



story

Itsuki Mizuho

art

Nekobyou Neko

To  
Another World...

with

LAND  
MINES!

3





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# C O N T E N T S

TO ANOTHER WORLD...  
WITH LAND MINES!

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# Prologue

“So yeah, we need to earn and save up a lot of money now!” Haruka exclaimed.

We had decided to rent a house in Laffan to use as our home base and had asked Diola-san to help us look for one, but there wasn't anything that matched what we were looking for, sadly. It wasn't her fault by any means, though, since it was a fact that she couldn't show us something that didn't exist. As a result, we had asked her to help us with the negotiations to purchase a plot of land instead so that we could pay for the construction of our own house. However, even though we had saved enough money to rent a house, we didn't have enough money to pay for both land and a new house. All of this was what had led to Haruka's declaration. Diola-san's efforts would go to waste if we didn't manage to save up enough money on our end. We would probably have to live a frugal life and continue to stay at an inn for a while to accomplish this.

“Well, with that said, the only thing we can really do to earn money is to take on more adventurer work. It's not like we can take out a loan in this world.”

Yuki added, “What Haruka means is that it's not a safe option. There's a chance we might be scammed or even forced into slavery. Personal bankruptcy doesn't exist here, so yeah.”

*Oh, right, Yuki has the General Knowledge skill as well.*

“Hmm? Didn't you mention before that slavery is prohibited here, Haruka?” I asked.

“What Yuki means is conditions that are basically as bad as slavery. You know, situations like harsh penal servitude, for example. It seems like there are some measures in place to make sure you don't die, but it's definitely much harsher than anything back in Japan.”

Haruka told us that people who fell into that situation would be put under strict surveillance while being forced to work, and the money they earned



would mostly go towards repaying their debt as well as towards management fees, so it was much more difficult to repay a debt in that way than it was working a normal job. Back in Japan, the amount of money you earned during penal servitude would be handed over to you once you had finished your sentence and were released from prison. The difference in this world was probably due to deductions for food expenses, prison maintenance fees, and the salaries of the people who worked at the prison. The kind of work you would be forced to do would probably be the shady type of work, and as for the work that women would be tasked with...

“Yeah, debt is absolutely bad,” I said.

“I don’t intend on allowing any of us to go into debt,” said Haruka. “It’s dangerous if you get scammed, so everyone needs to make sure to report and discuss with each other.”

“Mm, that’s the right way to go about it,” said Natsuki. “Calmly discuss things with someone else before making a decision. It’s best to have the mentality that every get-rich-quick scheme is a scam.”

“There are probably also special types of scams that target people who think they’re too smart to get scammed...” said Touya.

“Yep, and there might be scams unique to this world out there too, so we should all be on our guard,” said Yuki.

We all nodded. It would be hard for us to escape elaborate scams if any of us got ensnared in one, so we had to avoid them at all costs.

“On a sidenote, does Diola-san really like dried dindels?” Natsuki asked.

“Yeah. It seems she absolutely loves dindels, not just dried ones,” said Haruka.

The way Diola-san had taken a cut of our dindels seemed a bit like an abuse of her authority, but she had insisted it wasn’t a problem.

“Dindels are expensive seasonal fruits that aren’t readily available in the market, so they’re quite useful for negotiations,” I said.

“Oh, do dried dindels taste good?” Yuki asked.



“Oh right, neither of you have had dried dindels yet,” said Haruka. “Would you two like to try some?”

“Yeah!” Yuki exclaimed.

“Is it okay to have some?” Natsuki asked.

“Yeah. Give me a second.” Haruka took some dried dindels out of a bag and handed them to Yuki and Natsuki. “Okay, here you go.”

Both of them took some time to examine the fruits in front of them.

“Can we eat them right away like this?” Yuki asked.

“Yeah, you can bite right in,” said Haruka. “You can also slice them up first if you want.”

The main difference between regular dried fruits and dried dindels was their size. Most dried fruits would end up similar in size to an apricot or persimmon, and anything larger than that would normally be sliced up first before consumption. That probably meant that the large, plump dried dindels looked quite strange to Yuki and Natsuki, but it didn’t change the fact that they were delicious. The rest of us stared intently at them, silently urging them to try out the dried dindels.

At last the two of them tentatively bit into the dindels. Their faces lit up with looks of surprise, and they both voiced their thoughts.

“D-Delicious! It’s very sweet, but it still has a sour edge to it!” Yuki exclaimed. “Whoa, even the skin tastes good!”

“Mm!” Natsuki chimed in. “I’ve never had dried fruits that tasted this good before!”

*Yep. Dindels become sweeter when dried, and you can even eat the skin, which you would normally throw away, so it kind of feels like you’re getting the best value out of dindels this way. However, fresh dindels have a stronger sour flavor than dried ones, and that’s something I enjoy, so it’s hard for me to say which I prefer.*

“Okay, I understand why they’re a delicacy now,” said Natsuki. “By the way, how much does each one go for in the market?”



“Hmm. Well, dried dindels probably go for at least one thousand Rea each.”

“At least one gold coin per dindel?! That’s really expensive!” Yuki exclaimed.

“Oh yeah, we could probably pay for a plot of land if we sold our entire stock of dindels.”

Yuki objected right away. “I’m against that idea, Haruka! It’s better to have some valuable sweet food in stock!”

Natsuki gently shook her head. “The two of us weren’t the ones who made these dried dindels, so I feel a bit bad about saying this, but I kind of agree with Yuki...”

“If I had to pick a side, then I guess I’m of the same opinion,” said Haruka. “Nao, Touya, what about you two?”

“Well, I wouldn’t mind selling about half of our stock,” I said.

Yuki and Natsuki expressed their disappointment together when they heard my words. “Really...?”

I changed my opinion as soon as I saw how sad they looked. “Oh, actually, never mind, we should keep our stock of dindels.”

“Yeah, I agree with Nao,” said Touya. “They’re delicious, after all!”

Even if we had enough money to purchase the land, we would still have to earn more to pay for a house, so there wasn’t any reason to make Yuki and Natsuki sad when they had been suffering from bad food for so long. There was nothing wrong with taking our time to save up money.

“We can use dried fruits as rations when we have to go out on long trips, so I actually am in favor of saving them for practical reasons too,” said Haruka. “I plan on stocking up on other cheap dried fruits, though.”

The value of one dried dindel would be enough to purchase a couple of other dried fruits, so it would be somewhat extravagant to eat only dindels even though they were delicious. We had a lot of dried dindels stocked up, but we would run out before the next spring if each of us ate one or two per day.

“Can we actually earn four hundred gold coins in a short amount of time, though, Haruka?” Yuki asked.



“Well, it might sound like a lot of money, but the amount we spent on the chain mail for you and Natsuki was only one and a half times that amount, so it’s not that bad.”

“Uh, that just makes me scared to wear the chain mail...” said Yuki.

“It technically is clothing that’s worth the equivalent of at least one million yen, so yeah,” said Touya.

“When you put it like that, chain mail is actually quite expensive,” I said. The amount we had paid for Touya’s chain mail would have been enough to buy a car back in Japan.

Yuki tilted her head in thought. “Actually, now that I think about it, the value of heavy armor in the past back in Japan would’ve been somewhere between twenty and thirty million yen, so I guess it kind of makes sense.”

Touya looked quite surprised. “Wait, for real?! It was that expensive?!”

“Yeah. Life for samurai in the past seems to have been quite hard, since they had to gather up money to build large estates and also for their armor.”

“Yikes. The labor costs were high due to the fact that it was handmade instead of mass-produced, right? Our chain mail looks like it took a lot of work to make as well,” I said.

I always got a headache just thinking about how much delicate craftsmanship had gone into the fine wires that held my chain mail together. That thought would come to mind any time I wore it.

“It’s true that a lot of work went into our chain mail, but they’re also made of white iron, and that seems to be the main reason for their high cost,” said Touya.

“Really?” I asked.

“Yeah. That’s why chain mail is lightweight and rustproof.”

“We don’t know for sure yet if the chain mail is really rustproof, but it does feel pretty light considering that it’s made out of metal,” said Haruka.

“If you hold up a lump of white iron and a lump of regular iron, you can easily tell which one is lighter. I thought the white iron was actually aluminum for a



second due to its weight. It felt to me like about half of what the regular iron weighed. At the same time, white iron is also about two or three times stronger than regular iron.”

“Whoa, that sounds amazing,” I said. “I guess it makes sense that the chain mail was expensive.”

“Wait, did you guys buy this expensive armor without knowing about such things?” Yuki asked.

As she said that, Yuki reached for the chain mail that was lying near me and picked it up with one hand. The fact that she could pick it up like that was evidence of how light it was.

“We left all of that to Gantz-san, the owner of the weapon shop,” I said. “It’s better than amateurs like us giving specific orders, right?”

“I guess that’s one way to go about it, as long as you trust the person.”

“Also, the value of white iron is about ten times that of regular iron,” said Touya. “It’s also much more difficult to work with. The closest thing that comes to mind for me is stainless steel.”

“Oh, yeah, that sounds difficult. It would probably cost way over one million yen if it was made back in Japan.”

Based on what I knew, stainless steel wires were quite tough. Cheap wire cutters would have a difficult time snipping through even a single millimeter of wire. *I wonder how much time it actually took to make this chain mail by hand considering that there aren’t any machines or tools like that in this world to help with the process...*

“Well, it’ll take less than two months to save up four hundred gold coins if we hunt boars every day,” said Haruka.

“That’s amazing—or wait, is it?” Yuki paused and then mumbled to herself, “I don’t really know what to compare it with...”

You would have to take into account the time required to hunt boars as well as the risks involved, and the value of money in this world was different anyway, so it was hard to convert to an exact yen equivalent. The exchange rate



we had in our minds was roughly one hundred yen per one Rea, so one gold coin would be the equivalent of ten thousand yen, but we were just basing that rate on the value of bread, since that was the primary food in this world. There would be some discrepancies if we instead based it on something like the value of fruits or lodging fees.

“It’s a monthly income roughly equivalent to about two million yen. If we divide it by five, then it’d be about four hundred thousand yen per person,” I said. “It’s more than enough for people our age, isn’t it?”

I wasn’t sure if it was worth the risk that came with hunting boars, but I was fairly sure that people who dropped out of middle school wouldn’t be able to earn four hundred thousand yen per month. Depending on the commodity, prices in this world could be more or less than prices back in Japan, so a simple comparison wasn’t really helpful, but it was nice to think about making that much money. However, Yuki and Natsuki’s next words made my joy short-lived.

“That’s a yearly salary of four million eight hundred thousand yen with bonuses already included, right? It’s not that much if we take into account the fact that we have to pay everything ourselves, including taxes, social insurance, and work-related expenses,” said Natsuki. “If we deducted all of that, then the final amount would end up somewhere around half of the total, at two million four hundred thousand yen.”

“Our lives are also at risk doing this kind of work, but there’s no such thing as insurance or hazard pay!” Yuki exclaimed.

*Well, there goes my dream, I guess. I feel kind of sad about this.*

Touya tried to refute what the girls had just said. “Well, it’s not like boars are the only way for us to earn money. We can also hunt at least two or more boars per day if things go well, so...”

Haruka brought up another issue, although she seemed to partially agree with Touya. “It’s true we can earn money from other work, like gathering herbs, but the problem here is that we don’t know how much longer we can keep hunting boars. Right now is the best time of the year for hunting boars, so we’ve encountered a lot of them that are fat, but they’ll get skinny during winter and be harder to come across, right?”



“There won’t be as much food available for the boars in winter, so that makes sense,” said Yuki.

“Mm, that would result in a drastic reduction in income for us,” said Natsuki.

“What about animals like deer?” I asked. “If their population is out of control like it was back in Japan, we can hunt them without any issues, right?”

The number of deer in Japan had grown to dangerous levels, and apparently it would be very bad for the environment if their population continued to grow. There was plenty of demand for meat in this world, so I was down to hunt deer if they existed in this world.

“The reason for the explosive growth in the deer population back in Japan was that humans hunted wolves to extinction,” said Haruka. “There are monsters in this world, so I doubt there are any overpopulation issues with regular animals.”

“On the other hand, monster populations can grow out of control!” Yuki exclaimed.

What that meant, apparently, was that monster populations would sometimes grow until they ran out of prey to feed on, and then an even worse phenomenon known as Stampede would occur and monsters would assault human settlements.

“So that means in this world, monsters are the natural predators of regular animals? That’s awful,” I said.

I would rather be faced with an excess population of boars or deer instead of monsters like goblins, since goblins weren’t exactly edible. Supposedly some monsters like orcs did have edible meat, but goblins definitely did not. You wouldn’t die from eating goblin meat, but I had no intentions of trying it out.

“If the boars decrease in number during the winter, then I guess we’ll have no choice but to gather magicite from goblins,” said Haruka. “However, even if we ignore the mental trauma from that process, it’s still not a very efficient way of earning money.”

We would only get 250 Rea for splitting open the head of a goblin and prying out its magicite. *With that in mind...*

“In a way, I guess dindels are like a bonus item for elves,” I said.

All we had to do as elves was reach out and pick the fruit to obtain the same value as one magicite from a goblin.

“I feel like people who aren’t elves would try to gather dindels too if they were such a good way to earn money, though,” said Touya.

“Nah, Touya, you might think it’s easy since you didn’t climb up that tree, but it would’ve probably been impossible for me if I was a human,” I said.

“Yeah, Nao’s right,” said Haruka. “In fact, accidents happen from time to time where adventurers who aren’t elves try to gather dindels themselves and fall from the trees.”

When we’d gone to gather dindels with Aera-san, she had easily hopped up the dindel tree, but it was still at least fifty meters tall. The winds that blew at the top were quite strong, and the branches weren’t exactly stable either. You would have to balance on those shifting branches while you put dindels in a bag, and then you would have to carry a heavy bag full of dindels as you climbed down. The way down was honestly more dangerous than the way up. I was used to it by now, but I’d needed rope at first. The path that you had to take to get to the dindel trees wasn’t exactly safe either. Adventurers would be able to take care of themselves, but tusk boars and goblins were a real threat for ordinary citizens.

“Hmm, so there is a good reason that dindels are expensive,” said Yuki.

“I mean, yeah,” I said. “That’s just how economics works.”

“What about the herbs you mentioned earlier, Haruka?” Natsuki asked. “How much profit can you earn gathering those?”

“Other adventurers wouldn’t be able to earn much from gathering herbs, but we have the Help Guide and the Appraisal skill, so we can earn a decent profit from it.”

“Is that so?”

“You would normally have to memorize the different types of herbs and know how to tell them apart and spot them in an open field, but that’s easy to do



with those two skills.”

Diola-san had been quite surprised when we’d brought back the first batch of herbs we gathered.

“Appraisal is quite a useful skill considering there were so many additional land mine skills,” said Touya. “It’s not exactly a cheat skill, but it’s a nice bonus skill to have.”

“A lot of our classmates probably decided to get the Appraisal skill, so in a way, it really is kind of like another bonus from that ‘evil’ god,” I said.

Of all the skills we had as a party, there were three that were quite different from the others, and those three were Appraisal, Third Eye, and the Help Guide. *How do I put it? They’re more gamelike than the other skills, I guess? I’m not sure if there’s a reason for that or if they’re just more freebies from that evil god like Touya said. I wonder if we’ll find out the truth one day.*

“Well, the only person among us who has the Appraisal skill is Touya-kun, right? I have the Help Guide, but...” Natsuki glanced at Yuki.

“Yeah, I’m the only one here without the Help Guide or Appraisal skill! Teach me the Appraisal skill, Touya! Does it have a level?”

“Well, yeah, it has a level, but how am I supposed to teach you it?”

“Uh, just give it a try!”

“Won’t you be unable to ever learn this skill if I don’t manage to successfully teach you?”

“That’s true, but it’ll be fine! It’s probably not a skill that normal people in this world can learn anyway!”

*That makes sense. Similarly, the augmented reality display windows we have are probably something that only we have access to.*

“Let’s give it a go then, I guess? Don’t blame me if it doesn’t go well, okay?”

“Yeah, I won’t complain even if we don’t succeed.”

“All right, let’s begin. My Appraisal skill is Level 2.”

“Gotcha. Okay, I’ve successfully copied it.”

“Let’s see. Oh, we can use this.” Touya went to grab a dried dindel and handed it over to Yuki. “Look at this and think in your head that you want to know what it is. A display window will then appear with the text ‘Dried dindel’ and a description. Do you see it?”

“Uh, no, I don’t...”

*Yep, just as I expected. I had a feeling that it wouldn’t be that easy.*

“Yuki, with all the skills you’ve copied so far, didn’t it take you at least one hour before you could use them?” Haruka asked. “There’s no way you’ll be able to use a newly copied skill right away.”

“Uh, so are you saying I need to stare at this dried dindel for at least an hour and think in my head that I want to know what this is?”

“Yeah. For the copied skill to start working, you also need someone to teach you throughout this process, so Touya probably has to stick with you while you’re doing this.”

“Seriously?”

Both Yuki and Touya looked quite shocked when they heard what Haruka said. *Good luck, you two. I’m cheering you both on and wishing you good luck, but that’s all I can do.*

“You don’t have to do this in one go, so how about you slowly work at it whenever you have time? And just treat it as good luck if you do succeed,” said Natsuki.

“Ugh, I guess I don’t have a choice. I want to learn how to use this skill before we go out to gather herbs, though...”

“Don’t worry, Yuki. We won’t be going out to do work until tomorrow.”

“Are you telling me to learn this skill by tomorrow, Haruka...?”

Haruka stood up and didn’t reply to Yuki’s question. “Now then, we should be heading out for lunch. How about we go get some food at Aera-san’s café?”

“Hey, did you hear what I just said?”

We all got to our feet when Haruka brought up the topic of lunch. Yuki



appeared unhappy that we were ignoring her.

“Yeah, I’m kind of worried about whether Aera-san’s doing fine on her own,” I said.

“She should be fine,” said Natsuki. “She is a professional cook, after all.”

“Wait, are you all ignoring me?” Yuki asked.

“I’m feeling hungry, so let’s go right away!”

“Huh, you as well, Touya?” Yuki hastily got to her feet and followed behind us.  
“Wait! Wait for me! I’ll go as well!”

# Chapter 1—Earn Money with Dangerous Mushrooms!

“Welcome—oh, hello!”

It seemed like business was booming as usual for Aera-san’s café. I looked around and noticed that most of the seats were full, just like they had been when we had been helping her out.

“Hello, Aera-san. I was a bit worried about how things were going for you, but I guess everything’s fine,” I said.

“Yeah! I’ve managed to get things on track thanks to all the help! I get a lot of customers now—oh, give me a moment to prepare a table.”

She went and brought an empty chair to a table for four and waved at us to come over.

“Here, please take a seat! What would you all like?”

“Everyone’s fine with the same dish, right? Okay, we’ll have the daily special for five,” said Haruka.

“Daily special for five, correct? Okay, I’ll have it out soon.” Aera-san smiled before she headed back to the kitchen.

I looked around the café again to take stock of the customers. It looked like there were currently eighteen here, fourteen of them women. Compared to The Slumbering Bear, the number of customers was quite low given the amount of space available, but that was how Aera-san’s café was supposed to operate in order to maintain its relaxing atmosphere. The price for lunch here was rather expensive compared to other places, so it was encouraging to see that this café was already almost full of customers just a bit past noon.

“It looks like things are going well, Nao-kun.”

“Yep. I was a bit worried about whether Aera-san could handle things by herself, but it looks like she’s succeeded so far.”



Soon after I had exchanged those words with Natsuki, Aera-san came back with a tray in her hands.

“Thank you for waiting. Here are your daily specials. Today’s daily special consists of bread with tusk boar meat.”

“Oh, this bread smells really good. Did you bake it yourself, Aera-san?” Yuki asked.

Aera-san nodded. “Yes. I wouldn’t be able to do this with a high-volume and low-margin business model, but it’s manageable if I make a limited amount per day.”

“Ah, okay. Thanks for the food.”

“Please take your time and enjoy it.”

Aera-san gave us a light bow before she hurried back to the kitchen. Table turnover wasn’t high, but that didn’t change the fact that Aera-san was the only person working here. It made sense that she didn’t have the time to chat with us.

“Let’s start with the bread,” I said. The bread was so soft that my fingers sank into it. When I took a bite, I noticed the crispy texture and savory flavor of nuts. “Whoa, this tastes great!”





It felt similar to biting into an almond, but these nuts seemed like they were only one-third the size of an almond. As for the flavor, the closest thing that came to mind was cashews. *I'd love to buy some of these nuts on their own. It depends how expensive they are, but I think they'd be great as snacks.*

"It really does. The bread that the innkeeper makes back at The Slumbering Bear tastes great as well, but this is even better," said Haruka. "I think the ingredients that went into this are more expensive, though."

"The meat tastes great too," said Touya. "Honestly, I wouldn't mind coming here every day to eat."

"Why is there such a huge gap in skill between different cooks?" Natsuki asked.

It sounded like everyone else loved the food as well. Natsuki was probably comparing this food to what she'd had back at Sarstedt, but the food there was so bad that the comparison was meaningless.

"I think it's a difference both in the skill of the cook and the quality of the ingredients," said Haruka. "In any case, I'm glad there's a new place in town where we can get delicious food."

We continued to chat with each other as we ate lunch. Yuki was the only one among us who remained silent; she was staring at the dried dindel, which she had set on the table in front of her. The sight would have been comical to someone who didn't know what Yuki was doing, but she had a serious look on her face.

"Still no luck?" Haruka asked.

Yuki sighed and then rubbed her eyebrows and blinked. "Nope. Will I really learn to use the skill this way...?"

