, I made some major revisions to volume four as well as adding some new characters, one of whom happens to be a beastwoman with animal ears, the kind of girl Touya-kun has been wanting to meet for a long time. Unfortunately for him, it seems like he doesn't have a chance with her. It's kind of his own fault, since any girl would run away if some guy suddenly approached her seeming very excited. Such an act clearly falls under the category of sexual harassment, after all. Touya-kun needs to learn restraint if he wants to have a shot with women.

Now then, in regard to the manga version of *To Another World... with Land Mines!* by Relucy-san that's currently being published, I have a slightly disappointing announcement to make. There are very few cute girls in the manga so far, since most of the characters that have appeared are guys! On top of that, the guys are also quite muscular! I wonder who's to blame for this. Oh right, it's me. In addition, most of the characters that'll show up in the future won't be girls either! Ugh, I didn't take into account how well scenes would look in manga form! I would've been able to see a lot of cute girls drawn by Relucy-san if only I had made more cute girls show up in the story!

Okay, that's enough rambling about my regrets for now. Information about updates can be found on my Twitter account (@itsukimizuho), so feel free to check whenever. For the most part, I only tweet and retweet announcements, but there's a chance that you'll find some interesting information from time to

time.

Last but not least, I'd like to thank Nekobyou Neko-san as well as my editor and everyone else involved with this series for all of your hard work and help. This book couldn't have been published without everyone's combined efforts. Also, I'd like to thank all of the readers who have made it possible for this series to continue by purchasing the volumes. I hope we can all meet again in the next one.

Itsuki Mizuho

An anime-style illustration showing a giant mushroom with a brown cap and thick white stem rising from a town. In the foreground, two young women with pointed ears are looking up in shock. The woman on the left has blonde hair and blue eyes, wearing a purple dress with a white collar and blue striped sleeves. The woman on the right has grey hair and blue eyes, wearing a black dress with a white collar and yellow trim. A third woman with brown hair and purple eyes, wearing a blue dress with a red bow, stands in the background. The sky is blue with white clouds and orange halftone circles.

**A giant mushroom
appeared!**

“Now then, everyone,
please take a look in
that direction.”

“This direction? Wait, since when
was there a white pillar over there?
I don’t remember seeing this before...”

Diola



"Hell yeah!"

The fish's silhouette made it look quite big.

I felt something on the end of my fishing rod, so I followed my instincts and pulled the rod towards myself.

"Got one!"

"Congrats, Nao-kun!"

Haruka

"Oh, another one!"

Nao


Touya

Yuki

Natsuki

To Another World...

with **LAND MINES!**
4



“All right, then. Kaho-san’s alias is Little Executioner, and it’s because of how you behead orcs and slice them cleanly in half,” said Sara.

“As for Sae-san, your alias is Crimson Eliminator,” said Sara.

“Last of all, Yoshino-san, your alias is Angelic Sadist.”

“Hold up. Is that really what other people think of me?! These are harmful rumors!”

Sae

Kaho

Yoshino

The three girls from the Jade Wings party are lucky enough to acquire some aliases!

A vibrant manga-style illustration featuring four anime characters in a lush garden. In the foreground, a girl with short brown hair and purple eyes, wearing a blue dress with a red bow, looks up with a finger to her lips. Behind her, a girl with long blonde hair and green eyes, wearing a green and white dress, reaches out. To the left, a girl with long blonde hair and blue eyes, wearing a black and white dress, also reaches out. In the background, a boy with white hair and cat ears, wearing a green and white outfit, points upwards. The scene is filled with pink petals and flowers, with a large building in the background.

story

Itsuki Mizuho

art

Nekobyou Neko

To
Another World...

with

LAND
MINES!