"You haven't leveled up your Appraisal, right, Touya?"

"Yeah, since I don't really use it often. Oh yeah, don't you have to study from something like an encyclopedia to be able to use or level up this skill?"

"Wait, really?! Are you telling me I've been wasting my time just staring at this dindel...?" Yuki looked to us for confirmation; she seemed to be quite

confused.

Haruka waved her hands around to dispel Yuki's doubts. "We only said that it might be a possibility. It's not like we have a manual for skills that tells us how they work—wait, what was the description for Appraisal during the character creation process? Do you remember, Nao?"

"Uh, sorry, I don't."

In a way, Appraisal was a very typical skill for fantasy worlds like this, but it had completely slipped my mind. I probably should have gotten Level 1 Appraisal instead of raising my Third Eye to Level 2, but the distribution of skills in our party had worked out quite well, so it was probably fine.

"I remember some of the description," said Natsuki. "I think it went along the lines of 'Appraising the same object will have no effect. Studying is required too,' or something similar."

"Oh nice, Natsuki!" I said. "If that was the description, then does it mean you'll get something like experience points just from using the Appraisal skill?"

"Probably. I think what it means is that you can level up Appraisal by appraising different objects and studying up on them," said Haruka.

Touya nodded. "That makes sense. If that's the case, I guess I'll start using the Appraisal skill more often. It's not like it drains anything."

"Yeah, you should," I said. "It might get even easier to use if you level it up, or you might unlock new functions."

The Appraisal skill had already been useful to us, since it had taught us what parts we needed to gather from herbs. If Touya managed to level it up, then that would open up all sorts of possibilities. *Oh yeah, we also have a shovel now, so it should be easier for us to gather the roots of herbs. If we dig herbs as well as hunt boars, then we'll earn a bit more money.*

"Doesn't that still mean there's no point in me staring at this dried dindel, though?"

"This new information isn't relevant to you yet, Yuki," said Haruka. "You still haven't learned how to use the skill."

“Oh, right.”

“Also, Touya, make sure you teach Yuki how to use the skill properly.”

“Huh? How am I supposed to do that?!”

“Maybe you can just watch Yuki as she’s doing her best to learn the skill?”

“That’s it? Okay, well, I guess I’ll do that.”

The result of this discussion was that Touya stared at Yuki while she stared down at the dried dindel. I wasn’t sure if this would do anything, but Haruka looked satisfied. She nodded at Touya and Yuki and then reached for the menu on the table.

“Okay, let’s enjoy some tea and desserts while we think about how we should earn money,” said Haruka.

“That sounds like a good idea,” said Natsuki. “Our brains need sugar if we’re going to discuss important matters like that.”

Haruka and Natsuki stared at the menu together. All of a sudden, Yuki raised her head to interrupt them. “Wait, what about me?!”

“I know, I know.” Haruka lifted a finger to her chin and tilted her head. “Hmm, would you work harder if I told you that you can’t have any desserts until you manage to learn how to use the Appraisal skill?”

Yuki furiously shook her own head in response. “No, that won’t work! I’m already trying as hard as I can!”

Haruka waited a little too long before saying, “I was just joking.”

*That long silence and the look on your face makes me think you were seriously considering it, Haruka. Well, Yuki looked like she was more concerned about not missing out on sweets than about learning the Appraisal skill, so...*

“Nao, Touya, what about you two?”

“Hmm, sure, just order whatever for me,” I said. “I’d feel bad about occupying seats without ordering anything.”

A few seats were empty now since it was a bit past noon, but I wasn’t the type of person who was brave enough to occupy a seat at a restaurant for hours



and only buy self-service drinks.

“I guess I’ll have some too—actually, can I get another serving of the daily special?”

“I’m pretty sure there’s none left by now, Touya,” said Haruka.

The main customer base for Aera-san’s café was women, so it appeared that the daily special wasn’t quite enough to fill Touya up. However, more customers had entered and left the café since we had entered earlier, so the daily special was probably out of stock by now; there was a limited amount per day.

“Also, you remember that we need to save money at the moment, right?”

“Uh, well, just order me something with a large portion size, then.”

“Okay. Aera-san! Can we order right now?”



Our conversation resumed after some sweets and warm tea were lined up in front of us on the table.

“Well, hunting boars is still the most efficient way of earning money, right?” I asked.

“Yeah, once dindels are out of season,” said Haruka. “That’s if there are no other good options, though.”

“Does the General Knowledge skill offer any hints?” Natsuki asked.

“Nope. Detailed information about adventurer work isn’t common knowledge in this world,” said Yuki.

“That makes sense,” said Touya.

I had no idea what specialized work was like even back in modern-day Japan despite the greater ease of looking up information online, so it was only natural that such information wouldn’t be common knowledge here in this world either.

“I guess we’ll have to ask Diola-san for help again,” I said. “Hmm, actually, maybe we’ve been relying on her too much.”

“We just asked her for help with finding real estate, so we should try to solve this problem ourselves if possible,” said Haruka.

We all paused in thought and tried to come up with some ideas, but none of us had the necessary background knowledge.

Once there were fewer customers in the café, Aera-san came over to chat with us as we racked our brains for ideas. “Oh, do you all happen to need money for something?”

“Yeah, kind of,” said Haruka. “We’re planning on buying a house in this town so that we don’t have to live at an inn forever.”

“That’s a great idea! I’d love to help you all since you’ve helped me out, but money isn’t exactly something I have a lot of...”

“Don’t worry about it. We never considered asking for your help with money, Aera-san.”

“Ugh. That kind of makes me feel bad in a way...”

She had been on the verge of falling into financial ruin recently, so it was only natural that we wouldn’t ask for her help with money. Her café had started to attract customers after we’d helped her out, but even I knew that it would take quite a long time before the investment she’d put into this café would pay off.

“Oh, I can buy meat off of you, though! I use offal in my dishes as well. I’ll pay more than what you’ll get at the Adventurers’ Guild. It’d be nice if you could supply the meat in a frozen state, if possible.”

“That’d be great. We’ll sell you some meat when we manage to get some. Having a supply of meat would be good for you as well, right, Aera-san?”

“Of course! It’s a good deal for both of us, tee hee!” Aera-san stuck out her tongue in a playful manner and giggled.

We all chuckled in response.

“Mm, that’s true. We’d like another source of income aside from boar meat, though. Any ideas, Aera-san?”

“Hmm, let me think. At this time of the year? Oh, magical mushrooms should start sprouting about now. I don’t really recommend them, though.”

*Magical mushrooms?! They sound dangerous based on their name alone!*

“Is the reason you don’t recommend them because they’re dangerous mushrooms? Are they illegal?”

Aera-san hastily shook her head in response to Haruka’s carefully worded question. “Oh, that’s not it. It is a poisonous mushroom that can cause hallucinations if you eat it raw, but it’s used as an ingredient in painkilling potions, which you can normally sell with no problems.”

*Whew, I’m glad to hear that these mushrooms aren’t illegal drugs.*

“The reason why I don’t recommend them is because it’s risky to gather them. This particular mushroom is a favorite food of wipe bears. Do you know what wipe bears are?”

“Yeah, we do,” I said. “We had a hard time when we first encountered one.”

It would probably be much easier for us to defeat one now, but it had been quite a formidable foe at the time.

“There’s a high risk of encountering wipe bears while looking for magical mushrooms. Some people believe that the wipe bears grow the magical mushrooms themselves.”

According to Aera-san, wipe bears would sometimes uproot trees for no apparent reason. After one or two years, when the fallen trees started to rot, they would sprout magical mushrooms, which wipe bears loved to eat. That was why some people believed the wipe bears were deliberately growing the mushrooms. It sounded like a plausible theory to me, since I knew that some species of ant back on Earth had a symbiotic relationship with fungi. If the theory was true, then that would make us mushroom thieves. Some people might yell at us, thinking about the efforts that the “farmers” had put into growing such crops, but we were self-interested people, so there was no reason for us to be considerate of wipe bears. We had almost been killed by one, after all.

“Do magical mushrooms sell for a lot...?” Yuki asked.

“The small ones won’t go for much, but the big ones will fetch a hefty sum if you’re lucky enough to find some. In a way, it’s a nice source of extra income if



that does happen. Are you actually going to search for magical mushrooms?”

“If possible,” said Haruka. “Are you against the idea, Aera-san?”

“Well, I don’t really want to recommend taking on dangerous work. I’ve heard stories about how adventurers who suffer serious injuries aren’t able to resume doing adventurer work...”

In a way, dangerous work was part of being an adventurer, so it looked like it was hard for Aera-san to give us an unambiguous no. She had a troubled look on her face; she lowered her eyebrows and avoided saying anything firm. What she had said was the truth, though. If you took time off work as an adventurer due to injuries like bone fractures, then having medical bills on top of your routine expenses would quickly consume tens of gold coins. If you didn’t have any money saved up, then you would be forced to do things like sell your own equipment or go into debt. It was true that you could just return to work to earn that money back, but the type of people with that kind of pragmatic mentality would probably have savings anyway, so they wouldn’t end up in that situation in the first place. What that meant was that the people who got into debt and then tried to resume working as adventurers would usually fail.

“Oh, if that does happen, I could just hire everyone to work here at my café...”

“Uh, nah! Thanks for the offer, but we’re good!” I replied hastily.

I wouldn’t be against the idea if we were planning on saving money for the purpose of opening our own relaxing café in the future, but it hadn’t even been a year yet since we had been transported to this world. We were way too young to retire from being adventurers, and I would feel a bit pathetic becoming indebted to someone at this point in my life. I wanted to at least achieve some concrete results before retiring from adventurer work.

I did my best to convey those thoughts without going into detail, and Aera-san smiled in response. “Okay. I can wait. Elves have a slightly longer life span than humans, after all.”



On the way back to the inn, I asked Haruka something that had been on my

mind. “Oh yeah, Haruka, Aera-san mentioned that she’d like the meat we supply to be in a frozen state, but is that actually possible? It took you a lot of effort to learn that spell for creating ice, right?”

We’d been storing all of the meat we’d obtained so far in ice that Haruka made with magic, but freezing the meat itself would be a completely different task. However, if it was possible, it would make things a lot easier since we wouldn’t need to do things like change the ice periodically and discard the melted water.

“I haven’t tried it yet, but I think it’s possible. I’ve made ice by creating water with magic and then freezing it, remember? That means it should be much easier to just freeze what’s in front of me instead of creating water first.”

“Oh, that makes sense. Isn’t the required temperature different, though?”

Water would usually freeze at or below zero degrees Celsius, but the temperatures in meat lockers would normally be something like negative twenty degrees Celsius.

“It’s not like ice forms at one degree below Celsius. I can’t measure the exact temperature since we don’t have a thermometer, but I plan on lowering the temperature as much as I can. Besides, you’ve noticed that the ice I’ve made recently has started melting slower than it used to, right?”

“Oh yeah, I think so. You’ve cooled the ice a lot more, huh?”

Part of that was probably the lower ambient temperatures as we got closer to winter, but it was true that it felt like we hadn’t been needing to change the ice out as often recently. It was just a feeling since we didn’t have something like a watch to accurately measure time, but Haruka was probably right.

“Wouldn’t freezing the meat affect its quality, Haruka?” Natsuki asked. “It’s fine if the meat remains frozen, but if you keep freezing and unfreezing it, then...”

Apparently this was common knowledge among people who cooked.

“Oh, right, I didn’t think of that. What if I just lower the temperature as much as I can and reapply the spell before it unfreezes? I’ll have to test what temperature the meat starts to unfreeze at, though.”

For example, you could freeze the meat at negative forty degrees Celsius, and then freeze it again once it warmed to negative twenty degrees Celsius. The meat would remain frozen that way, but the transfer of heat would be quite large as well. Haruka would have to recast her spell quite often if we couldn't come up with a good insulation method.

"Hmm. Oh, Nao, what about your Time Magic? Are you capable of making a magic bag yet?"

"Uh, well, I'm not capable of using the Spatial Expansion spell yet, but I think combining the Slow Time and Light Weight spells will work—or rather, we can test it out to see if it works."

Based on what I had learned, regular magic bags would have a lot of space by default, and the expensive types would also have other enchantments; some made their contents lighter and others slowed the passage of time inside. However, I'd discovered that my assumptions had been slightly wrong after a thorough read through the grimoires on Time Magic that I had obtained. Spatial Expansion was applied to magic bags by default due to demand, but spells like Slow Time and Light Weight were actually much easier to apply to magic bags than Spatial Expansion. As for why those two spells were only applied to expensive magic bags, it was due to the difficulty of applying multiple enchantments together. For example, we could assign an arbitrary difficulty of Level 3 for Spatial Expansion. Compared to that, Slow Time and Light Weight were both only Level 2. However, the difficulty would spike to Level 7 or 8 if you tried to combine Spatial Expansion with Slow Time, and it would increase even more if you tried to combine all three. What that also meant was that magic bags that only had Slow Time and Light Weight applied to them were the easiest to make.

"In that case, do you want to give it a try, Nao? I've read through books on alchemy myself, so I know how it works in theory."

"Sure, Haruka. We'll be able to earn more per trip if this goes well."

"All right, then. On our way back, let's go and purchase the absolute minimum amount of tools and materials we need."

"Yeah, sounds good. We'll run out of places to put stuff if we buy too much."

Alchemy required a lot of different tools and materials. Gathering such materials was one form of adventurer work, but it wasn't something that we were capable of doing at the moment, so we had no choice but to purchase what we needed from stores.

"You also need tools for your Pharmacy skill, right, Natsuki?" I asked. "We should purchase those too once we have our own house."

"Yeah. We all have the Robust skill, but that doesn't mean we're absolutely immune to disease," said Natsuki.

"It's kind of strange to me that out of all of us, you're now the most resistant to disease, Natsuki," said Haruka. She had traces of amazement in her voice.

Natsuki chuckled and grinned. "Tee hee. I invested a lot of points into that area, after all. I'll be the one to take care of everyone else if they get sick."

Back in Japan, Haruka would pay a visit to Natsuki's house whenever she had to take days off due to her sickly constitution, so it made sense that Haruka would find this change a bit weird. Natsuki didn't look any different on the outside, though.

Yuki suddenly interrupted us. "Oh, I can see it now!"

"Huh?" we all replied.

"What's up all of a sudden?" Haruka asked.

"I can see it now! Here, look at this!"

Yuki sounded quite happy as she extended her hand and showed us a dried dindel. *I mean, I can see it just fine too—oh, wait...*

"Do you mean you can use the Appraisal skill now?!" I exclaimed.

"Yeah! So far the display window only tells me that this is a dried dindel, but I see it!"

"Whoa, so Appraisal can be copied after all! Congrats, Yuki!"

The time and effort she had spent in silence during lunch had finally paid off.

"For real? All I did was watch, though," said Touya. He sounded surprised.

Yuki nodded emphatically. "Yeah, all you did was watch. You didn't give me



any good advice.”

“I mean, what else could I do? There wasn’t anything for me to say.”

“I guess that’s true. If Touya staring at me was enough, it must be easier than I thought to meet the condition of having to ‘learn’ from the person you copied the skill from.”

That condition would still be a bit annoying if both people had to be in the same place while the person with Copy was practicing the skill they’d copied. It would probably be fine to take breaks while practicing, but it would still take a few hours before you could actually use the copied skill properly. Even if there were other people out there with the Copy skill, we wouldn’t be able to casually teach them skills. Or rather, if we did meet such a person, then they would have to prove to us that teaching them skills would be worth our time.

“Well, in any case, this means I’ll be useful gathering herbs from tomorrow onward!”

“Yep,” I said. “Okay, Haruka, let’s do our best to make a magic bag.”

“Mm, yeah. Also, Yuki, while we’re at it, I’ll teach you my Alchemy skill as well.”

“Huh? Right now? I just managed to learn how to use Appraisal, though...”

Yuki looked surprised when Haruka suggested that idea; she had seemed like she was quite relaxed now that she had finally learned how to use Appraisal.

“Oh yeah, you also have the aptitude for Time Magic, right, Yuki? I’ll teach you Time Magic, then.”

“She has the aptitude for Fire and Water Magic too, so teach her those as well,” said Natsuki. “She’s not good enough with the Staff Fighting skill yet to use it in actual combat, so it would be a good idea.”

“Huh? What kind of harsh curriculum are you guys putting me through?”

“All right, we don’t have much time left today, so let’s hurry back to the inn!” Haruka exclaimed.

Yuki looked quite perplexed at the turn of events, but we just nudged her along as we hurried back to the inn.



“All right. We’ve decided on making a magic bag, but is it actually possible to do so, Haruka?” I asked.

Touya and Natsuki had both headed out for training, so Haruka and Yuki were the only ones left at the inn with me. Yuki had already copied Time Magic and Alchemy from us, but she wasn’t able to use either skill yet.

“I’ve read books on alchemy during my free time and performed some experiments here and there, so it’ll probably be fine. In fact, I think your contribution will be more difficult. Will you be okay?”

“I mean, I’ve kept practicing Time Magic this entire time, so I’d like to think I’ll be okay.”

I would feel really bad if all the time and effort that I had put into training was for nothing. I had practiced Fire Magic as well, but Time Magic was the one that I had concentrated the hardest on. Both required the user to be good at mana control, but Time Magic was way more difficult than Fire Magic. It was a sad fact that I didn’t need to practice Fire Magic that much to get better at it. Or rather, it was nice that I had it easy for Fire Magic, but that just made me more self-conscious of my lack of progress with Time Magic. However, things had changed quite a lot after I had obtained those grimoires on Time Magic. I now had an idea of how to practice Time Magic properly, so I felt like it wouldn’t be too long before I would be able to use a Level 3 Time Magic spell such as Spatial Expansion.

“All right, I’ll get started with preparations, then,” said Haruka. “Let’s do this together, Yuki.”

“Yes, ma’am!”

Yuki raised her hand as if to salute Haruka. That gesture made me think that she was quite motivated, but I wasn’t sure if her motivation would actually produce results.

“The first thing to do is to transcribe what kind of magic bag you want to craft in a magic circle that looks like the one in this page. The most common method of creating magic circles is to use a special kind of ink, but we’ll be doing

embroidery instead.”

“Embroidery? Why not the ink if it’s the most commonly used method?”

“Well, it’s common to draw magic circles in ink because mana passes through the lines. Between lines drawn with ink and a straight length of thread, which do you think is easier for mana to pass through, Yuki?”

“Uh, the line of thread, of course.”

The girls both nodded in agreement, as if that was the natural conclusion.

“That’s right. Research on this method has been published in books, so it’s credible information. Magic circles are more effective if it’s easier for mana to pass through them, so there’s no reason not to draw them this way.”

“Yeah, that makes sense. It’s not a common method, though, right?”

“It might be more effective, but that doesn’t make it a more *productive* method. Think about it like this, Yuki. What’s the difference in speed between drawing a line with a pen and embroidering a line with thread?”

“There’s at least a ten times difference in terms of speed between the two methods. I get it now. If it takes at least ten times longer, then that would reduce profits by quite a lot.”

“Magic bags sell right away after they’re made, so there’s no reason to spend more time than necessary if you want to make a profit on them.”

It appeared that the supply of magic bags on the market was always much lower than the demand. There would be an incentive to create better magic bags if more competition existed, but there was no point in sacrificing productivity for quality since magic bags were guaranteed to sell. The only time that would be different was if an order came in for a high-quality magic bag with cost as no object, but such orders weren’t a common thing.

“We’re not experienced at all, so it’s better to take our time to improve the quality as much as we can,” said Haruka.

“Okay, I get it. I just need to copy this magic circle design into embroidery, right? Is there a point in me doing it, though?” Yuki asked. “I can’t use the Alchemy skill yet, so...”

“I’ve discussed this with Nao before, but getting a skill isn’t a prerequisite for performing a task. Rather, I think that when you learn how to do something, you get the skill as a result. For example, Natsuki doesn’t have the Cooking skill, but she can cook just fine, right?”

“Oh, yeah. So what you’re saying is that I can do alchemist things even though I can’t use the skill yet.”

That was probably how most skills worked aside from special ones like the Help Guide or the Copy skill. Or rather, the descriptions that were displayed in our status windows only gave us a rough idea of how each skill worked. I couldn’t be sure that Haruka was right about the nature of skills, but it was a fact that the existence of skills wasn’t common knowledge in this world. If skills only affected people from our class, then there was a high chance that the evil god had tweaked things so that we would only be able to get a rough idea of each skill.

“That should be it for today. I’ll draw a magic circle with ink, so can you work on the embroidery method, Yuki?”

“Hmm. That’s fine, but can I get Natsuki’s help with this? She doesn’t have the Sewing skill, but she knows how to do embroidery, right?”

“Oh yeah.” Haruka nodded and then turned around to look at me.

*Yeah, yeah, I’ll go find her.* I went outside and came back with Natsuki. I’d let Touya continue training by himself since he wouldn’t be of any use to Haruka. Of course, I wasn’t going to be of any use either, though.

“Nao-kun told me there was something I could help out with,” said Natsuki. “What should I do?” She sat down on a bed that Haruka had cleaned with her Purification spell.

Haruka nodded and pointed at the sewing tools. “Yes, there is. You know how to make embroidery, right, Natsuki?”

“Well, I’m about as good as the average person.”

She was probably just being humble. I highly doubted that someone as graceful and elegant as Natsuki would be satisfied with just being okay at embroidery. My opinion was biased, but I was fairly sure that I wasn’t wrong. *Or*

*rather, what counts as okay when it comes to embroidery? Can the average person actually do embroidery? I certainly can't, although I learned a little in school. All I know is how to make some running stitches.*

"I'll draw a magic circle with ink, so I just want you to copy that into embroidery, Natsuki. Is that okay?"

"Sure, I don't mind, but will it work if I do this? This is part of alchemy, right?"

"Yeah, it should work. Well, if it doesn't, then that would mean I made you do work for no good reason, though..."

Natsuki smiled and gave a thoughtful reply. "Don't worry about that, Haruka. We should give it a try if there's a chance it'll succeed."

I was quite impressed by the fact that Natsuki didn't seem to mind the possibility of failure. In fact, I was confident that I would get angry if I was forced to copy this complicated and detailed magic circle design into embroidery and then told that it hadn't worked, especially if Haruka said something like "Tee hee" at the end. Well, Haruka wasn't really the type of person who would say something like that in this situation, but there was a good chance that Yuki would.

"Thanks, Natsuki," said Haruka. "The next thing to do is to decide on where to sew the magic circle."

"Hm? Can't we just sew it on the magic bags?" Yuki asked.

"It's not that simple. Here, take a look. This is how things work if I put it all into formulas."

Size of magic circle = energy

Energy = Difficulty (difficulty of mana control) \* mana

Difficulty = Effect radius \* effect potency

"Hmm. Based on these formulas, it takes more energy to create bigger magic bags, but a high proficiency at mana control and a large amount of mana is needed to produce the required energy, right?" Natsuki asked. "It also means that a low amount of energy will result in a poor outcome, correct?"

"Yeah, that's a good summary. You need to take into account how much



energy you can actually produce, or else the magic circle won't function well even if you do your best with the ink or embroidery."

"In that case, how about we divide things up so that Haruka applies the magic circle design to one of our backpacks, I apply the design onto something like a medium-sized burlap bag, and Natsuki applies the design onto a small-sized burlap bag?" Yuki asked. "We can just leave the big ones that we fail at for after we get better at this."

"Hmm, that's not a bad idea. That would mean the failures won't be a waste."

*Oh, that makes sense. If Haruka fails to apply the magic circle to the backpack, then we can just turn small burlap bags into magic bags instead and put them inside our backpacks.* It was an extra hassle, but it would work.

"Oh yeah, what happens if you put a magic bag enchanted with the Light Weight spell inside a magic bag enchanted with the Slow Time spell?" Yuki asked.

"That wouldn't work," said Haruka. "The two enchantments would interfere with each other and prevent each other from functioning correctly."

"Oh, I guess it's not that easy."

"Mm. It's especially a disaster if you try to do it with a magic bag, so you have to be very careful."

"Why's that? Oh wait, I get it. The Spatial Expansion spell will stop functioning, so the bag will either explode or its contents will get messed up."

"It sounds like even expensive magic bags will break that way, so it's too dangerous to try," said Natsuki.

"We can just make another one ourselves, but it would be a huge loss for an ordinary person who spent a lot of money on a magic bag," I said.

"It'd be even worse if you were storing raw meat. People would have to flee if a magic bag exploded and the contents flew everywhere!"

Yuki chuckled after she said that. *Is that supposed to be some kind of pun with flee and flew? It doesn't really make sense...*

"Now then, let's start by drawing a magic circle on Natsuki's bag."

“Sure. Good luck, Haruka.”

Haruka took out a bag along with a pen and some inkwells while Natsuki started to prepare the thread.

“Hey, come on, please respond to my joke!” Yuki exclaimed.

“We did you a favor by ignoring it, and yet you want a response? Fine. Five points. I wouldn’t give you any points if I didn’t have to, though.”

“Damn, that’s harsh! Wh-What about you, Natsuki?!”

“Your pun wasn’t in good taste. The image is much too messy.”

“Ugh! Nao, please!”

“Uh, well, it wasn’t that bad...?” I felt kind of bad for Yuki due to the devastated expression that she had on her face, so I tried to back her up, but it seemed like she wasn’t really pleased with my response.

“Thanks for the kind words, I guess? I would’ve preferred if you’d said something more ambiguous, though. It still sounds like you didn’t find my pun funny.”

*I mean, what do you want me to say? It just wasn’t amusing. Like Natsuki said, the imagery is way too gross. We’ll probably continue to carry raw meat around, so it’s not something I want to think about. In fact, I think the expression you have on your face right now is more amusing than your “pun,” Yuki.*

“More importantly, pay attention and look at what I’m doing, Yuki,” said Haruka. “I’m going to start drawing the magic circle.”

“Okay! You bought the ink that you’re going to use, right? Do you know what it’s made of?”

“Yeah, it was described in one of the books on alchemy along with instructions for making it. All you need is some crumbled magicite and animal glue.”

“Is that so? That sounds somewhat like the materials used for Japanese ink painting,” said Natsuki.

“Oh yeah, animal glue and mineral pigments are used for that as well. This ink is a bit different, though. As you can see, the ink is stored here in an inkwell.”

According to Haruka, a liquid that was just a mix of animal glue and pigments would be difficult to preserve. The ink that Haruka had bought didn't have that issue and so was easier to use.

“It seems like it's quite easy to make your own if you don't need to worry about preserving it, but we don't have the tools required for that, sadly...”

Haruka began drawing the magic circle freehand. The design was quite intricate, but she managed to draw it without any mistakes.

“I'm impressed that you were able to draw this complicated pattern without any help, Haruka,” I said.

“Well, I just let my hand do the work. It came to me naturally. Drawing magic circles like this is kind of similar to how weapon skills work if you've practiced a bit, since mine is Level 1.”

*Oh, so it's similar to how my body just knows how to move around naturally when I use a spear.*

“Okay, that should do it. Copy this design as you work on the embroidery, Natsuki. It's more effective if the different parts of the circle are connected by long, unbroken lines, so feel free to use as much thread as you need.”

“Understood. Did you buy this thread as well?”

“Yeah. Well, I bought normal thread and soaked it in ink.”

That process sounded much simpler than I would have expected. The embroidery method wasn't common, and it was easy enough to prepare the thread yourself, so apparently most stores didn't carry thread already soaked in ink.

Haruka swiftly finished drawing the magic circles for herself and Yuki and then started working on embroidery as well.

“It would be great if we had an embroidery frame for this,” said Natsuki.

“Yeah, it would,” said Yuki. “Do they exist in this world, though? Those have small screws, right? They sound quite difficult to make.”

“I’m not sure if mine would fit into one either since the cloth I’m using is quite thick.”

*Oh right, embroidery frames are those hoop-shaped things. The girls look like they’re having a difficult time right now, since they’re holding the cloth down with their feet and stretching it out with their hands.*

“Anything I can help out with?” I asked.

“Uh, well...”

I was reading the grimoires on Time Magic to review what I knew since I wasn’t of any use right now, but it wasn’t like I could actually practice the spells since I would need mana for the enchantment process later. I offered my help in case there actually was something I could do, and Haruka just looked at Yuki and Natsuki without giving me a clear answer.

“Nao-kun, can you help Haruka out?” Natsuki asked. “It looks like she has the most difficult task of any of us.”

“Yeah, ours are much easier to work on,” said Yuki.

Haruka was stitching the magic circle design on the back side of a backpack, so it definitely seemed like she had the most difficult task. The cloth she was using had a coarse weave, so unlike tightly woven synthetic cloths, it didn’t require much strength to push a needle through, but on the other hand, the coarse weave made it difficult to execute fine details.

“Gotcha. What should I do, Haruka?”

“Oh, can you hold this part and pull? Yeah, just like that. Thanks.”

Both of Haruka’s hands were free now that I was holding up the cloth, which meant that she was able to embroider much faster.



“I’m done,” said Natsuki.

Haruka was about halfway done with her work when Natsuki announced that she was finished. I was somewhat surprised, since she was the only one of the girls who didn’t have the Sewing skill. She had been working more slowly than Haruka, but she’d probably finished first because the magic circle design she

had to copy was the smallest one.

“Good job,” said Haruka. “Try enchanting Natsuki’s bag first, Nao. It’ll use up mana, after all.”

“Yeah, that’s a good idea. I’ll have some time to recover my mana this way.”

I wasn’t sure how much mana the enchantment process would consume, but it would be nice to have some time to rest in between casting.

“First, let’s go over the process again. Nao and I will place our hands on the magic circle like this.”

Haruka placed her hands on the edge of the magic circle, so I copied what she was doing. “Okay.”

“Next, I’ll inject mana into the magic circle and then stay on standby. You’re up next, Nao.”

“I’ll keep the Slow Time spell at the state right before activation and slowly inject the mana into the magic circle.”

“After that, I’ll spread the injected mana throughout the circle, and once I’m done, that’s it.”

“Oh, that’s it? Okay, I think I’ve gotten the hang of it. Well, in my head, at least!”

I had carefully read through the grimoires and had practiced controlling my mana to maintain a spell at the state right before activation, so all that was left was to actually perform those tasks for real. *Can I pull this off? Yeah, I can. Believe in yourself, Nao. You have the aptitude for this. You spent points to get the aptitude, after all!*

“All right, let’s do this, Nao. Pay attention as well, Yuki.”

“I’m ready.”

“Okay.”

“Three, two, one, go!”

Once she had checked that I had placed my hands on the magic circle, Haruka started to inject mana. Immediately afterwards, I started up my spell. The



amount of mana I was using was the greatest amount that I could control at the moment, and I did my best to carefully inject it into the magic circle. The grimoire said that the final result would be of poorer quality if the mana escaped or if the spellcaster lost control, so I mustered all of my concentration. The flow of mana was smoother than I had thought it would be, but I wasn't sure if things were going well. I glanced at Haruka, and she was staring at the magic circle with a serious look on her face; her lips were sealed tight. *Come on, just a little bit more.* The grimoire had told me to remain focused until the alchemist was done with their work, so I followed that advice as I finished my part. A few seconds later, the flow of mana throughout the magic circle had settled and become stable.

Haruka let out a huge sigh. "Whew, I'm exhausted. This was more tiring than I thought it would be. How do you feel, Nao?"

"Uh, I'm fine in terms of mana. I can probably keep going without breaks for magic circles of this size. However, I'm mentally exhausted due to how much focus is needed for this delicate process."

It was similar to carefully threading a needle. It wouldn't use up that much physical stamina, but it would use up your mental energy.

"In what way is this difficult, Haruka?" Yuki asked.

"It's hard to explain since it's just a feeling, but it's really hard for me to control Nao's mana or spell. It might be because my Alchemy skill is only Level 1. If it's this difficult for me even though I have the aptitude for it, then it might be too difficult for you at Level 1, Yuki."

"Did I inject too much mana, Haruka?" I asked. "I injected the largest amount that I'm able to control at the moment."

"No, I think that was the right thing to do. Well, it'll probably be easier with less mana since you won't have to control the mana for as long, but that doesn't change the difficulty of controlling the mana itself."



According to Haruka, you could describe the magic circle as something like a water tank: the size of the magic circle was the volume of water that the tank could hold. The mana I was injecting into the magic circle would be like pouring water into the tank. However, the size of the tank would remain the same regardless of how much I poured in, and so would the spout that the water was being poured from. I was the faucet, and Haruka was the one who had to hold up the tank from below. The amount of energy required would scale with the size of the tank.

“Wait, does that mean any extra mana that I inject will go to waste?”

“Technically speaking, yes. However, it’s not like you can seal the water tank with a lid while you’re pouring water into it, so the ideal way to do it is to pour a little bit more than the amount that the water tank can contain.”

“Huh? Does that mean I’m responsible for deciding how much to pour in based on the size of the magic circle?”

“You’ll learn that eventually when you have more experience. I think a quarter of what you had injected into this magic circle would have been enough, though.”

“Ugh! That means I wasted a huge amount of mana!”

“It was your first time doing this, so don’t feel too bad about it. It’s better than not injecting enough mana.”

Haruka was right, but I still felt bad. *Oh well, it was my first time, so it’s not like I could have performed perfectly even with the aptitude skill. I guess I’ll just consider it lucky that I didn’t fail on my first try.*

“Does that mean this is now a magic bag?” Natsuki asked.

Natsuki tilted her head quizzically as she lifted up the bag and stuck her hand into it. It didn’t look any different from before, and it wasn’t easy to test if a spell like slow time was working, so her reaction was a natural one.

“Maybe it would have been better to test the Light Weight spell first,” said Haruka. “Let’s try putting this inside of it.”

Haruka took out two chunks of ice that she had created with magic, each the

size of a regular ping-pong ball. She placed one chunk into the magic bag we had just created and placed the other into a regular bag. She then set the two bags together on the floor.

“Oh, we can observe the difference in the passage of time this way. What’s the exact difference, though?” I asked.

“From what I know, the state of objects inside high-quality magic bags will remain the same even after years have passed,” said Haruka. “However...”

Natsuki finished the thought. “...This magic bag was made by beginners at the craft.”

“You guys didn’t fail at making it, so it should have average specs, right?” Yuki asked.

“If that’s the case, then the ice should remain the same for about ten thousand minutes,” said Haruka.

“Hmm...”

*How long is ten thousand minutes? There are 8,760 hours in a year, so if you leave something alone inside a magic bag for a year, then...*

“That should be fine for the purpose of preserving food, then,” said Natsuki.

“Yeah. We probably can’t keep food hot or cold, though,” said Haruka.

“Only five minutes will have passed inside the bag even after we leave something inside for a month, though, right? It sounds like it should be fine for everyday use,” said Yuki.

*Yeah, we could probably even store raw food inside the magic bag. I wonder if we’ll eventually be able to eat sashimi thanks to these bags.*

“That’s only if we manage to make a magic bag of good quality,” said Haruka. “We’d be able to measure the passage of time inside the bag more precisely if I could make a watch or clock, but...”

“Was something like that not listed in the alchemist encyclopedia?” I asked.

“No, the encyclopedia listed devices like that, but I can’t make them yet. My Alchemy skill is only Level 1 right now, after all.”

“You can make a magic bag, but you can’t make something like a watch or clock?”

“The reason why magic bags are rare and expensive is due to the scarcity of mages who can use Time Magic. It seems that the work itself is considered fairly simple for most alchemists.”

*Oh, so that’s why Haruka can make magic bags even at Level 1.*

“More importantly, let’s get back to working on embroidery. Can I ask you for your help again, Natsuki? I’d like to get more practice and make as many as possible.”

“Sure, no problem.”



We had finished a total of five magic bags by the time the sun set. One of them was the first backpack that we had worked on, two of them were bags that Yuki had worked on, and another two were bags that Natsuki had worked on. I helped Yuki complete one of her two bags, since she had become able to use the Alchemy skill. I had managed to get better at precise mana control, so things went fine even when I was working with Yuki.

“Now then, we’ve managed to enchant three magic bags with the Slow Time spell and two magic bags with the Light Weight spell,” said Haruka. “The ice inside the first magic bag we made hasn’t melted yet, right?”

“Mm. It looks like it has remained in the same state,” said Natsuki.

“It’s much easier to tell the difference with the Light Weight magic bags,” said Yuki. “I think the weight of objects gets reduced to one percent of their original weight inside the magic bags.”

Yuki picked up a magic bag that we had stuffed with heavy objects and lifted it with great ease. We couldn’t tell the exact effect because we didn’t have a scale, but I agreed with Yuki’s suggestion based on how it had felt when I’d lifted the magic bag myself earlier. *If we can make things this much lighter at our current level, I wonder what the difference will be once we level up our skills?*



“If there’s such a huge difference, then it might be worth enchanting the Slow Time and Light Weight spell together on a magic bag, even if the individual effects get halved in terms of potency.”

“I mean, yeah, but you remember that it’s difficult to apply multiple enchantments together, right, Haruka?” I asked.

Haruka nodded. The task of conjuring and maintaining two spells at the same time while evenly injecting the mana into the magic circle was very difficult. I had practiced a bit, but it wasn’t something that I would be able to master in a short amount of time.

“We’ve succeeded so far with these five magic bags, so don’t you think it’ll somehow work out even with two enchantments, Nao?”

“Nah, Haruka, I’m telling you, it’s really difficult. By way of analogy, it’s like the difference between playing a piano with one hand and playing a piano with both hands.”

“Hmm. So does that mean adding on Spatial Expansion would be like asking someone to also play an Electone with their feet?” Yuki asked. “That’s perfectly possible! I think you can pull it off if you put in some practice!”

*It’s not as easy as you make it sound, Yuki. I’m already trying my best!*

“It’s not that easy—”

“Oh right, you know how to play an Electone, Yuki,” said Haruka.

“Wait, for real?” I asked.

“Well, yeah, kind of?” Yuki answered nonchalantly.

Haruka forced out a dry laugh and then shook her head. “Kind of? Weren’t you quite good at it?”

*Ugh, that means I used a bad comparison!* Now that Yuki had said my example wasn’t impossible, I had no choice but to practice. I had the aptitude skill for Time Magic as well, so I couldn’t use a lack of aptitude as an excuse to avoid confronting this task. *I guess having skills and a status display window isn’t always a good thing...*

“Well, I’m impressed that you’re able to play that kind of difficult

instrument,” said Haruka. “Don’t you have to do annoying things like change the timbre manually?”

“Mm, I feel the same way,” said Natsuki. “I can play the piano, but Electones aren’t something I can play.”

“I mean, you can set it up so the timbre change is automatic, and it’s not like you can play complicated melodies with only your feet. I was quite confused at first, but I got a hang of it after practice.”

“Right, everything takes practice,” I said. “Oh, wait, don’t you have the aptitude for Time Magic, Yuki?”

“Oh.”

Yuki covered her mouth with her hands as if she had just realized her mistake, and I grinned when I saw that.

“Oh, don’t worry, I’ll teach you everything you need to know!” I exclaimed. “Let’s practice together, Yuki!”

“Uh, well, I need to practice alchemy, so—”

“You’ll have to learn this eventually, so you might as well practice it now,” said Haruka. “Leave the embroidery to Natsuki and me.”

“I got ditched?!”

“Heh heh heh, it’s time for you to experience how difficult Time Magic is for yourself, Yuki!”

“Ugh, you coward!”

“Let’s suffer together, yay!”

*I mean, practicing magic is a very boring task. It’s mentally exhausting. I feel slightly depressed whenever I practice magic by myself. On top of that, you can’t easily see the effects of Time Magic, so it’s even more depressing compared to something like Fire Magic. If someone watched me practice Time Magic, then they’d just see me grunting to myself for a long time. If I have someone to suffer with me—I mean, a friend that I can count on to work hard with me at the same time, then I’m fairly sure it’ll be less unpleasant.*

However, in the end, I did not succeed in applying two enchantments to a magic bag that day. It would probably take both Yuki and me quite a while before either of us would be able to succeed at that task.

“Our break ended up being longer than I planned, but from today onward, it’s time to earn money again!” Haruka declared.

“Yeah!” we all exclaimed in unison. Yuki and Natsuki also nodded solemnly.

“Yuki, Natsuki, this will be the first time either of you has taken on actual adventurer work, right?” I asked. “Do you both feel okay?”

“Yeah. In fact, we feel a bit relieved since we can finally do some actual work now,” said Yuki.

“Really?”

“Mm. Our living standards have improved a lot since grouping up with you, but it’s all thanks to the effort your party has put in up until now, Nao-kun,” said Natsuki. “Honestly, we felt kind of bad about the fact that we haven’t really contributed much.”

“We’re all going to work together for the purpose of saving up money to purchase land and have a house built, so we’ll feel better once we accomplish that. It’ll be easier on our consciences to ask for things once that’s done.”

“You don’t really have to think that way, but I kind of understand how both of you feel,” said Haruka.

When they’d first met up with us, Yuki and Natsuki had tried to hand over the money they’d had on them, but it was practically nothing; their daily wages back at the inn were a mere one hundred Rea. Most of that money had probably gone into daily expenses or spare clothes. The remainder was even less than the allowance that Touya and I would receive from Haruka, so all of us had refused to accept their money.

“We’ll have to earn quite a lot at a good pace to achieve that goal,” I said. “Are we going to head to the forest right away?”

“No, let’s head to the guild first,” said Haruka. “There might be some lucrative quests posted.”

“That makes sense. Actually, now that I think about it, we haven’t really taken on any proper quests so far.”

“There wasn’t any need for us to do so since there were other methods for us to earn money.”

Penalties awaited adventurers who failed to successfully complete quests that they had taken on. On the other hand, if you acted recklessly in order to avoid failing a quest, then the dangers involved would increase. For example, even a simple gathering quest could become dangerous if you had to venture into the deep woods because you couldn’t find the herbs you needed on the outskirts of the forest. Haruka’s decision for us to avoid proper quests as long as we were able to earn money through other methods was perfectly rational.

“We should still avoid reckless actions, but it would be a good experience for all of us to take on quests that seem simple, since we’re a party of five now,” said Haruka.

“Yep. Oh, right, Tomi told me that he saw Umezono at the Adventurers’ Guild the other day!” Touya exclaimed.

“Umezono? Oh, *her*,” I said. “It’ll be annoying if we bump into her.”

Haruka had a slightly gloomy expression; she sighed before replying to me. “Mm. I’d prefer to never see her again if possible.”

“Umezono-san is that girl who copied all of your skills and then booked it, right, Haruka?” Yuki asked.

“Oh, the freebie,” said Natsuki.

“Don’t say that, Natsuki! You’re making it sound like people with the Copy skill are freebies! The Copy skill itself is harmless!”

“Right, it’s harmless *and* useless.”

“It’s only useless if you don’t have any friends! I’m not useless anymore, am I?!”

“Hmm. I don’t think you’ve copied enough skills to counterbalance the points you spent on the Copy skill.”

“Ugh! Well, I guess you’re right. It really is hard to make the Copy skill worth

its cost...”