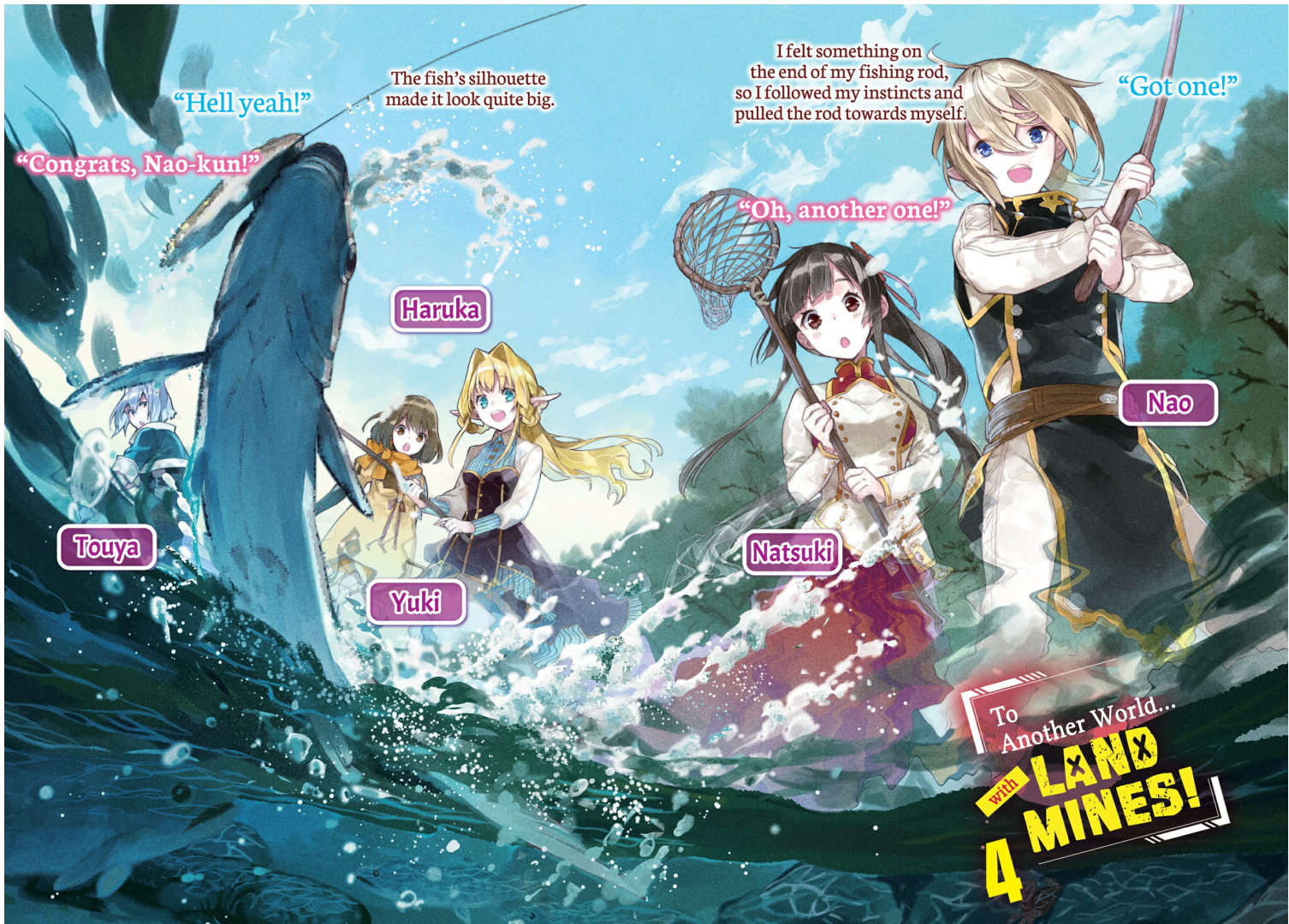
A giant mushroom with a thick, light-brown stem and a large, flat, light-brown cap is rising from a town. The town has red-roofed buildings and a church spire. The sky is blue with white clouds. There are orange and red circular patterns in the sky. Two anime-style characters are in the foreground. The character on the left has blonde hair and blue eyes, wearing a white shirt and a purple vest. The character on the right has grey hair and blue eyes, wearing a black shirt and a white vest. A third character is in the background on the right, wearing a blue dress and a red bow.

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To Another World... with Land Mines! Volume 4

by Itsuki Mizuho

Translated by Yen-Po Tseng Edited by Shakuzan

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