The cost of the Copy Skill was 100 Points, and most of the skills that could be copied were Level 1 Skills that would only have cost 5 Points in character creation. Based on simple arithmetic, Yuki would have to copy twenty skills to balance things out. She would barely be able to do so if she tried her best to copy skills from all of us, so it definitely didn’t seem easy to do.

“Natsuki, don’t tease Yuki too much,” said Haruka. “Hmm. This might be an extra hassle, but I think it might be a good idea for either Yuki or Natsuki to approach the guild building by stealth and see if Umezono-san is hanging around.”

“Stealth? That sounds like a task for me,” said Natsuki. “I have the Sneak skill, after all.”

*Oh yeah, it’s a skill that erases your presence.* She’d really scared me when she first used it in my presence, since it had felt like she’d suddenly disappeared.

“Eh, I don’t think we need to,” said Touya. “Tomi told me that Diola-san was quite mad at Umezono-san and told her that she wouldn’t offer her any jobs for a while. I assume that’s because Umezono-san ditched work.”

“You mean the incident at that café when she ran off after gloating at me?” Haruka asked.

“Oh right, that incident,” I said. “It seemed like she was working there, so I guess a complaint would have been filed to the Adventurers’ Guild when she walked off the job.”

*I wonder what she’s doing now that she doesn’t have a job. I don’t really feel bad for her since it’s her own fault. I wouldn’t really have minded helping her a bit if she hadn’t gloated like that, but oh well. If only she was a bit cute the way Tomi is. By that, I mean on the inside and not how she looks.*

“Well, let’s just head in, then,” said Haruka. “Even if we bump into Umezono-san, just ignore her unless there’s a good reason not to.”

“Okay,” said Yuki.

“Understood,” said Natsuki.

It had been a few days since the last time we’d visited the guild, but it looked like nothing had changed. Luckily for us, the annoying person we were worried about bumping into wasn’t here, so we casually greeted Diola-san before heading to the bulletin board where quests were posted.

“Now that I think about it, this is the first time we’ve actually taken the time to look for quests like this,” said Haruka.

“Yeah! Looking for quests like this really feels like a standard thing to do in a fantasy world!” Touya exclaimed.

“I feel the same way, Touya, but the quests themselves aren’t appealing,” I said. “There are barely any that actually seem like proper adventurer work.”

Most of the quests listed on the bulletin board were gathering quests, and the rest were mostly escort quests. The rewards posted weren’t attractive either. In any case, there were rank prerequisites for escort quests, so we weren’t able to take any of them on at the moment.

“Hmm, it’s hard to tell from these posters what would be a good quest to take on,” said Yuki.

“Mm. The only information available here is about what to gather, but there’s nothing on the risks involved,” said Natsuki.

“Gathering quests are basically all like that,” said Haruka. “Adventurers are responsible for knowing the risks. It’s implying that we should look things up if we don’t know about them.”

“Oh, there’s a warning poster here,” said Touya. “It says that wipe bears have been spotted recently in the east forest.”

I grimaced when I saw the poster that Touya had pointed at, as did Haruka. “Those things?” I said. “If possible, I’d prefer to not fight one again...”

Yuki and Natsuki tilted their heads in confusion when they saw our reactions.

“Are these wipe bears strong?” Yuki asked.

“Yeah,” I said. “I felt like I got pretty close to dying.”

Yuki and Natsuki looked very surprised when they heard my frank assessment.

“That dangerous?!”

“Nah, we’re different now from how we were back then,” said Touya. “We’ve gotten better at combat, and we also have much better equipment. I don’t think it’ll be that hard for us to defeat wipe bears now.”

“I mean, yeah, there are two extra zeros in front of the value of our equipment now, but are you sure it’ll be that easy?”

Touya grinned and boasted, “Yeah, leave it to me! Wipe bears stand no chance against me now!”

*Are you sure, dude? Well, I guess we’ll have to take them on regardless, since there’s a high chance that we’ll encounter one while searching for magical mushrooms.*

“Putting aside Touya’s boasting, we do have Yuki and Natsuki with us now, so we should have an easier time defeating wipe bears,” said Haruka.

“That’s true, I guess.”

We had managed to defeat a wipe bear in our first few days in this world, after all. We would most likely be fine as long as we didn’t let our guard down.

“What else is there? Oh, there’s a quest for capturing a greater salamander,” said Haruka.

*Oh, there really is. There’s a warning on this poster about how you should freeze it right away after slaying it.*

“A reward of at least twenty gold coins based on the length of the salamander, starting from at least fifty centimeters? That doesn’t sound too bad,” said Touya.

“You’d expect a salamander to be strong, though,” I said. “It definitely isn’t the type of monster you encounter right away in a game, for example.”

“Yeah, it sounds like something you’d encounter in a volcanic region!” Yuki exclaimed.



*Its name is also greater salamander instead of lesser...*

“Look at this poster again more carefully. It says to capture the salamander, not hunt it,” said Touya. “Hmm...”

“In that case, the greater salamander might be similar to the *Andrias japonicus* from Earth,” said Natsuki.

“I wonder if they’re considered a delicacy in this world as well,” I said.

Japanese giant salamanders were a nationally protected species in modern-day Japan. I had heard stories about how people in the past would eat them as a delicacy, though. It appeared that its name in Japanese originated from the fact that its meat gave off a scent similar to the Japanese pepper. In a way, I was impressed that any of my fellow Japanese people were willing to eat something so obviously weird.

“Ugh, if that’s what salamanders are, they don’t sound as cool...” said Touya.

“Yeah, greater salamander sounds much better,” said Yuki.

“Salamanders are called that because their skin excretes a mucus that makes them resistant to being burnt by fire, right?” I asked.

“That’s one of the theories out there. As for this greater salamander, it’s worth decent money, but it depends on where you can find them and how you preserve them on the way back to town,” said Haruka. “The minimum length wanted is fifty centimeters, but that would be long enough to make it protrude out of our backpacks.”

We had only managed to turn two of our backpacks into magic bags yesterday, and those magic bags were only enchanted with the Slow Time spell. The rest of the magic bags we had made were much smaller. What that meant was that we wouldn’t benefit from the Slow Time enchantment if we hunted down something that wouldn’t fit inside those backpacks. There was the option of slicing up our game into smaller portions and splitting it between our two backpacks, but that probably wouldn’t work for this quest based on the conditions that were listed.

“I guess we’ll have to get our hands on a very large bag if we’re going to go after this greater salamander,” I said.

“We can probably use a bag like that for other purposes as well, so it wouldn’t be a waste to buy one,” said Haruka.

“We would have to turn it into a magic bag first, though, so we’ll need to wait until at least tomorrow if we want to go after this greater salamander,” said Natsuki.

“Mm. We also need to discuss this with Diola-san first.”

We browsed through the quests posted to the bulletin board for a bit longer to see if there was anything of interest before we all headed over to Diola-san’s desk.

“Hello, Diola-san,” said Haruka.

“Oh, hello.”

“We saw a poster about how wipe bears have been spotted recently. Is that true?”

“Yes. It’s the season for magical mushrooms, and it seems that wipe bears appear in search of them.”

*I figured. I’d like to gather some magical mushrooms ourselves if possible, but...*

“Do you know where these magical mushrooms grow, Diola-san?” Touya asked.

“I only know that they grow in damp and shady places. If your party goes looking for them, I think you should be fine, Touya-san, but be careful.”

“We’ll be careful, of course,” said Haruka. “Also, can we ask for some information on greater salamanders?”

“If I remember correctly, you can use Water Magic, can’t you, Haruka-san? Greater salamanders can be found all the way upstream of the Noria River. They’re not very dangerous, but they’re also not really worth going after.”

“They aren’t?”

“Unfortunately not. You have to travel a fairly long distance back and forth, and it’s quite difficult to keep them in a frozen state while carrying them back. It

would be somewhat of a loss if you came back with one that was just fifty centimeters long, but you can earn a decent profit if you come back with one that's at least a meter long. All of that said, we here at the Adventurers' Guild would still greatly appreciate it if you took on this quest."

The Noria River was the river located back at Sarstedt. It would take us at least half a day to get there, so a round trip to Sarstedt itself and back to Laffan would take up an entire day. If we were going to work for an entire day as a party of five, then the absolute minimum earnings to aim for would be fifteen gold coins. Double that would be ideal if we took expenses into account, but one greater salamander wouldn't be enough to bring in that kind of money even if it was fifty centimeters long.

"Hmm. I guess we'll discuss this a bit more among ourselves. Thank you for the help, Diola-san. We'll be heading out now."

"It's no trouble at all. Take care."

We left the Adventurers' Guild and headed out the east gate of Laffan towards the forest. When we arrived outside of the forest, we paused there to discuss our plans further.

"In the end, we saw two posters that caught our interest," said Haruka. "What do you all think?"

"Greater salamanders—or rather, we can just call them Japanese giant salamanders among ourselves, right? How about we just wait and see how much we earn today before we make a decision?" Yuki asked. "I'm interested in going out to hunt salamanders, but it doesn't seem like an efficient way to make money, so..."

"Yeah, the biggest problem is the distance," I said.

The price for salamanders was good, but traveling back and forth would eat up a lot of time, and there was also the condition of having to keep them in a frozen state. With that in mind, it would probably be more profitable for us to go after less valuable game that was nearer to Laffan.

"I guess that means we'll just gather some herbs today while looking for magical mushrooms. We can hunt tusk boars as well if we come across them,"

said Haruka. “That sounds fine, right?”

“Mm. Magical mushrooms sound quite dangerous based on the effects they can cause—and just based on their name,” said Natsuki. “But they’re a material that I can use for my Pharmacy skill, so...”

“Oh yeah, Aera-san mentioned they can be used as an ingredient in painkiller potions,” said Touya. “You can create a potion like that with your Alchemy skill as well, right? So what’s the difference between making one with Alchemy and making one with Pharmacy?”

*Oh yeah, Touya makes a good point. Isn’t Pharmacy useless if you can make potions with the Alchemy skill as well?* Touya and I looked at Natsuki, but she didn’t seem to have an answer, so she turned to Haruka for help.

“Um, Haruka, do you know the answer to that question?” Natsuki asked.

“You can make potions with both Alchemy and Pharmacy, but Alchemy allows you to make other things as well, whereas potions are the *only* thing you can make with Pharmacy.”

“Does that mean Pharmacy is useless?”

“No, not at all. There are some potions that you can only create with Alchemy, but there are far more potions that you can only create with Pharmacy. You don’t have to use mana to make potions with Pharmacy, so it’s much better suited for mass production of healing potions.”

“So that means that there are different kinds of medicine where each skill has an advantage over the other, right?”

“Yeah, that’s right.”

“It’s good that we have both skills in our party,” I said. “Diseases and injuries are scary, after all.”

“I probably need to practice my Alchemy way more, though, since it’s only Level 1, whereas Natsuki’s Pharmacy is Level 3,” said Haruka.

Level 1 was still better than nothing. I would rather have medicine that Natsuki or Haruka had brewed than something from a doctor who I didn’t know.

“That means either of you can use the herbs we gather, right?” Touya asked. “Wouldn’t we be able to make a good profit by using herbs to make potions?”

I immediately shot down Touya’s idea. “Nah, that won’t work.”

“Why not?”

“Think about it this way, Touya. Would you buy some Viagra from a stranger on the street?”

“Hell no. Oh, I get it—it’s a problem of trust. Also, I don’t need Viagra!”

Counterfeit medicines occasionally found their way into Japan through private imports or drugstores. I’d doubted my ears when I first heard about how it was standard business practice to purchase drugs without confirming the identity of the seller regardless of whether or not they were a regular; those drugs would apparently then be sold to drugstores. If that was truly the standard practice back in Japan, drug wholesalers must have been incredibly unsafe. It sounded like it would be really easy to commit acts of terrorism if you were able to counterfeit the pharmaceutical packaging. There had been stories in the news of counterfeit medicine that looked exactly like the real thing, and yet pharmaceutical businesses seemed to lack any awareness of the dangers involved in importing medicine from abroad. It wasn’t like you could analyze the contents and effects of a drug right away like you could in a video game with a skill like Appraisal. On the other hand, standardized packaging didn’t even exist here in this world. Ordinary citizens wouldn’t be able to tell the difference between an actual potion and a bottle of water, so I highly doubted that people would actually purchase potions from strangers.

“The Merchant Guild can serve as the third party to solve the problem of trust, but we don’t stand to benefit that much from joining that guild,” said Haruka. “It’ll also cost us extra money.”

“Mm, it’s not like we’re full-time potion makers,” said Natsuki. “Oh, does this problem also apply to alchemists?”

“Yes, kind of. Well, it’s not against the law to sell items made with alchemy, but there’s no guarantee that they’ll sell.”

“In that case, wouldn’t magical bags sell quite well?”

*Oh yeah, the supply of magic bags is quite low compared to demand, so they should sell easily. I can't enchant magical bags with Spatial Expansion yet, but it might be a good way to earn money.*

"Well, yes, the magic bags will sell, but they'll invite trouble along with sales. That's a warning for you, Nao. And Yuki as well, I guess?"

"Me?!"

"Me too?!"

"I mentioned how mages who can use Time Magic are rare, right? Just think about it, Nao. You don't have any connections who can protect you. If you become known as someone who can use Time Magic, you'll stand out a lot from other spellcasters, so you're bound to attract unwanted attention."

"Oh, you mean from people like nobles?"

"Yeah. At higher levels of Time Magic, you get access to spells like Teleportation, right? There's no way people with authority and power won't want to get their hands on someone who can use spells like that."

"That makes sense. Ugh, that's so annoying, though..."

"There are only two ways to solve this problem. One is to do our best to hide the fact that you can use Time Magic. Another is to make personal connections who can protect you. Our only realistic option for now is to continue hiding your abilities. I don't think it'll be that easy to make connections who will really have our best interests at heart."

"Yeah, you're right..."

To win the protection of someone well-placed in society, we would probably have to provide them with some kind of profit or other benefit. However, having that kind of obligation to a powerful person would place constraints on our actions.

"Haruka, why did you use the phrase 'as well' when mentioning me?" Yuki asked. "It felt like you added me as an afterthought! Is there a difference in the way you treat us? Am I at a lower affection level or something?! Nao, it seems like Haruka doesn't—"

Haruka bopped Yuki on the head. "Shut up."

Yuki covered her mouth with her hands as if she had bitten her tongue.

"Now that we're all working together, we have to hide the fact that our party has people who can use Time Magic. Nao just happens to have a higher level," said Haruka. "It's a different story if you want to go off on your own, though, Yuki."

"Of course not! I'll follow you for the rest of my life, Haruka!"

"That's a bit over the top, but oh well. In any case, Nao, Yuki, be careful not to use Time Magic in a way that attracts notice."

"Okay," we replied in unison.

*I don't want to invite trouble, so I'll do whatever I have to.*

"Let's get back to what we were talking about earlier," said Touya. "What's the plan? Are we going to go out in search of magical mushrooms?"

"The only problem with that plan is the likelihood of encountering wipe bears," I said. "I think we can avoid combat if I use my Scout skill, though. What do you guys think?"

"I think it would actually be a good idea for us to take on wipe bears," said Haruka. "It was quite difficult for us to defeat one the first time, but we'll probably encounter stronger foes eventually. With that in mind, we can use wipe bears as practice."

"I don't really have a strong opinion either way," said Yuki. "I mean, I don't know exactly how strong wipe bears are, so..."

"I don't know exactly how strong wipe bears are either, but I think we should give it a shot," said Natsuki. "Safety is a priority, but it's also important for us to challenge foes stronger than ourselves so we can build up our skills."

*Whoa, Natsuki's way more aggressive than I expected her to be! Well, I guess it kind of makes sense that she would be ready for a challenge. She did practice martial arts back in Japan.*

"So that's a majority in favor of fighting wipe bears. Let's do it, then," I said. "We're relying on you, Touya. You're the tankiest person among us."



“Yeah, you can count on me. I have a shield and chain mail this time, so it’ll be much easier than it was before.”

*Oh yeah, the first time we fought a wipe bear, all he had was some cheap leather armor and an iron baton. I’m really impressed by your courage, Touya. That bear was massive, but you still tackled it head-on.*

“Okay, let’s summarize things,” said Haruka. “We’re going to look for magical mushrooms and gather herbs on the way. If we encounter tusk boars, then slay them. As for goblins, there’s no need to go out of our way to fight them, but we should slay them if they approach us. Does that sound fine to everyone?”

We all agreed to the plan and then entered the forest, separating into groups of two that were responsible for gathering herbs and for monitoring our surroundings, respectively. We made sure each subparty was balanced by putting Touya and Haruka together, while I joined Yuki and Natsuki. In that way, both groups had either the Help Guide or the Appraisal skill, so neither group had to worry about gathering the wrong parts of herbs. The herb-gathering process went quite smoothly as a result, and thanks to Touya’s shovel, we were able to extract some roots as well. About an hour had passed after we first started exploring the forest while gathering herbs when Touya raised his voice to announce that he’d spotted our main objective.



“Hey, check it out!” Touya exclaimed. “This looks like the kind of mushroom that we’ve been looking for.”

I looked where he was pointing and saw a fallen tree that had a diameter of about twenty centimeters. Growing on that tree was a clump of what looked like white mushrooms. They resembled shiitake mushrooms but had longer and thicker shafts.

“So this is a wipe bear’s favorite snack,” said Haruka.

“They don’t look all that tasty,” said Yuki.

“Well, Yuki, maybe that’s just because you haven’t tried these mushrooms before. Mushrooms only look delicious if you’ve eaten them before, right?”

“I guess?”

The reason that thick, round shiitake mushrooms looked delicious to me was that I knew how they would taste if I sprinkled some soy sauce over them and stir-fried them. Unlike fruits, mushrooms didn’t really have an appealing color. However, that didn’t mean that colorful mushrooms would whet your appetite; in mushrooms, bright colors were actually a sign of danger and would make you lose your appetite, which was an interesting phenomenon psychologically.

“You know, these things kind of remind me of button mushrooms since they’re completely white,” said Natsuki.

“Button mushrooms? That just makes them seem even more dangerous to me...” Touya had an awkward smile on his face.

“On a sidenote, ‘magical mushroom’ is a generic term for certain types of poisonous mushrooms that contain alkaloids. It doesn’t refer to a single specific type of mushroom,” said Haruka. “They’re quite different in shape compared to what normally comes to mind when you think of the word mushroom.”

“Oh, is that so?”

“Yeah. One example is the mushroom known as the petticoat mottlegill.”

“Since magical mushrooms can be used for making painkillers, it sounds like people here use the alkaloid contents the same way people in Japan would use datura for medicinal purposes in the past,” said Natsuki.

“Oh, are you talking about the surgeon Seishu Hanaoka, Natsuki?” Yuki asked.

“Mm.”

*That’s the guy who pioneered the use of general anesthesia, right? I remember reading about this in a manga before. Don’t strong painkillers like morphine have addictive and hallucinatory effects, though...?*

“Okay, that’s enough chatting. Let’s harvest these mushrooms,” said Haruka. “What does your Appraisal skill have to say about them, Touya?”

“Uh, it just says they’re the raw ingredients in anesthesia, but the caps are worthless if they’re less than three centimeters in diameter. If they’re ten centimeters or more, they’re extremely valuable, apparently.”

“So those are the ones that Aera-san said would fetch a hefty sum? However...” I paused and examined the mushrooms closely.

“There aren’t many mushrooms here, and it looks like none of their caps are ten centimeters in diameter,” said Haruka.

The fallen tree was about ten meters in length, but there was only a sparse crop of mushrooms growing on it. In fact, it looked like the yield was less than what you’d get growing shiitake mushrooms on a log. At least half of the caps looked like they had a diameter of less than three centimeters, so the number of caps that were worth any money at all didn’t even reach two digits.

“I wonder how much mushrooms of this size will go for,” said Yuki.

“Oh yeah, we forgot to ask Diola-san about that,” said Haruka. “Well, the guild will probably pay a fair price for them, so let’s just do our best and harvest as many as we can.”

“Yeah.”

If we were selling these mushrooms to a merchant, we would have to worry about getting ripped off, but we wouldn’t have to worry if we turned them in at the guild. The guild generally paid a bit less than most merchants, but it was a reasonable trade-off for not having to spend time looking for a willing buyer.

“The largest cap here seems to have a diameter of about eight centimeters,” I said. “We could leave them alone until they grow bigger, but...”

“Nah, that won’t work,” said Touya. “Wipe bears have been spotted here, so these mushrooms will probably get eaten up before they get much bigger.”

“I guess that’s true...”

I gave up on that idea and went to harvest all of the mushrooms with caps of least three centimeters in diameter and stuffed them into our bags. I also took a closer look at the trunk of the tree and saw what looked like claw marks. This tree had probably been pushed to the ground by a wipe bear.

“I kind of feel bad about slaying wipe bears if it’s thanks to them that we can harvest these mushrooms...” said Yuki.

“Really? Those bears aren’t cute at all, so it doesn’t bother me,” said Touya.

“They aren’t cute *at all*?” Natsuki asked.

“Nope,” I said. “They look nasty. Their meat isn’t worth much—it’s really only their fur that sells for a decent amount of money—so I’m not too keen on the idea of actively seeking them out.”

A regular brown bear was cuter than wipe bears, though they were both equally ferocious.

“We can just slay any we run into,” said Haruka. “Let’s get moving again once we’re done harvesting the mushrooms here. There’s no reason for us to purposely wait for a wipe bear to show up.”

“Okay.”

We double-checked to make sure we hadn’t missed any mushrooms and then somewhat quickly left the area and resumed our search for more magical mushrooms. In the end, we found two more fallen trees that had magical mushrooms growing on them. On top of that, we were lucky enough to find one mushroom that had a cap with a diameter of over ten centimeters. It was a great haul that made us all happy. However, our shared moment of delight was cut short when my Scout skill picked up a hostile signal. It was moving in our direction, and from the size of the signal, it was probably a wipe bear.

“I’ve detected a hostile signal!” I exclaimed. “It’s most likely a wipe bear!”

“Oh, it’s finally time! Hmm, it seems to be coming from that direction.” Touya

immediately took out his sword and pricked up his ears, then went to stand in front of the rest of us, facing in the direction of the approaching signal.

“Nao, Natsuki, get ready as well,” said Haruka. “Yuki, you and I will support them.”

“O-Okay!” Yuki exclaimed.

“Understood!” Natsuki exclaimed.

Natsuki and I went to take positions at Touya’s left and right flank respectively. Haruka climbed up a nearby tree and Yuki stood on guard beside it. Shortly after we all assumed our positions, a wipe bear appeared out of the trees ahead of us.

“I-It’s huge...” Yuki stammered.

Natsuki didn’t say anything; her lips were sealed tight, and she had an expression of intense concentration on her face as she gripped her spear.

“It looks like it’s as big as the one we fought before,” said Touya. “That works out. Haruka, Nao, can you guys wait a bit before you back me up? Let me take it on myself for a sec.”

Haruka said, “Well, I don’t mind, but...”

“Are you sure you can do this?” I asked.

“Yeah.”

The wipe bear slowly pawed its way towards us through the bushes. It stopped right before reaching Touya, stared at him as though it was feeling wary, and then stood up on two feet. However, as soon as the bear got up on two feet...

“HYAH!”

Touya made his move, roaring so powerfully that the sound reverberated throughout the forest. The wipe bear flinched for an instant, and that was all the time Touya needed to dash forward and swing his blue iron sword down on the bear. It made a loud sound on impact.

“Ugh!” I didn’t look away in time, so I saw everything that happened. Touya’s

sword sank deep into the bear's cranium, and its eyeballs popped right out. *Let's leave it at that. I'll feel even sicker if I describe it in more detail.*

The bear's body leaned forward and collapsed to the ground with a crash.

"Is it dead?!" I asked.

"Don't jinx it!" Touya exclaimed. "But like, I felt my sword go through it. It's not a monster, so yeah, I'm pretty sure splitting its skull is enough to kill it."

"Oh, I'm not trying to jinx it or anything. I just felt like that was the right comment for this situation, since you managed to slay it so easily."

"Isn't that a good thing?! I mean, this was a combination of the Roar and Charge skills along with an expensive sword and Level 3 Swordsmanship. I'd be very surprised if this wasn't enough to slay a bear."

"I guess that's true, but it just feels kind of weird to me, given how difficult it was for us when we fought a wipe bear the first time..." It felt kind of unreal—unreasonable, even—that Touya had managed to slay the bear with a single blow. I poked the bear with my spear, almost hoping that it would get up, but it appeared to be good and dead. *That's all you got? Come on, man...*

"Whoa, I didn't know you were that strong, Touya!" Yuki exclaimed. "The bear scared me a lot, but you made slaying it look easy!"

"Mm. It was much scarier-looking than I thought it would be," said Natsuki.

"Those are natural reactions for your first time encountering a foe this size," said Touya. "You're probably proficient enough to slay a wipe bear yourself, Natsuki, but first you'll have to get used to how intimidating they are. This was my second time fighting one, so it was much easier this time."

Touya looked like he was doing his best to play it cool, but he was obviously puffed up with pride at his achievement.

"Our first time fighting a wipe bear went pretty badly," said Haruka. "On top of the damage we took, the fur ended up getting badly damaged, but this time, it looks like the fur is mostly intact, so it'll get us a decent amount of money." She sounded pretty happy.

Haruka took out a knife and started to skin the bear. She was quite practiced



at this process by now, but Touya and I helped out as well due to the sheer size of the bear.

“What should we do about the meat, Haruka?” I asked.

“Oh yeah, wipe bear meat was really cheap when we sold it last time. We got a decent amount of money due to the quantity we brought back. However...”

“It’s a waste to just throw it away, isn’t it?” Touya asked. “It’s almost lunch, and even if we run into some tusk boars, the greatest number we can realistically hunt is two. We’ve got more people in our party now, so...”

“Mm, that’s true. We do have more hands to carry luggage now.”

Thus far today, we had only gathered herbs and mushrooms, so none of our backpacks were at capacity yet. That being the case, we could probably fit all of the bear meat into our backpacks just fine.

“All right, let’s dress this bear,” said Haruka. “I wonder if its heart and liver are edible...”

“Let’s bring them with us back to Aera-san’s café,” I said. “We might as well make use of the magic bags that we made.”

“That’s true. The organs will still be fresh when we bring them back.”

We started to dress the wipe bear, but it was way too large and the meat took up a lot of space.

“Hmm, we might have no choice but to go back to town now...” said Haruka.

“Right? It’s still quite early in the day, but...” I said.

We’d divided the meat between each of our backpacks, but as a result, they were all close to full. Haruka and Yuki looked like they were fine since they were using the magic bags that were enchanted with the Light Weight Spell, but that only solved the problem of weight; it didn’t change the fact that there was almost no space left in the bags for anything else. The biggest issue was that my bag had more meat stuffed in it than the bags the girls were carrying, so it was a great burden on me. As an elf, I didn’t have a ton of stamina. *I really want to get back to town...*

“Nao, don’t worry. I can carry most of the luggage,” said Touya.

“The rest of us can help carry some of it as well,” said Yuki. “It won’t fit in our backpacks, though.”

“The issue is that combat will be difficult with all of this luggage on us,” said Haruka. “Let’s start heading out of the forest and only hunt game animals if we happen to come across them.”

“I guess that’s fine,” said Touya. “Do your best to find some tusk boars with your Scout skill, Nao.”

“I mean, I’ll let you know if my Scout skill detects some, but it didn’t on our way out here, so I doubt we’ll come across any on our way back.”

There was a possibility that the number of tusk boars in the wild had already started to decrease. The wipe bear sightings might have something to do with that as well. However, my Scout skill did pick up tusk boar signals at the very edge of its range right before we got out of the forest, and Touya happily ran off to hunt them down.



Once we got back to Laffan, the first place we headed was Aera-san’s café. Touya had insisted on jogging back to town—he’d said it was good training—and we’d all played along, but I’d figured he was really just in a hurry to eat a delicious meal. I had no objections since Touya was the one who’d volunteered to carry half of the tusk boar meat, but the impromptu “training session” was the most painful for me out of anyone. In our party of five, I was way below average in terms of stamina. Haruka had the least stamina of all of us, but Yuki and I were fairly close to the bottom. In my case and Haruka’s as well, it was because we were elves. I had to carry the second-largest amount of luggage despite my lack of stamina. Natsuki had offered to carry some of it, but I’d turned her down; it would have been shameful to accept her help as a guy. However, by the time we arrived in town, I had learned my lesson from this experience. It would probably be a good idea to make more realistic choices next time and follow a policy of gender equality.

“Sorry for coming over at a busy time of the day, Aera-san,” said Haruka.

“Oh, don’t worry about it. It’s not yet noon, and I’m already done preparing for lunch.”

We revealed our haul for the day.

“We preserved the tusk boars with the method you taught us, but as for the wipe bear meat...”

“Wipe bear meat needs to be processed fast, otherwise it’ll start to stink. However, fresh wipe bear meat can turn out quite tasty if you know how to cook it. Simply roasting it over a fire will turn it tough, though.”

Tusk boar meat was much easier to cook than wipe bear meat. That was probably one factor in the price difference between the two. At least, that made sense to me; tusk boar meat was delicious even if you just sprinkled some salt over it and roasted it.

“You can’t eat the heart or liver of a wipe bear. Oh, I see there’s no gallbladder. The gallbladder of a wipe bear can be used for medicinal purposes, so it sells for a decent amount of money.”

We had cut out the wipe bear’s liver because we’d heard (or thought we’d heard) that it could be used for something or other, but it seemed that we had retrieved the wrong organ. Aera-san told us that a gallbladder in good condition would fetch a decent sum, so it was pretty painful to realize our mistake. As for the heart and liver, we followed Aera-san’s instructions and disposed of them. Aera-san was a professional cook, so there was no reason to doubt her judgment.

“Thanks for the help, Aera-san,” said Haruka. “Advice from a professional cook like you really was helpful. Maybe I should study cooking.”

“Specialized knowledge in the field of cooking isn’t easy to come across. You’ve all helped me out a lot, so I don’t mind helping you in any way I can.”

Granting that knowledge was a kind of asset, we had basically forced the wipe bear meat onto Aera-san, and she had also bought some of the tusk boar meat and internal organs off of us at a price that was cheaper than what a butcher store would offer but higher than what we would get at the Adventurers’ Guild. However, she wouldn’t take our money for the lunch that we ordered afterwards, so I wasn’t sure if this deal had actually been good for her.

After we finished our early lunch, we headed towards the Adventurers’ Guild.

It was a time of the day when we usually wouldn't visit the guild, so Diola-san looked somewhat surprised to see us.

"Oh, I believe this is rather earlier than I usually see your party, Haruka-san."

"Mm. We slew a wipe bear, so we returned to town earlier than usual."

"Oh! Are you all quite all right?"

"Yeah. It went easier than we expected, I guess? We ran into the problem of carrying too much luggage, however..." Haruka pointed at our backpacks to indicate that they had been filled close to maximum capacity.

Diola-san nodded in response. "Mm, understandable. What about the magical mushrooms, incidentally?"

"Well, I'd like to say we ended up with a decent haul, but..."

We had no idea if the number of magical mushrooms that we had gathered was a lot or very little, but we had found one with a cap of over ten centimeters in diameter, so we were looking forward to the money it would earn us.

"Hmm. In that case, follow me to the backyard."

We followed Diola-san to a warehouse located in the backyard. Normally, she would take the materials we laid on the counter and carry them to the backyard herself, but she told us that it would be more efficient to have us come with her since we were now a party of five, besides which all of our backpacks were close to full. When we entered the warehouse for the first time, we saw a guy working at a large, wide table. Diola-san greeted him and then pointed at the table.

"Let's start with the meat."

"Okay," said Haruka.

"Oh, you managed to slay some tusk boars today along with a wipe bear? The bear's coat looks to be in very good condition."

Touya had basically smashed the bear to death, so it was only natural that the fur wouldn't be damaged. He had swung at the bear's skull, so some of the fur in that area might have been damaged, but the sword Touya used was more of the smashing type than the cutting type, so it probably wasn't that bad. There

was another guy who seemed to be responsible for assessing materials, and he measured the pieces of meat one by one after they were lined up on the table. He then checked the condition of the fur and wrote what seemed to be some numbers onto a board. After he finished his assessment, he handed the board over to Diola-san and went to help the other guy clean up and store the meat.

“The total comes to thirty thousand six hundred Rea. The fur was in very good condition, so it went for a good price.”

“Okay. We’re going to take out the herbs next.”

Yuki lined up the herbs that we had gathered today, and Diola-san swiftly assessed them, writing some numbers down on the board.

“Are these all the herbs? The total for the herbs is eleven thousand four hundred Rea. Once again, there are no worthless herbs in your haul. I’m impressed.”

“We’re impressed too, Diola-san,” said Haruka. “You managed to assess all of these herbs thoroughly in such a short time.”

“Well, I am a professional. Of course, when it comes to herbs, I suppose your party is also very experienced in a way.” Diola-san chuckled and gave us a light bow.

Most adventurers would probably bring back a bunch of useless herbs with them, so that must be why she was so impressed. We had only succeeded in gathering all the right herbs thanks to the Help Guide, however. I was confident that I would have brought back the wrong herbs too if I hadn’t had that skill. A lot of herbs looked exactly the same as normal grass, after all.

We couldn’t exactly mention the existence of skills, so I came up with another justification to allay Diola-san’s suspicions. “Well, Haruka and I are elves, and Natsuki has some knowledge of herbal medicine, so it’s highly unlikely that we would bring back the wrong herbs.”

“Oh, Natsuki-san has knowledge of herbal medicine? That probably means your party can earn even more from herbs than most adventurers.”

“Mm. The only things left are the magical mushrooms,” said Haruka.

We had harvested a total of thirty-five mushrooms today, and we had high hopes for the one with the ten-centimeter cap. *Come on, mushroom! I believe in you! Bring us some fat stacks of cash!*

“My... I’m quite impressed your party managed to gather this many. There’s even a particularly large one. Did your party go deep into the forest for these, Haruka-san?”

Diola-san seemed a bit perplexed, but Haruka shook her head in response. “No, we didn’t. We ventured into the part of the forest where we go every day, which is quite far away from the deep forest and the dindel trees. Is there something strange about this, Diola-san?”

“Well, it’s more that there are some fruitful years like this when one can find a plenty of magical mushrooms for the taking without having to venture deeper into the forest. Wipe bears are certain to appear wherever the mushrooms do, however, which results in a higher death rate for rookie adventurers.”

It seemed like fruitful years were a thing in this world just like how they were back on Earth. That would be a good thing if it just resulted in an increased yield of mushrooms. However, the corresponding increase in the population of wipe bears would be a disaster for ordinary citizens.

“Are there any other rookie parties aside from us, Diola-san?” I asked. “We haven’t seen any other rookies so far.”

“Yes, there are two other parties. Both tend to visit the guild at different times of day than your party.”

We usually wouldn’t visit the guild at all in the morning, and after hunting and gathering herbs in the woods, we would return to town sometime between early afternoon and early evening. When we returned earlier, it was usually for the purpose of making time for solitary training. In any case, it was true that we weren’t active at the same times of day as other adventurers. The main place that we went to earn money was the east forest, but we hadn’t bumped into any other adventurers there so far. It sort of made sense that we hadn’t since the outskirts of the forest stretched along the highway for several kilometers.

“Now that I think about it, your party has encountered a wipe bear before, haven’t you? In addition to the posters, it might be a good idea to warn

adventurers about the wipe bears verbally. Most rookies would quickly fall in battle with a wipe bear.”

Wipe bears were supposedly rare, but we had encountered one within a few days of being transported to this world. *Hmm, I wonder if that wipe bear was actually on its way to prepare a tree for growing magical mushrooms. It could have been roaming around for a year uprooting trees in preparation. That makes it sound like a hardworking farmer, albeit a very murderous one. Are we actually the bad guys for stealing the product of the wipe bear’s hard work?*

“Oh, excuse me, I should get back to the assessment. As long as they’re in good condition, the value of magical mushrooms is usually determined by the size of their caps.” As she continued to explain, Diola-san took out a ruler and started to measure the size of the caps, pausing periodically to record the numbers. “However, caps with diameters of over ten centimeters jump up in value dramatically because most magical mushrooms are eaten by wipe bears long before they exceed that size. I’m impressed, by the way, that all of the mushrooms your party brought back are above the minimum requested size.”

*That’s all thanks to Touya’s Appraisal skill.*

“All right, the total comes to forty-six thousand three hundred Rea.”

“Whoa, that’s a lot!” I exclaimed. “Oh, by the way, how much did this large one get assessed for?”

“Twelve thousand Rea. The rest of the magical mushrooms were worth somewhere between eight hundred and thirteen hundred Rea apiece.”

*A large one jumps up to ten times the value of smaller ones?! We brought a number with caps around eight centimeters in diameter, but those were only worth one thousand three hundred Rea?! I can’t believe there’s such a huge difference! Aera-san really wasn’t exaggerating when she said a large one like this would fetch a hefty sum!*

“Would you like to exchange all of these for Rea?”

“Yes, please,” said Haruka.

“Very well. Please head back to the counter table. I’ll bring the sum with me shortly.”



In the end, we got eighty-eight gold coins' worth of Rea from a single haul.



“We sure earned a lot of money today!” Yuki exclaimed. “Eighty-eight gold coins from a single day’s work, huh? It feels somewhat unreal to me. Not too long ago, Natsuki and I were working hard together, and we only ended up with two large silver coins per day...”

“Yuki, it’s actually a total of ninety gold coins if we add in what we got from Aera-san,” said Natsuki.

Once we returned to The Slumbering Bear, we’d all gathered in one room to pool our earnings for the day. Yuki and Natsuki seemed quite happy as they looked at the small mountain of gold coins that we had piled up. I was happy too, but not as happy as they were; I had already had the experience of getting a huge amount of money from dindels.

“We were lucky to come across magical mushrooms today,” said Haruka. “We probably won’t be so lucky from tomorrow onward.”

Over half of our earnings today had been from the magical mushrooms, so Haruka made a good point. We probably wouldn’t be able to earn as much in the future even if we spent more time gathering herbs. If we went back to just hunting tusk boars, then we would be lucky to earn even a third of what we had earned today.

“The magical mushrooms that we didn’t harvest today won’t grow big right away either,” said Yuki. “What if we search somewhere else?”

“If we do that, then we’ll have to venture into unfamiliar areas, which might be a bit risky. The area we went to today was a place that we had slowly explored in the past as a party of three.”

Initially, we had only gathered herbs on the outskirts of the forest, and then we’d slowly ventured deeper while making careful note of our surroundings to map them out in our heads. It had taken us a while to find the area with the dindel trees. *We really have come a long way.*

“Hmm. I don’t feel so safe going very deep into the forest, but it’s not like we have to go that deep,” said Yuki. “We’ll only encounter things like wipe bears if

we go too deep, right? I think we'll be fine as long as we don't let our guard down. Anyway, Nao can scout them out."

"Yeah, it's unlikely that we'll be caught by surprise as long as either Touya or I stay on alert," I said.

"I'm down for exploring deeper in the forest," said Touya. "It's safer than venturing way out in search of giant salamanders. We still need to be saving up money for our housing plans."

"All right, so that'll be our plan for tomorrow," said Haruka.

"That's fine with me," said Natsuki. "What should we all do for the rest of the day? Individual training?"

"Mm. It's too late in the day to go outside now."

"Okay." Natsuki got onto her feet after she responded to Haruka, and Touya also stood up with his sword in hand.

"Oh yeah, Nao has some grimoires on Time Magic, but do we have any grimoires on other types of magic?" Yuki asked.

"We wanted to buy some, but we put it off since we don't have an easy way to store grimoires yet," said Haruka. "We'll have to continue putting it off for a bit since we need to save money for housing."

"Is it because they're expensive?"

"If I recall correctly, grimoires on the basics of magic go for about fifteen thousand Rea, and a grimoire on Light Magic goes for about thirty-six thousand Rea."

"Whoa, that's really expensive! A bookshelf full of grimoires would be enough to pay for a house!"

Ten volumes of grimoires would be enough to purchase a plot of land, and twenty would be enough to pay for a house to be built on it. A library full of grimoires would probably be enough to pay for a castle.

"Mm, grimoires aren't something you can buy casually."

"I see..."

“Yuki, for now, just try reading through the grimoires on Time Magic,” I said. “You can start with the beginner one. I’ll go out and train while you do that.”

Yuki sounded quite disappointed at the fact that we had so few grimoires, so I gave her the one in my hands and got to my feet to join Touya and Natsuki for training. I was already weaker than Natsuki when it came to my abilities with a spear, and that gap in prowess would only grow wider if I focused too much on practicing my magic.

“Oh, thanks, Nao. Shouldn’t I also do some training, though?”

“We can practice together later, Yuki,” said Haruka. “The innkeeper was kind enough to let us use the backyard for self-training, but it’s not large enough for five people to use at once.”

“Okay. Good luck, Nao.”

“Gotcha.”

Haruka and Yuki waved at me, and I waved back at them before I headed out for training.

## Chapter 2—Earn Money Hunting Monsters!

We had hoped that we would be able to harvest mushrooms again the next day, but our expectations were dashed by rainy weather. The rain had started yesterday evening, and it dragged on into the next day. The ground outside was completely sodden.

“I’m back,” said Haruka.

“Welcome back,” I said. “Any good news?”

Haruka had gone to ask the innkeeper about the weather. She shook her head in response to my question. “Nope. He said that it’s pretty typical to get a month of rain around this time of year.”

“I see. I guess it’s like this world’s autumn rainy season, then.”

According to the girls who had the General Knowledge skill, the calendar in this world consisted of six days per week, five weeks per month, and twelve months per year. Periodically, there were years with leap days as well. The days of the week were divided into six elements. The week started with the Day of Light, followed by Fire, Water, Wind, and Earth, and then the last day of the week was Darkness. There wasn’t an equivalent to Sunday as a day of rest, so the day of the week would only rarely cross our minds. We weren’t sure exactly how long a day was in this world since we didn’t have a clock or watch keeping Earth time for comparison, but we estimated that a day was between twenty and thirty hours long. We could have gotten a more precise estimate if we’d found ourselves getting tired in the middle of the day, which would have meant that we were still operating on a twenty-four-hour circadian rhythm like we had on Earth, but our new bodies seemed to have internal clocks aligned with this world’s day-night cycle.

“On the other hand, apparently this is the only time of year when the weather can rapidly change for the worse. There’s no ‘plum rain’ in the spring the way there is back in Japan, and there aren’t any heavy snowfalls in winter either. The winters here will probably be very comfortable; the temperature only

rarely gets down to the freezing point.”

In the region of Japan where we had lived, the temperature would frequently dip below freezing during the coldest time of the year, so it was nice to learn that this new world wasn't like that. *I wouldn't exactly call life in this world comfortable, though...*

“We still need to prepare for winter, though, right?” Natsuki asked. “If the temperature drops below fifteen degrees Celsius, I don't think our current clothes will be enough to withstand the cold.”

“Mm, you definitely need winter clothes, and so does Yuki,” I said.

The rest of us had the leather clothes that we had originally used as armor. They weren't very breathable, which made them uncomfortable to wear most of the year but also meant they could serve as decent winter clothes. It would be ideal to have clothes that breathed more but still blocked wind and water. However, even if such clothes did exist in this world, they were probably out of our price range.

“If all of us are going to need new clothes, then we might have to take on some risks to earn more money. It's possible that we won't be able to spend the winter in our own house if we don't.”

“Are you sure we'll be able to spend the winter in our own house even if we do take on risks, Haruka?” I asked. “Even if we earn enough money in time, we'll still have to wait for the house to be built, won't we?”

“Not exactly. Apparently most houses in this world are constructed quickly by assembling large groups of people. I think it'll only take two months for our house to be completed.”

If there wasn't a good reason to use a great deal of man power, custom-built homes in Japan were often erected by a small group of workers or even by a single person. As a result, it took a long time for those homes to be completed, but the opposite seemed to be true in this world. According to Haruka, it was possible to hire large numbers of laborers at places like the Adventurers' Guild and build a house at a rapid pace. In addition, the land where we wanted a house built had already had a house on it once before, so the ground was suitable for our purposes. On top of that, magic existed in this world, so the

average physical prowess of people here was greater than back on Earth. In fact, there were plenty of people in this world who could easily lift and carry over one hundred kilos.

“Well, we’ll still be cutting it close in this case,” said Haruka. “However, there are going to be a lot of rainy days for the foreseeable future, so...”

“Mm, I’d rather not work in the rain if possible,” I said.

“You sound like a lazy bum, Nao!” Touya exclaimed. “I feel the same way, though.”

You definitely couldn’t use rain as an excuse to take a day off work back in Japan. *Hmm, on second thought, would that work as an excuse in certain fields like construction? I don’t actually know.*

“Well, regardless, we don’t have any actual rainwear,” I said.

“It would still be dangerous even if we did have rainwear,” said Natsuki. “We’ll be at a disadvantage for sure compared to animals and monsters since we walk on two legs and have to carry weapons.”

“Yep, I agree as well,” said Yuki. “I’d rather not go into the forest while it’s raining unless we absolutely have to.”

Haruka had a wry smile on her face as she nodded in response to our comments, but she raised a counterpoint nonetheless. “I know how you all feel, and I don’t plan on forcing us to work out in the rain, but we’ll have to practice fighting in the rain eventually. We’d end up in a bad situation if it suddenly starts to rain while we’re outside and we can’t fend for ourselves.”

“Oh, I guess that’s true,” said Touya.

We had the choice of fleeing from battles in the rain as long as we only needed to take care of ourselves, but we couldn’t abandon someone else we’d agreed to escort as part of a quest. With that in mind, we had no choice but to practice fighting during the rain at some point in the future. *Oh yeah, I remember hearing about how there were battle drills in the Self-Defense Force where enlistees had to jump into puddles of water regardless of whether they got drenched or covered in mud. On top of that, they had to work hard in response to natural disasters no matter how hot, cold, or dirty the conditions*

*were, so as an ordinary Japanese citizen, I really appreciate their hard work.*

“I agree that we need that kind of training, but I’d prefer to put it off until we have a bathtub,” I said.

“Yeah, I feel the same way Nao does,” said Yuki. “Thanks to your Purification spell, it’s much better for me and Natsuki now compared to how things were back at Sarstedt, Haruka, but...”

“Mm. I also miss being able to take a bath,” said Natsuki.

There were definitely some Japanese people who were fine with just taking a shower, but all of us preferred to take baths, so there was a consensus among us on this point. It wasn’t like we could take a shower in this world even if we wanted to, however.

“All right, we can set training in the rain as a long-term goal. For now, let’s decide what to do today,” said Haruka. “The people who use magic can just practice that, but that leaves nothing for Touya to do.”

Touya was the only one among us who didn’t have any skills related to magic, so the only kind of training he could do indoors was to exercise and work out. However, our rooms were quite small, and I didn’t really want to practice magic next to Touya while he was sweaty from working out. *Maybe I can just leave him alone in our room while I go over to the girls’ room to practice magic.*

“Hmm. I’d actually like to go do some research at the Adventurers’ Guild,” said Natsuki. “If I recall correctly, there’s a reference room at the guild with all sorts of documents and materials that you can browse, right?”

“Yeah,” said Haruka. “The room isn’t that big, but you can obtain all kinds of information about the area surrounding Laffan.”

I had never entered the reference room myself, but Haruka had gone there multiple times looking for information. According to Haruka, experienced adventurers would go there to read up on herbs, animals, and monsters before they went out for work.

“I’ll tag along as well,” said Touya. “I might be able to level up my Appraisal skill if I learn more information on various things.”

“Oh yeah, the Appraisal skill has levels, unlike the Help Guide,” said Yuki. She tilted her head. “Should I tag along as well, Haruka?”

Haruka shook her head in response and handed Yuki a grimoire. “No, you should practice magic here, Yuki. You’re not as capable in combat as Natsuki, so it would be best for you to practice different spells for dealing damage.”

“Ugh, I guess you’re right. I’ll do my best...”

Yuki looked a bit dejected as she took the grimoire from Haruka and opened it. It was true, though, that Yuki didn’t have many ways of contributing during combat, so I felt the same way Haruka did.

“All right, I’ll be heading out,” said Natsuki. “Oh, do we have anything that I can use as rainwear?”

“I have a cloak with a hood that I use. That could work,” said Touya.

We had bought those cloaks before we met up with Yuki and Natsuki, although we hadn’t used them much recently. They weren’t waterproof, but they could serve as protection from rain to a certain extent.

“Um, can I borrow your cloak, Nao-kun?”

“U-Uh, sure, I guess...?”

I handed my cloak over to Natsuki, and she looked quite happy as she took it from me and hugged it. *Lending clothes to a girl makes me feel a bit nervous for some reason. I lent my coat to Haruka sometimes back in Japan, so it isn’t my first time doing this, but still.*

“...Natsuki, do you want to borrow my cloak instead?” Haruka asked.

“Oh, you don’t have to lend me yours.” Natsuki smiled as she replied to Haruka. “Nao-kun’s cloak is a better fit for my height.”

Haruka narrowed her eyes but then nodded. “Hmm. If you say so, I guess...”

“Whoa, is this a skirmish between girls...?” Yuki muttered.

“Hm? What did you say, Yuki?” I asked.

“Oh, it’s nothing. I just think this book is interesting, that’s all.”

Yuki looked like she was trying to hold back a smile as she said that, and I



tilted my head in confusion as I looked at her. “Really?”

Yesterday, while Yuki was reading the grimoire on the basics of Time Magic, she had made a fuss about how she didn’t understand abstract concepts, so it was strange that she would suddenly find the contents of the grimoire interesting now. On a sidenote, I didn’t really understand the abstract concepts described in the grimoire either. Three-dimensional space somewhat made sense to me, and I had a rough idea of what “graviton” was from the word gravity. However, the concept of a “time axis” was much more difficult; to understand that point, I felt like I would need to be well versed in both physics and philosophy.

“All right, see you guys later,” said Touya. “Do your best with studying and practicing magic.”

“Gotcha. Well, I think you and Natsuki will be the ones doing actual studying and learning, Touya,” I said.



After all, those of us who remained at the inn would actually be practicing what we learned from grimoires, not just studying.

“I guess that’s true. Let’s all do our best, then.”

“Yep.”



We spent the rest of that day studying and training into the evening, and by the next morning, the weather had cleared up. All of us had somewhat of a bounce in our step as we headed towards the forest under a bright blue sky.

“It rained yesterday, so maybe a lot of mushrooms sprouted up for us to pick!” Yuki exclaimed.

Haruka shrugged. “It’s the right time of year for mushrooms because of the weather, but I’m not sure if they’ll grow that fast.”

Back in Japan, weather had never prevented me from buying artificially cultivated mushrooms at supermarkets, but wild mushrooms would probably be greatly affected by the weather. I would sometimes hear television news about how the price of matsutake mushrooms had fluctuated due to bad weather, but such news didn’t concern an ordinary citizen like myself. I had eaten matsutake mushrooms before, but they didn’t feel like they were worth their price. For that amount of money, I’d rather buy a nice cut of meat.

“Oh yeah, I found this out yesterday at the reference room... It seems that orcs are a good source of money,” said Natsuki.

“Really?” I asked.

“Mm. Magicites from orcs go for much more than the ones from goblins, and you can sell the meat as well.”

*You can sell orc meat? I don’t know what orcs look like in this world, but I don’t really want to eat orc meat if they look like the typical orc you’d see in a fantasy game.*

“Orcs? Oh, do you mean the type of orcs that often go together with female knights?” Touya asked.

I hastily stopped Touya before he could go into further detail. “Touya, don’t say things like that! What if you jinx us?!”

That concept was something we could joke about back on Earth since orcs didn’t exist there, but in this world, there was a real chance that one of the girls could end up in a situation like that.

“Hmm? What do you mean by that, Touya?” Natsuki asked.

Only people well versed in certain otaku subcultures would immediately know what Touya meant, so it was only natural that Natsuki had no idea. In fact, I would have been shocked if she had known what Touya was talking about. However, it would be too embarrassing for me to describe the concept to Natsuki in detail, so I attempted to explain in an indirect way.

“Oh, Touya’s probably wondering if women get assaulted by orcs,” I said.

Natsuki had a perplexed look on her face. “Why women specifically? I don’t think gender matters when it comes to being assaulted by an orc. Well, it’s more dangerous for women and children due to their lower stamina, but that’s it.”

She didn’t seem to get what I was trying to imply, but that didn’t matter. *I should just nod and then bury this topic.*

“To be more specific, Touya and Nao are talking about women getting sexually assaulted, Natsuki,” said Yuki.

“Huh? Sexually...?”

*Why did you have to spell it out, Yuki?! I almost managed to convince Natsuki to move on from this topic! Ugh, that surprised look from Natsuki really hurts—and so does that cold look from Haruka! Damn it, Yuki. She’s probably enjoying this situation since she figured out what we were talking about.*

“That concept isn’t realistic at all,” said Haruka. “Orcs and goblins are completely different organisms from us. There’s no way they can reproduce with another species unless they have some kind of hypergenes, which I doubt.”

*Hypergenes? That’s a good way to put it. If orcs and goblins could reproduce with humans, then that would also mean they could reproduce with monkeys or*

*boars.*

“When you say ‘that concept,’ does that mean you also know what we’re talking about, Haruka?” Touya asked.

“Touya, you idiot!” I exclaimed. I’d had no time to stop him before he asked that stupid question.

“Yeah, I saw some stuff like that in Nao’s room.”

*Ack, so she hasn’t forgotten about it!*

“Ugh! W-Wait, hear me out! That belonged to Touya—”

“Dude, don’t drag me into this!”

“It’s true, though! You gave me that game and told me to try it out!”

“I mean, yeah, but a true bro wouldn’t sell out another bro like this!”

“Hell no, we’re in this together as bros! You’re not getting away scot-free!”

It was true that, as a guy, I had enjoyed that game, but I wasn’t going to let Touya play innocent in this situation. *You’re the one who started this by bringing up the concept of orcs and lady knights in the first place, Touya!*

“All right, that’s enough pitiful squabbling, you two,” said Haruka. “It doesn’t matter who owned that game, since you both played it, right?”

We both flinched and groaned when Haruka pointed that out. *I mean, of course I tried it out! What kind of teenage boy would get his hands on a game with an age rating that was supposedly too high for him but then not try it out?! It doesn’t matter whether he ends up enjoying the game or not. I can confidently say that if there’s a guy out there who wouldn’t at least install and play the game, then he isn’t a normal teenage boy!*

“In any case, it would be impossible for orcs to reproduce with other races even if their respective genes were ninety-nine percent the same. It’s possible that orcs eat the meat of other races, though.”

*Ending your life in an orc’s stomach sounds horrible in its own right...*

“Actually, maybe goblins and orcs reproduce asexually,” said Touya. “That would explain why female goblins don’t exist in some fictional settings.”

“Hmm. By that, do you mean goblins and orcs in those settings are actually laying eggs inside human women they assault?” I asked. “And then when those eggs hatch, they eat their way out—”

Touya clasped his hands over his ears and shook his head violently. “Ugh, don’t go into detail!” he exclaimed, cutting off my biology thesis. “You made me see it in my head!”

*You’re the one who gave me the idea, Touya.*

“Okay, that’s enough,” said Haruka. “Just look—Natsuki’s absolutely creeped out by this. Besides, this topic isn’t relevant to the world we’re in now.”

“Oh, right. Sorry about this,” I said. “Please just forget what we were talking about and let’s move on.” *And forget about the fact that I borrowed that game from Touya!*

“Um, okay. Well, I guess it’s reasonable for guys to have slightly strange fetishes,” said Natsuki. “It’s a difficult fact for me to accept, though...”

“Natsuki, hold on. Please don’t try to understand this,” I said. “We were just talking about stuff in fiction, okay? It’s not related to what we actually like in reality.”

For example, liking a loli character in an erotic manga wouldn’t necessarily make someone a lolicon in real life. The same went for people who enjoyed little or older sister characters in fiction: most of those people wouldn’t be sexually attracted to their actual sisters.

Touya nodded in agreement. “Yeah, Nao’s right. We’re not the kind of guys who mix up reality and fiction—” Suddenly, he stopped himself midway through his sentence and seemed to get lost in thought.

“What’s up?”

“Oh, it’s just that now that I think about it, I did say I wanted a wife with animal ears before, so—”

“Why did you have to bring this up now, Touya?! That’s kind of mixing reality and fiction in a way, yes, but it’s completely different in our situation!”

Back in Japan, it would be very cringe to say completely in earnest that you

wanted a wife with animal ears, but it was a perfectly normal dream to have in this world. Touya himself had animal ears, so for him, it didn't really count as mixing up reality and fiction.

"Don't worry, Natsuki," said Haruka. "Most of Nao's fetishes are pretty normal."

"Is that so?"

"Mm. I'm fairly sure that he doesn't have any fetishes that would end his life if people found out about them." Haruka nodded, looking quite confident.

*How am I supposed to reply to that?*

"Should I say that I'm glad you're quite understanding or something, Haruka?" I said.

"You should have probably tried to hide stuff better, Nao," said Touya.

*This is really strange. I remember Haruka finding that game I borrowed from Touya, but I don't remember her finding the rest of my collection. What if she did and just never questioned me about it...?*

"On a sidenote, can you tell me some of what those fetishes are, Haruka?" Natsuki asked.

"Sure. If I remember correctly—"

"All right, let's stay alert and on guard!" I exclaimed. "We're going to an area that we've never been to before, after all! Right, Touya?" I had a bad feeling about what would happen if we continued to discuss this topic, so I thumped Touya on the back as a signal to play along with me.

"U-Uh, yeah, you're right! We shouldn't let our guard down!"

I pressed onward towards the forest. *I can't hear anything behind me, not at all! I'm sure words like 'maid uniform' and 'sailor suit' are just my imagination! Yeah, definitely. Please, let them be just my imagination...*



"Whoa, I didn't expect these magical mushrooms to grow this fast," I said.

"Yeah," said Touya. "Are all mushrooms like this?"

We picked over the areas where we had harvested magical mushrooms two days ago before venturing into new areas, and we were all amazed at the sight of the mushrooms there. The ones that we had ignored back then because their caps didn't meet the minimum diameter requirement now looked like they were all at least five centimeters in diameter, and there were some big ones that looked close to seven centimeters. That would mean that these mushrooms had grown at least two centimeters over two days.

"I'm not sure about this since I've never grown mushrooms myself, but I've heard stories about how mushrooms can suddenly grow in size if the environmental conditions are favorable," said Natsuki.

"I've grown mushrooms before," said Yuki. "Well, they were the type of mushrooms that you can grow indoors at home. They grew slowly at first, but they did start to grow faster after a bit."

"So does that mean mushrooms grow pretty quickly in general?" I asked.

"I think that makes sense," said Haruka. "These mushrooms probably won't grow back for a while if we harvest them, though."

According to Haruka, mushrooms weren't something that would continue to grow all over the place just because they grew quickly. If the conditions were exactly right, the mushrooms we picked might grow back in a few weeks, but it was more likely that we'd have to wait until next year. Haruka also mentioned that magical mushrooms would only grow on the logs of trees that had fallen to the ground and decomposed for one to two years, so it wasn't guaranteed that mushrooms would grow on the tree in front of us by next year.

"If they grow this fast, won't these magical mushrooms jump up to ten times in value if we just wait three more days?" Touya asked.

"You mean if the caps grow to a diameter of over ten centimeters? In theory, you're right, but I'm not sure if it's that easy," I said.

"Mm, there's probably a catch," said Haruka. "If it was that easy to find magical mushrooms with caps of over ten centimeters, they wouldn't be worth that much."

Haruka made a good point. The gap in value between magical mushrooms



that were at least ten centimeters and the ones that weren't wouldn't make sense if it was that easy for the mushrooms to grow to that size.

"These mushrooms will probably get eaten up by wipe bears before they get to that size, or else maybe their growth will slow down," said Yuki.

"What should we do?" I asked. "Should we leave these mushrooms alone, or should we harvest them?"

"It's hard to decide," said Natsuki. "They might jump up in value if we leave them alone for a few days, but there's also a chance that we'll end up with nothing. I think the latter is more likely."

"Let's have a vote," said Haruka. "Raise your hand if you think we should harvest these magical mushrooms now!"

Touya and Yuki were the only ones who didn't raise their hands.

"You two want to gamble instead of playing it safe?" I asked.

"It's not that I want to gamble," said Touya. "I actually have a reason for not raising my hand."

"Hmm?"

"We just slew a wipe bear two days ago, remember? If this area was the territory of that wipe bear, then that bear can't come here to eat these mushrooms anymore since it's dead, right?"

"I mean, yeah, but there might be other animals that eat these magical mushrooms. Other adventurers might also come across them and harvest them." I had no idea how many other parties of adventurers would venture this far into the woods for work, but it was a possibility that we would have to take into account. We hadn't bumped into any other adventurers yet, but this forest was perfect for rookies.

"What's your reasoning, Yuki?" Haruka asked.

"Uh, I just thought that some mushrooms might remain even if a lot of them do get eaten up."

"I'm fairly sure a wipe bear as large as the one we encountered the other day would eat up all of the magical mushrooms here. Even if it was smart enough to

leave the smaller ones alone, it would probably still eat them up before the mushrooms managed to grow to over ten centimeters.”

Large magical mushrooms would be more abundant if wipe bears were smart enough to wait for them to grow, after all.

“In any case, we have a majority vote in favor of harvesting the mushrooms now, so let’s pick all of the ones here and move on.”

“Okay.”

We picked the magical mushrooms with caps that had a diameter of at least three centimeters and then returned to the spot where we had gathered magical mushrooms two days ago. However, we were greeted with a surprise when we arrived.

“All gone, it seems,” said Haruka.

“It looks like the mushrooms were eaten up by an animal,” said Natsuki. “There are traces of bite marks here and there.”

We examined the remains of the mushrooms. It looked like the stalks had been ripped off, not pulled up at the mycelium the way we harvested them. The bare stems of the mushrooms had been left intact, and there were scars on the tree itself as well.

“I’m not sure if it was a wipe bear that did this, but it looks like we made the right choice to harvest the magical mushrooms at the previous area,” said Haruka. “Out in nature, there’s a competition for these mushrooms.”

“Yep. Let’s hurry over to the third area,” said Touya.

“Yeah, we should hurry before someone or something else gets the mushrooms first.”

We rushed towards the third area. Luckily the mushrooms were still there. Just as we had done in the first area, we gathered the ones that had caps with a diameter of at least three centimeters, but in this case, there were only a few mushrooms left when we were done. It probably wouldn’t be worth it to come back to this area again.

“We’ve gathered a decent number of magical mushrooms, but we’ll probably

only get about twenty gold coins for this haul,” I said.

“Mm. For the sake of our house, let’s explore and try to find new areas where we can harvest mushrooms,” said Natsuki.

“The plan is to hold back from gathering too many herbs while we’re exploring and to avoid unnecessary combat, right?” Touya asked.

We all nodded in response to Touya’s question and then ventured deeper into the forest.



A few hours had passed since we’d first started to explore new areas, and we had eaten lunch in that time as well. We would normally have headed back to town by this time of the day, but our mushroom hunt wasn’t going well. We had discovered a total of four spots with fallen trees, but two of those spots were empty of magical mushrooms, and one only offered a few mushrooms that were above the minimum size requirement. The fourth spot was the only place that we had been able to harvest a decent number of mushrooms. We took a break after we had finished harvesting the mushrooms at the fourth spot.

Haruka sighed after she took a look inside her own backpack. “This probably isn’t very efficient if other spots are like this as well...” said Haruka.

Even if we included the amount of money we would get from turning in the herbs that we had gathered along the way, we would only earn about forty thousand Rea for our current haul. It wasn’t an acceptable amount for a party of five considering that we had taken the day off yesterday due to rain.

“Mushrooms aren’t that bad as a source of money, but it doesn’t seem like a good idea to depend on them in the future,” said Natsuki.

“Should we consider going after giant salamanders, then?” Haruka looked at each of us in turn.

*Hmm. We’ll be able to earn quite a lot of money if we succeed in catching a big one. We made a big magic bag yesterday as well, so we can probably bring back a few giant salamanders. The only problem is the distance we need to travel to get to where they live...*

“I think it would be a better idea to hunt orcs,” said Natsuki.

“Really? I’m surprised to hear that coming from you, Natsuki,” said Haruka.

I was quite surprised as well. It sounded like an idea that Touya would bring up; plus, I had thought Natsuki was the type of person who would prefer to avoid combat.

“There are two reasons that I wanted to bring up that possibility. The first one is that we aren’t ready to go on a long trip that would require us to camp outside for a few days along the way, and camping gear would cost us a lot of money. The other reason is that slaying monsters is a way to help enhance our skills and ensure our own safety. If I recall correctly, we all have something known as character levels, right? We should raise our character levels by slaying monsters.”

“Oh, those are some very convincing reasons,” I said.

“Mm. I would have said no to the idea of hunting orcs if Touya had brought it up, but it sounds much better when Natsuki says it,” said Haruka.

“Oh, come on! Why’s that? That’s not fair!” Touya exclaimed.

“I mean, you should know why, Touya,” said Yuki.

Haruka and I nodded, and Touya gave us an unhappy look. However, you could more easily persuade your friends to take risks if you were sensible most of the time, and Touya didn’t have much going for him in that respect. It wasn’t like we would turn down Touya’s ideas just because they came from him, though; he would just need to provide good reasons to back them up.

“I’ve thought about eventually raising our character levels as well, so I don’t have a strong reason to say no,” said Haruka. “However, I had planned on mostly slaying goblins for a bit. What do you think, Touya?”

Touya paused in thought for a moment. He seemed like he wasn’t completely sure even when he replied. “Honestly, it’s hard to say. Based on the information that I looked up at the guild about the goblins and wipe bears that we’ve fought so far, I could probably handle one orc by myself just fine. It’ll be even easier if Natsuki helps me out. If the rest of you back us up, then it’ll probably be a curb stomp. That’s only in theory, though.”

“How many orcs do you think we can safely take on at the same time?”

“If we all calmly carry out our roles, then I would say three. Four at the same time would be a bit dangerous. If we want to play it safe, then we should only take on two at the same time.”

After Touya replied to both of Haruka’s questions, the rest of us looked at Natsuki, and she nodded, so it appeared that she agreed with him. Well, Natsuki’s Spearmanship skill was Level 4, so she would be able to slay an orc in one hit for sure if I lent her my spear. In fact, she had my spear most of the time anyway. She was using it way more than I would have, so it was basically her spear at this point. I could contribute to combat using my magic, so it would be a logical choice to transfer ownership of that spear to Natsuki, but the thought made me feel kind of sad.

“There’s the possibility that other monsters might jump into the fray as well, so two at most sounds right,” said Haruka. “We probably won’t get caught off guard, though, since Nao has the Scout skill.”

“Yeah, no monster or animal has managed to evade my Scout skill yet.”

I wasn’t sure if there was something out there that could go undetected by my Scout skill, but all of the creatures we had fought so far had triggered my Scout skill once they got within its range. However, I had to pay close attention to notice tinier creatures such as small birds. There was a possibility that my Scout skill could miss small creatures that were dangerous.

“In that case, let’s venture a bit deeper into the forest. Do we all feel fine in terms of stamina?”

We all nodded in response to Haruka’s question, and Haruka nodded back, satisfied. “All right. Let’s venture about an hour deeper into the forest. If we don’t encounter any orcs during that time, we should start heading back to town. It’s too dangerous to continue exploring the forest in the dark, after all.”

“Yep,” I said. “We should pay attention as we explore.”

A while after we carefully ventured deeper into the forest, my Scout skill picked up three signals. Each of the signals was stronger than a goblin’s but weaker than a wipe bear’s.

“I’ve detected three signals. They’re about eighty meters away from us.”

“Are they orcs?” Haruka asked.

“I’m not sure, but they seem like they’re weaker than wipe bears.”

“Should we avoid them since it’s a group of three?” Yuki asked.

“Let’s just go check what Nao detected first,” said Touya. “We’ll need to know how to tell them apart in the future anyway, right? I can just use my Appraisal at range to confirm.”

“Mm. Even if they are orcs and notice us, it should be fine as long as they’re weaker than wipe bears,” said Natsuki.

“In that case, let’s carefully approach the signals,” said Haruka. “Lead the way, Nao.”

“Okay.”

We headed in a different direction from the one that we had been going in. The signals that I’d detected came into sight within a minute.

“Those things are hobgoblins,” said Touya. “They’re slightly stronger than regular goblins, and the magicite you can get from them goes for about six hundred Rea.”

“Is that information you learned from your study session at the guild?” I asked.

“Yeah, I think so. The information that my Appraisal skill just displayed was taken from the documents that I looked through yesterday.”

The Appraisal skill seemed like it could be used as a convenient way to archive notes in your mind and recall them readily. We hadn’t encountered that many monsters so far, but it would probably be hard for us to remember everything we’d encountered once we got to know about more and more monsters.

“It looks like the hobgoblins haven’t noticed us yet, so let’s take the initiative and attack them first,” said Haruka. “Nao, fight alongside me. Can you join us as well, Yuki?”

“Well, I have the Fire Arrow spell now, but I’m not sure if I’ll be of much

help...”

Per usual, Yuki had used her Copy skill to get my Fire Magic skill; she was able to use that and some other basic spells now. However, her Fire Arrow wasn't as powerful as mine, since I had made some adjustments to my version of the spell.

“Don't worry, I'll be on standby to act as backup,” said Natsuki.

“All right, let's get into formation,” said Haruka. “From left to right, it'll be me, Nao, and Yuki. Touya, Natsuki, don't charge in—we'll continue to shoot at the hobgoblins even if they don't die in one hit. Only engage the hobgoblins if they manage to get close to us.”

“Gotcha.”

“Understood.”

The three of us who were long-range attackers nodded together and then started to prepare our attacks. Haruka and I matched our timing with Yuki's since she had the least experience and would have struggled to match us. A flurry of magic and arrows flew forward at about the same time. The first hit that landed was Haruka's arrow. It sank into a hobgoblin's head and caused it to wobble on its feet. That first hobgoblin collapsed to the ground, and simultaneously, my spell landed on the middle hobgoblin and blew off half of its head. Yuki's spell landed a few moments later and covered the face of the remaining hobgoblin in fire. It was easy to compare our attacks in terms of speed since we had launched them at roughly the same time. I had focused on potency instead of speed when I prepared my Fire Arrow, but it seemed like it was a bit excessive for hobgoblins. That meant it would be a good idea to take speed into consideration as well depending on what kind of foe I was facing in combat. On the other hand, Yuki's Fire Arrow was lacking in potency. It looked like it was about as strong as the Fire Arrow that I had been able to use when I first arrived in this world.

“Ugh, I'm the only one who didn't manage to finish a hobgoblin in one blow—wait, it's running away!” Yuki exclaimed.

I had thought the remaining hobgoblin would continue to approach us, but it looked like it was attempting to flee due to the fact that we had slain the other

two in one hit each. However, the moment it turned its back on us, it tripped and fell to the ground.

“Success!”

After Yuki yelled in excitement, Haruka fired off another arrow to finish the hobgoblin where it was lying on the ground.

“Was it your magic that made the hobgoblin trip, Yuki?” I asked.

“Yeah. It’s hard to nail the timing for foes that are already running, but it’s not that hard if I do it right before they start running.”

According to Yuki, she had made the ground sink a bit under the hobgoblin’s feet right before it was about to take a step forward. That was a good use of her spell, since anyone would trip if the ground below them sank a few centimeters right as they were starting to run. The potency of her Fire Arrow wasn’t that strong, but her decision-making was quite good considering that she had immediately adjusted to the situation and followed up with a different spell.

“Your Fire Arrow was quite amazing compared to mine, Nao. We used the same spell, didn’t we?”

“It was technically the same spell, but in this world, the names of spells are just a general guide to their effects.”

Casting a spell was more complex than just shouting its name, but as a result, you had much more freedom to change its effect depending on the amount of mana you used and the image that you conjured in your head while casting. However, it would confuse your party members if the same spell had completely different effects for different mages, so you would probably have to either control the area of effect for the spell or, if you altered it too much, just change its name.

“This was the first time we’ve fought hobgoblins, but I guess they’re not very strong,” said Yuki.

“Maybe. It seems like even Haruka’s arrow can kill them in one hit if she lands it in a lethal spot, but I can only cast that Fire Arrow about three times in a row,” I said. “I’ll run out of mana after a few dozen shots even if I take breaks.”



“In that case, we can probably safely take on about ten hobgoblins if Touya and I participate in combat as well,” said Natsuki.

“Mm. As long as we get the first strike, then Nao and I can probably slay about four of them before they get anywhere near us,” said Haruka. “Everyone aside from me can handle themselves in close-range combat, so let’s take on hobgoblins as long as they’re in a group of ten or fewer.”

“Sounds good. Well, let’s go retrieve the magicite from these hobgoblins,” said Touya. “I’m still not used to this, though. Six thousand yen, six thousand yen...”

Touya sighed but then resumed muttering that figure under his breath. It seemed like he was trying to distract himself as he smashed open the heads of the hobgoblins and retrieved their magicites. Haruka then used her Purification spell on Touya to clean him and the magicites. It was true that his sword was well suited to splitting heads open, but I was impressed by the fact that he had willingly taken on the task rather than making any of the girls do it. *I guess I’ll look for the magicite from the head of the hobgoblin that I blew off with my spell. Oh, there it is. I was worried that I’d destroyed the magicite, but it looks like it isn’t damaged at all. This might be a good way to retrieve magicite from monsters since I don’t need to smash their heads open. Magicites seem to be sturdier than I would have expected.*

“Monsters like hobgoblins would be a good source of money if we encountered them as frequently as you would an enemy in a game, but it doesn’t seem worth it at all since we have to spend time to seek them out and to extract their magicites,” said Yuki. “It’s a shame, isn’t it?”

“Mm. The location of the magicite in hobgoblins isn’t convenient either,” said Natsuki.

The exact location of magicites differed for each species of monster, but there were two typical spots. Common monsters, like goblins, would usually either have their magicite inside of their head or in the center of their body, near the equivalent of the solar plexus in humans. The latter would be an easier place to retrieve magicites from, but the former was more common for species related to goblins. Orcs fell into that category, but orc meat would sell for money as

well, so you would have to dress orcs regardless of whether you wanted their magicites. This meant that the ease of retrieval for magicites didn't really matter when it came to orcs, sadly.

"All we got for slaying three hobgoblins is the equivalent of eighteen thousand yen," said Touya. "Ugh, I don't really want to go out of our way to hunt them. Can we avoid them if possible? Nao, can you tell hobgoblins apart from other signals with your Scout skill?"

"Uh, I think I can once I get familiar with them. It'll take a while, though. I'll probably mistake them for other monsters or animals for a bit until I get used to it."

"That's fine. Everyone else down with this idea?"

"Yeah, I'm down," said Yuki. "I'd prefer to not have to do what you just did to retrieve the magicites, Touya..."

Natsuki put in, "I'm willing to do that work if needed, but..."

"Sure, Touya. In that case, let's just slay hobgoblins with magic if we happen to encounter more of them," said Haruka. "We can retrieve their magicites easily that way."

"Gotcha. I'd prefer the magic method as well," I said. "All right, let's get going on."

Splitting open the head of another humanoid made an uncomfortable sight for everyone, so none of us said no to Touya's idea. We resumed our search for orcs after that discussion. A few minutes later, I detected two signals with my Scout skill that seemed to be stronger than wipe bears.

"Two signals that seem to be slightly stronger than wipe bears are approaching us."

Right away, Natsuki said, "Those two are probably orcs. The only other monsters in this area that are stronger than wipe bears are ogres, but ogres are quite rare." According to her, my Scout skill would probably have detected much stronger signals if they were ogres.

"What's the plan?" I asked. "We don't have much time before they get close."

I wasn't sure if the two creatures detected by my Scout skill had noticed us yet, but they were approaching us in a straight line. We probably only had less than a minute left to prepare for combat.

"Leave them to Touya and me this time," said Natsuki. "Back us up if things look bad."

Haruka agreed to Natsuki's plan right away and took a step back as she lifted her bow in order to be able to react if necessary. "Okay. Good luck."

Touya and Natsuki then stepped forward. They looked ready to take on whatever was coming. Yuki and I held up our weapons as well and started to prepare spells. Fire Arrow was a fairly quick spell that wouldn't take too long to charge, so I could use it to distract foes if needed.

Our foes came into sight soon afterwards. *Wait, what?! These things don't look like what I expected at all!* I had been imagining something like a bipedal pig, fat and hairless, but the orcs I saw were covered in fur. They looked like they had a powerful physique, and they might have been taller than three meters, about the same as a wipac bear. They kind of looked like a boar version of wipac bears. I could see some short fangs in their mouths as well, which was another similarity they had with boars.

Each of the orcs had a thick tree branch in its hands, I assumed to use as a club. Those branches looked like they hadn't been improved in any way from their default state. The monsters also weren't wearing any sort of clothes. That meant that each of them had another stick visible near its groin, although those sticks appeared to be retractable. The balls were still quite visible, but the sticks seemed to be in a neutral state. *Whew, I'm glad those sticks aren't bulging and pointing up in the air. If they were, I bet none of us would be willing to get close to them. I hope these orcs don't get excited down there from the thrill of battle...*

"It looks like these two orcs already noticed us a while back," said Haruka.

"Yeah. I'm not sure when they noticed us, though," I said. "Perhaps they sniffed us out?"

The two orcs were carefully approaching us while holding up their tree branches, ready for combat. They had definitely noticed us before we had been

able to see them. I had heard stories before about how boars and pigs had good noses and were able to sniff out things like truffles, so it was possible, depending on the direction of the wind, that they'd been able to detect us from outside of my Scout skill's range.

Once the orcs got closer to us, the first person who made a move was Natsuki. She rose out of a crouch and swiftly dashed forward, and Touya followed right behind. The orcs attempted to react, but they were a little bit too slow. Natsuki had already thrust her spear forward by the time the orcs started to raise their tree branches. Her spear stabbed through the jaw of the orc in front of her and pierced all the way through the back of its head. The tip of the blade was completely covered in blood. It looked like instant death for the orc; the tree branch fell from its hands to the ground.

On the other hand, Touya's clash with the orc in front of him was still ongoing. Swords had a shorter reach than spears, so it was only natural that he wouldn't be able to pull off the same feat that Natsuki had. He jumped in front of the orc and swung down with his sword, but the orc managed to block it in time with its branch. Touya's sword sank about halfway into the tree branch, but it looked like the branch was too thick for Touya's sword to slice in half. The orc attempted to smash Touya against a tree while his sword was stuck in the tree branch, but Touya managed to pull out his sword in time and backed away from the orc.

"Do you need help?!" I exclaimed.

"I'm fine!" Touya yelled and then took another step back. He crouched down for a moment and then jumped forward with the shield in his left hand held in front of him, angled towards the orc's left leg. The shield collided with the orc's thigh and made a loud sound upon impact. Next I heard a sound of something snapping, which overlapped with a scream from the orc. The orc started to collapse, and Touya maneuvered behind it so that it fell onto his upraised sword and died midfall.

"That was amazing."

I applauded after I said that, but Touya didn't seem happy to hear my praise. "Natsuki was way more amazing, so..."

“It’s just the difference between the reach of our weapons, Touya-kun. I can’t use the Charge skill that you used just now.”

“Oh yeah, I think this is the first battle where I’ve seen you take the time to use that skill properly, Touya,” I said.

“The skill seems to affect how I step forward when I swing my sword, but it’s true that this was the first time I used it to ram into something. It was stronger than I thought it would be.”

Touya had managed to snap the orc’s femur in one blow just by ramming into it with his shield. Instead of aiming at the joints from the side of the leg, he had attacked from the front, where the leg was covered in muscle, so the fact that the Charge skill had been enough to break the femur was an indication of just how much stronger it made Touya’s tackle.

“Was that use of the Charge skill really a good choice, though, Touya?” Haruka asked. “You got lucky in that you managed to snap the orc’s femur in one blow, but it was a bad idea to aim for the front. You should have at least tried to aim for the joints.”

“Yeah. If the orc had managed to withstand your attack, then you would’ve gotten smashed in the back with that thick tree branch while you tried to get behind it,” said Yuki.

Touya scratched his head; he had a bitter smile on his face. “I guess that’s true. It looks like I need to get more experience with combat against foes that have different builds.”

“Well, I feel like you would’ve been able to prevail just fine even if you hadn’t used the Charge skill,” I said. “There was a good chance your tackle wouldn’t have worked due to the difference in build between you and the orc, so it wasn’t a safe choice to make.”

“There’s no need to be so harsh,” said Natsuki. “It was our first battle with orcs. Touya-kun probably chose to fight that way because he had three other people to back him up. I’m sure he would have been more careful if that wasn’t the case. Right, Touya-kun?”

“Oh, uh, yeah, that’s right.”

The way Natsuki had phrased it, it sounded like it wasn't a bad idea for Touya to try out different things while he had a safety net, meaning us, to back him up.

"Honestly, though, the orcs were weaker than I thought they would be," said Touya. "Natsuki managed to slay an orc in one hit as well."

"Mm. They were quite slow and didn't feel very strong at all," said Natsuki. "Well, perhaps it's not that strange."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"My Spearmanship skill is Level 4, and Touya's Swordsmanship skill is Level 3," said Natsuki. "If the level cap for skills is Level 10, then our levels are relatively high. On the other hand, what if you compare orcs to monsters in general?"

Orcs were one of the stronger foes that you could encounter in this area, but there were ogres here as well, and they were apparently even stronger than orcs. Relative to monsters in general, orcs were actually weak foes. At the same time, orcs were enough of a challenge for us that most normal people in this world probably couldn't take them on.

"Mm, what Natsuki said makes perfect sense," said Haruka. "However, there are other factors that affect your combat abilities, such as character levels and experience with combat, so you can't measure strength from skill levels alone."

"Yeah. My Spearmanship skill is still Level 2, but I feel like I've gotten a lot better at using a spear since I first started out," I said.

*I really wonder why I still haven't been able to level up my Spearmanship skill. It's not like I've slacked off on training, but I've only been at it for less than two months, so I guess it's not too strange. If you could level a skill up with just a few months of training, then there was no way the cap would be as low as Level 10.*

"Oh, my Archery skill has actually leveled up to Level 3," said Haruka.

"Wait, really?" I asked. "I've put more time into training with my spear than you have into training with your bow, haven't I?"

*Huh? Is it that easy to level up a skill? Haruka can use more spells than me, so*

*surely she's spent more time practicing magic than I have...*

“Hold up, Nao. I’ve spent a ton of time training with my sword,” said Touya. “Sure, I spent some time training with a baton for the Staff Fighting skill, but I’ve still spent way more time training with my sword than Haruka has with her bow! And yet my Swordsmanship skill is still only Level 3!”

“I mean, it kind of makes sense since you need to level up from Level 3 to Level 4, which might be a bigger increment than Level 2 to Level 3. However, Haruka and I both started at Level 2 for our respective skills, and we both had the aptitude skills as well...”

*Is there a difference between aptitude skills depending on who has them? Maybe it's like how two people can both have an aptitude for sports, but one person might only be good enough to become an “average” pro athlete, while the other person might be good enough to participate in the Olympics.*

“There’s no point in comparing,” said Haruka. “Touya managed to learn the Staff Fighting skill and level it up to Level 2 even though he doesn’t have the corresponding aptitude skill.”

“I guess that’s true...” I said.

I had already known back on Earth that there was no point in comparing myself to someone else and feeling bad about myself. If I’d been the type of person who’d get mad about the fact that I had worse grades than people like Haruka even though I spent more time studying, then I wouldn’t be able to remain friends with her. Instead of comparing myself to others, it would be a better use of my time to ask people like Haruka for advice.

“Let’s stop chatting here and finish gutting the orcs so we can return to town,” said Yuki. “We don’t have much time left before sunset, right?”

“Oh yeah, sorry,” I said.

We all set to gutting the orcs. Luckily, Touya and I had managed to learn the Disassemble skill, and Haruka had managed to level hers up to Level 2, so the process went more smoothly and efficiently than in the past. Natsuki was the only one among us who didn’t have the Disassemble skill yet, but she had experience with using knives due to being a skilled cook, so she would probably

be able to learn Disassemble as well within a short time. However, despite the fact that the gutting process itself went smoothly, there was a large amount of meat; we had gutted two orcs that were each larger than a wipac bear. We would barely be able to bring it all back with us, so we cleanly removed parts like ribs to reduce the load that we would have to carry. We retrieved the same internal organs that we did from boars for use as offal. We also discarded the head, hands, and legs of the orcs since they looked disgusting to us. Toes weren't exactly an enticing part to bring back.

"Why do these orcs have toes even though they look similar to boars?" Yuki asked.

"It's true that boars are part of the *Artiodactyla* order of mammals, but it's not like they don't have toes," said Haruka.

"Really?"

"Mm, Haruka's right. Well, I'm not sure if you can really call them toes, but their hooves are a result of the devolution of what used to be their third and fourth toes," said Natsuki. "It's possible that some boar-like creatures still have toes if this devolutionary process didn't occur in them. It's also possible that they lost their toes and then obtained them again through some further evolutionary process, but I'm not sure."

*Oh, hooves are toes?* It sounded like boars had probably evolved into orcs in this world, but it was also possible that orcs were a result of a different evolutionary process. There was also the possibility that evolution wasn't relevant and that monsters were just like this, but one way or another, it wasn't strange for them to have toes.

"Oh yeah, now that I think about it, cats and dogs have toes as well," I said.

"Mm. It doesn't occur to you often, though, since what comes to mind is the word paw," said Yuki.

According to Yuki, most cats and dogs had five toes on their front paws and four toes on their back paws.

"These orcs have four toes on their feet and five fingers on their hands, so they're kind of similar to cats and dogs," said Touya.



“I see. You don’t have to show them to make that point, though,” I said.

Touya had lifted up one of the severed legs to show us the foot. Orcs looked closer to monkeys than cats or dogs, so it wasn’t a pleasant sight.

“Are you sure? This is kind of interesting from a biological standpoint.”

“Leave that to the scholars who specialize in this field. Let’s hurry up and finish gutting the rest of these orcs.”

“Good point. Well, we’re almost done anyway.”

We sliced up the meat, sorted the pieces based on what part of the body they’d come from, and then stuffed them into our backpacks. As for the meat that didn’t fit our backpacks, we shoved it into different bags that we lined up on the ground. We had a total of five bags stuffed with meat, although they weren’t uniform in size. To get everything back to town in one trip, each of us would have to carry one bag. The only parts of the orcs left sitting on the ground were their hands, legs, bones, heads, and their internal organs. *This actually kind of looks like the site of a murder...*

“Hmm, I kind of feel like it’s a waste to leave the bones here. We could use these bones to make tonkotsu pork broth if we brought them back with us...”

“Is that seriously what comes to your mind looking at this sight, Touya?!” I exclaimed. “It’s enough to make me lose my appetite!”

Touya’s mental fortitude was way stronger than it had been initially. When we’d first gutted a boar together, he’d had the same pale face I had, but it seemed like that kind of thing didn’t bother him at all anymore. *Am I going to end up like him eventually and think “Delicious!” when I see internal organs? Ugh...*

“That’s a bad idea, Touya,” said Haruka.

*Yeah, scold him more, Haruka!*

“Pork bones stink, and it takes a lot of time to make tonkotsu pork broth. We can’t do that until we have our own house.”

“Is that the only reason?!” I exclaimed. “Isn’t tonkotsu pork broth useless unless you want to make ramen?”

“Kind of. Tonkotsu pork broth isn’t something you make at home unless you have a lot of time. It’s not worth the cost.”

You would have to wash, break, and simmer the pork bones, and then simmer them again with vegetables and stock. If you took into account the total amount of fuel, time, and other materials needed, then it was way too much just to make ramen for a few people. It wasn’t like you could preserve tonkotsu pork broth for very long either, so you couldn’t just make a lot at one time and save some for future use. *Actually, maybe we can preserve tonkotsu pork broth with the tools we have now. We’ve made magic bags enchanted with the Slow Time spell, so...*

“Come on, let’s get going,” said Yuki. “Like I mentioned earlier, we don’t have much time left, right?”

“Right. It’ll get dark soon if we don’t hurry up,” said Haruka. “Nao, Touya, try to plot a path back that doesn’t run into any foes along the way.”

Haruka made it sound like no big deal, but I sighed in response to her request. “It’s not as easy as you think, Haruka. Let’s just return via the path we took to get here. I’ll do my best, but it’s just a matter of luck whether we get back without encountering more orcs.”

Hobgoblins wouldn’t be too hard to avoid, but the orcs we’d encountered today had seemed like they’d already noticed us by the time that I detected them with my Scout skill. If that wasn’t a coincidence, it meant orcs were able to detect other living beings from farther away than I could.

We did our best to pay attention to our surroundings as we made our way back. The path that we had taken was already clear of monsters, so it was technically safe. Monsters would move around, of course, but it was still safer than taking a different path back to town.

Luckily, we managed to get out of the forest without encountering any monsters. A zero encounter rate would probably make people frustrated in a game, but it was a good thing for us. In fact, if the encounter rate in reality was as high as it was in games, then monsters would have quickly surrounded us and killed us. Unlike animals, monsters were generally hostile and would attack people unprovoked, so there was no way we could ignore monsters that were

nearby and ready to attack us.

We arrived back in Laffan much later than usual. Most adventurers had probably returned to their inns already; the Adventurers' Guild was mostly empty when we entered it.

Diola-san was sitting at the counter with a worried look on her face. "Oh, I'm so glad to see you all! I was concerned since you were out later than usual..."

"Sorry for making you worry, Diola-san," said Haruka.

Diola-san stood up and let out a deep sigh of relief, and we all lowered our heads in apology. We'd never kept her apprised of our schedules before, but we would usually return to the guild at around the same time in the afternoon, so the fact that we had returned later than usual today must have caused her worry about us. Under normal circumstances, if we didn't show up at the usual time, she would probably just think that we were taking a day off, but it was a bit different in this case. We had taken a day off yesterday due to the rain and had mentioned to Diola-san that we were going to search for magical mushrooms, so her reaction was only natural.

"Hmm, it seems like none of you got injured." Diola-san smiled at first when she noticed that we were all fine, but that smile turned bitter when she saw the bags that we were carrying. "In fact, your party seems to have brought back a huge haul."

"Mm, it was a bit of a hassle to bring this all back," said Haruka.

"We slew some orcs today!" Yuki exclaimed.

"Orcs?! Well, then. Oh, those bags must be heavy, so let's assess them first."

Diola-san took us to the same warehouse in the backyard of the guild that we'd visited the last time. The assessed value of our haul was 72,800 Rea for the magicites, meat, and fur of the orcs and 32,000 Rea for the herbs and mushrooms, which meant that our total earnings for the day were a little bit over one hundred gold coins. *Hmm, at this pace, it'll only take us two days to earn enough money to purchase the land we want—as long as it doesn't rain again.*

"Congratulations. Your party has met the requirements for ranking up. You

are now Rank 2 adventurers.”

Diola-san had requested that we turn in our adventurer cards with the materials being assessed, and she returned them to us along with our earnings. I took a look at my card and saw a second seal engraved on the back. According to Diola-san, Rank 2 adventurers were just regarded as rookies with a little experience, but we were all happy about the fact that we’d ranked up. In fact, Touya and Yuki were grinning as they looked at the back of their own cards.

“Rank 2 is also the rank at which the death rate for adventurers starts to increase due to overconfidence and recklessness, so please keep that in mind. I believe your party will be fine since you’re all careful, but you never know. It’s painful to wait for adventurers who never come back...”

“Okay. Thank you for looking out for us, Diola-san,” said Natsuki. “We don’t intend to take on more than what we can handle, so we should be fine.”

“Hmm. Your party took on orcs within only a few months of registering as adventurers, though...”

*Oh, I guess most normal adventurers don’t challenge orcs that fast.*

“If you encounter orcs in an area, then it’s possible that there’s a nest located nearby. It’s dangerous to fight in that general vicinity, since a lot more orcs might show up during combat. Please make sure to be extra careful when fighting orcs, okay?”

“Oh. It definitely sounds like we could end up in a bad situation if we’re not careful,” said Natsuki.

This information was quite important to us, since it was highly likely that orcs were able to detect us from outside of the range of my Scout skill. We could probably handle ourselves against three or four orcs, but it was a fact that numbers could decide a battle. If the number of orcs swelled to ten or even more, then we would most likely die.

“Thank you for the information, Diola-san,” said Haruka. “We’ll be sure to keep it in mind and put it to use.”

It would probably be a good idea to consider fleeing from battle if things got dire. We also needed to improve our ability to scout out foes. We all thanked

Diola-san again and then left the guild and headed back to our inn.



We spent the next two days hunting orcs. We didn't forget what Diola-san had told us, but orcs were our only realistic source of income; we hadn't earned much from magical mushrooms. Most of the areas where we had initially gathered mushrooms were still empty, and in most of the new areas that we had discovered immature mushrooms, they seemed to have been eaten up by animals, so we earned barely any income at all from mushrooms. *Aera-san was right—you have to get lucky. This isn't a good way of earning money over a long period of time. We really were fortunate to find three spots full of magical mushrooms the first time we went looking for them.*

As for orcs, we'd encountered another problem. They were a good source of money, but once we'd gathered their meat and other materials, we had trouble carrying it all back to town with us. After we'd slain and dressed two orcs, our bags would be completely full, so we'd have to stop hunting and foraging and head back to Laffan by about noon. As a result, we had more free time for training, so it wasn't that bad, but it felt like we were wasting time that we could have spent earning more money. With that in mind, we needed to make magic bags enchanted with Spatial Expansion as soon as possible. It wouldn't make the bags lighter, though, so we needed to double-enchant magic bags with Light Weight as well. I had managed to learn how to cast Spatial Expansion yesterday, so hopefully this problem could be solved within the next few days.

Actually, Yuki had figured out Spatial Expansion quicker than I did. *Is it because I didn't try hard enough? Well, I'm still better than her at controlling mana, and after she gave me some tips about Spatial Expansion, I got the hang of it right away, so it's not like I didn't put in any effort, right? I guess I should spend more time practicing this spell during the block of training time before bed.*

The next day, our orc hunting was cut short; by the time we got to the forest, the sky looked like it could rain at any moment. We slew one tusk boar and then headed back to the Adventurers' Guild. After Diola-san paid us for the boar parts, we asked her how the negotiations for the land purchase were going.

“The negotiations are going well. They should be wrapped up within the next few days.”

“Really? I thought it would take much longer,” said Haruka.

“You’ve all been doing your best to save up money, so I did my best as well. It was quite easy to...convince...the owner with my connections and abilities.”

Diola-san smiled; she sounded quite competent. *I’ll pretend I didn’t notice the scary implication behind her words, though.*

“I don’t really feel like we’ve worked that hard, though,” I said. “I mean, recently we’ve been returning to town quite early.”

“That’s true, but your party has managed to hunt orcs and return to town unscathed each time. Most Rank 1 and Rank 2 adventurers spend the entire day out hunting but come back empty-handed,” said Diola. “They often just bring some herbs back with them so that they don’t end up with zero income for the day. And even if they do succeed in slaying an orc, they often just spend the money on alcohol over the next few days.”

“The next few days? How can they save up money if they spend it all like that?” Touya asked.

A party of five or six adventurers would be able to earn about six gold coins per person from one orc. That amount of money would disappear in no time if you spent it on good food and drink. Adventurers would need to spend money on equipment as well, so that level of income wasn’t enough to justify slacking off even for just a few days. Our party had been able to save money because the lodging fees at The Slumbering Bear were quite cheap, and because none of us would spend money on luxury goods like alcohol. On top of that, we didn’t need to spend money on clothes either thanks to the party members with the Sewing skill.

“Exactly. Adventurers like that will never rank up, but then, most adventurers don’t plan for the future, so...” According to Diola-san, that also meant that adventurers with a clear vision or goal for their futures would steadily climb up in rank over time. “It’s possible to get as far as Rank 4 through effort alone, so adventurers who barely make any progress towards that level generally don’t have a bright future.”

“What happens to those adventurers when they get older, Diola-san?” Yuki asked.

“Well, most of them don’t get older, since they end up dying young.”

Yuki’s face went rigid with shock. “Huh?”

“Among those adventurers, there are some who make the decision to quit, and some who are lucky enough to find stable employment, but most adventurers are people who are so certain of success that they don’t plan ahead, so...”

*Is that like the delusions of grandeur that a lot of teenagers have? If we’re considered adults in this world, then I guess most young people who want to become adventurers are around middle school age, so that makes sense. Kids like that probably continue working as adventurers as long as they think they’re special or different from others, but then they end up in early graves. Mm, we should avoid that at all costs. It’s important to have a house and money saved up.*

“When I first encountered an orc, I felt like it wouldn’t be too difficult to slay one at a time as long as we had a numerical advantage,” said Natsuki. “Is it just hard to find orcs that aren’t in groups?”

“It’s just that you’re quite strong, Natsuki-san,” said Diola-san. “Most rookie adventurers are young people from the countryside, so they’re usually amateurs who only have experience swinging around wooden staves. Rookies like that could probably handle goblins, but orcs are much too difficult for them.”

The difference was probably a lack of skills. We had started with weapon skills, so that gave us a huge advantage over other rookies. It would be a different story if those rookies were lucky enough to find a master who could teach them how to fight with a proper weapon before they became adventurers, but lessons would most likely cost money that amateurs didn’t have.

“On top of that,” Diola-san said, “there are almost no rookies out there who are patient enough to save up money for high-quality weapons like the one you have, Natsuki-san.”

The weapon that Natsuki was using was the spear that I had bought; it was worth the equivalent of one million and four hundred thousand yen. It definitely wasn't an amount that an ordinary kid of middle school age would be able to afford. On the other hand, cheap weapons would be less durable. The spear I was using now had originally belonged to Natsuki, but I wouldn't feel comfortable confronting an orc with it; the spear would probably snap in half if I wasn't careful.

"It's also hard to find single orcs that aren't in groups," Diola-san added. "It's difficult for rookies to deal with multiple orcs at once, so orcs are quite dangerous for them."

What all this meant was that we were able to slay orcs thanks to our weapon skills and my Scout skill. The "evil" god hadn't given us any overpowered cheat skills, but the skills that he had given us had helped us earn money quite easily. *I guess we should also thank him for sending us here to Laffan instead of some other place where it might be harder or more dangerous to earn money.*

"Also, I'm quite glad your party is able to bring back orc meat on a consistent basis, Natsuki-san. Orc meat is quite popular, after all."

"Do you also like orc meat, Diola-san?" Natsuki asked.

"Mm, I do. I managed to get my hands on some thanks to your party!" Diola-san smiled; she sounded quite happy. Meat was a bit expensive in this world, but it was affordable enough that an ordinary citizen could eat it every day. However, it sounded like Diola-san had obtained orc meat the same way she had obtained dindels in the past: by purchasing them at a "fair" price from the guild. Of course, Diola-san was the vice-branch master of the Adventurers' Guild here at Laffan, so there technically wasn't anything illegal about what she'd done.

"I'm glad our efforts have helped you out," said Haruka. "We'll probably be taking tomorrow off, though."

"Mm, it looks like it's going to rain tomorrow. I'll probably end up free as well, so I'll use tomorrow to head over and continue negotiations with the owner of that plot of land."

"Thank you very much, Diola-san. We'll work on saving the money we need to



purchase the land.”

“Mm, leave the negotiations to me—and expect good news soon.”



The rain that had started yesterday showed no signs of stopping today. As a result, we all took the day off work and spent our time training indoors. I practiced my Time Magic, while Yuki and Haruka practiced both magic and alchemy. Natsuki practiced embroidering magic circles. Touya was the only one among us who had nothing to do indoors, so he rolled around in his bed for a bit and then yelled “Time to practice fighting in the rain!” and dashed outside. The rest of us hadn’t commented on the fact that Touya was doing nothing, but he must have felt self-conscious. None of us were worried about Touya catching a cold since he had Level 4 Robust.

“I hope we can successfully enchant a magic bag with both Light Weight and Spatial Expansion today,” I said.

“We’ve both gotten decently good at casting Spatial Expansion, so it’ll probably work out,” said Yuki.

“I hope so.”

Luckily for us, we could practice the enchanting process as much as we wanted as long as we just released the mana that we inserted into the magic circles. Magic circles drawn in ink would degrade in quality if you inserted mana into them over and over, but the embroidery circles showed no signs of wear so far. However, we were still practicing on regular burlap instead of backpacks just in case we made a mistake. Haruka, Yuki, and I were only able to practice enchanting because Natsuki kept working on the monotonous task of embroidery quietly and without complaint, so I truly appreciated her patience.

“Sorry about this, Natsuki. We should be done soon,” I said.

“Don’t worry about it, Nao-kun. Besides, I don’t mind working on embroidery.”

So she claimed, anyway, but it didn’t change the fact that she’d had to repeat the tedious process over and over. It wasn’t like she was doing ordinary embroidery, where the designs themselves would hold a certain amount of

interest. She'd probably just said that so that I wouldn't feel bad about it.

"I can get the first half of the enchanting process done," I said, "but it's the second half that I'm struggling with..."

The enchanting process required you to insert mana into the circle while simultaneously maintaining a spell in the state right before activation. I was struggling with the latter part of the process—keeping the spells in that state of readiness. The spells would falter when I was about halfway done with inserting mana, which would make the mana itself escape as well. It seemed like Haruka had no trouble with controlling the mana that I had inserted, so I felt a bit bad that I was holding us back.

"Do you want to try doing this on a smaller bag first?" Haruka asked. "It should take less time to insert mana into a smaller magic circle."

"Uh, I don't think that's the problem here..."

It would be a waste to insert a large amount of mana into a small magic circle like I had done the first time. The most efficient way to perform the enchanting process in the shortest amount of time would be to insert an amount of mana that exactly matched the size of a magic circle. I wouldn't have to spend a lot of time keeping spells in the ready state if I was working with a small magic circle on a small bag. However, the problem wasn't just readying the spells. It felt like there was something else holding me back too, but I didn't know how to put it into words.

While I was pondering what to do, Yuki asked, "Hey, Nao, have you read this part?" She showed me a passage in the advanced grimoire on Time Magic.

"Hmm? This is in the advanced grimoire, so I've only skimmed it." I was still struggling to fully understand all of the concepts in the beginner grimoire on Time Magic, so I hadn't carefully looked through the spells in the advanced grimoire.

"In that case, take a closer look at this section here."

"Oh, let's see... 'Can you earn a lot of money with Time Magic?' Huh? What does this have to do—"

Yuki ignored me. "Just read it."

“O-Okay...?” I followed her instructions and began to read.

### *Article: Can You Earn a Lot of Money with Time Magic?*

*Hello, readers! I hope your attempts at learning Time Magic are going well. But perhaps some of you have almost given up due to the difficulties involved. I know exactly how you feel. Compared to other types of magic, Time Magic is far more difficult to make use of. For example, Fire Magic is quite simple: it just creates explosions that go “Boom!” and “Bang!” Water Magic can be used to create water, which everyone needs, and can also turn water into ice to deal damage against foes. On top of that, you can sell ice during summer to earn some easy cash, so Water Magic users have an easy life. Earth Magic may seem quite plain, but it’s more useful than you might think. With Earth Magic, you can help out with construction work without risking physical injury no matter how old you get, so it can be a good source of income as well. The value of Light Magic should be obvious due to the high demand even for mages who can only use Level 1. As for mages who reach Level 5 or Level 6, everyone will respect them, and they can enjoy a luxurious life if they’re so inclined. On the other hand, Wind Magic is close to Time Magic in that it isn’t very useful at low levels, although it is convenient in other respects. Darkness Magic? That’s in a completely different category. It’s not something that you can easily categorize as useful or not.*

*All right, let’s get back to the main topic. It’s a fact that Time Magic is harder to use than other types of magic. It’s essentially useless from Level 1 to Level 3, so when I reached Level 4 and learned the spell Sanctuary, I didn’t have high expectations. However, Sanctuary is the spell that I ended up using the most often. It’s quite useful for when you need to camp outside. Bugs can’t enter the area covered by the spell. Well, that isn’t how the spell is meant to be used; the way higher-level mages use Sanctuary is much more amazing. When my master in Time Magic used this spell, it was strong enough to deflect both arrows and spells. I was quite happy when I learned to use Teleportation at Level 6 but became quite depressed when I discovered right away that I could only teleport short distances within my field of vision. It’s different if a higher-level mage uses Teleportation, though. However, very few people can reach that mastery of Time Magic. It’s not easy to acquire Level 6 spells in the first place either.*

“Uh, Yuki, all I see here are complaints...”

“Don’t worry—just read it to the end.”

“Okay, I guess? I think it’ll be a waste of time, though...”

*Because of all these difficulties, most mages give up on Time Magic midway through. Mages who have mastered Time Magic are a wonder to behold, but it’s hard for people to stay motivated if the only spells they can use at first aren’t useful or flashy. Not everyone can spend all their time practicing magic, and the fact that Time Magic isn’t useful at first is also a problem from the standpoint of earning money. When people think of earning money with Time Magic, magic bags are usually the first thing that springs to mind. Almost everyone knows about magic bags and the fact that Time Magic is necessary to make them. And it’s true that you’ll be set for life if you can make magic bags. In fact, I myself managed to earn quite a lot from making magic bags, which is why I have the leisure time to spend writing.*

*Nevertheless, I’m afraid I have some disappointing news. Magic bags are not as easy to make as one might think. Level 3 is sufficient for all the spells you really need to make magic bags, so you might think that even people who give up on mastering higher-level Time Magic can make them, but there’s a catch. If it were that easy to make magic bags, then there would be many more on the market. The fact that the supply of bags is so low is proof that it’s not that simple. In order to make magic bags, you need to have an alchemist assist you. The alchemist doesn’t need to be very experienced, but they need to have the aptitude for alchemy. Not just anyone can fulfill this role. The alchemist also needs to be closely synchronized with the mage. Attempts to make magic bags won’t go well if the two aren’t personally compatible with each other. Of course, that also means everything will go well if the two are quite compatible with each other. In fact, my alchemist partner happens to be my wife, ha ha!*

*Ah, my mistake—I got sidetracked again. To return to the topic of magic bags: the process of enchanting a magic bag isn’t especially difficult when you only need to enchant it with one spell. That spell can be Light Weight, Slow Time, or Spatial Expansion. Even a beginner at Time Magic can probably succeed at this. However, magic bags enchanted with only one spell are worthless on the market. Rather, most prospective buyers only value magic bags that are*

*enchanted with all three of those spells. It has to do with their expectations, I suppose. I personally believe that magic bags with just one enchantment can still be useful depending on how you use them. That doesn't change the fact that they don't sell, however. That's one reason that I myself struggled to earn money with Time Magic at first. Users of Time Magic have no choice but to do their best to make magic bags that are enchanted with all three spells, since those are what most people consider to be true magic bags.*

*However, this is where the real difficulties begin. First of all, you need to be able to cast three spells at the same time. It's rather like writing with pens in both of your hands while you sketch with pens in both of your feet. I regret to say that I don't really have any advice in that regard. All you can do is practice until you can use the spells subconsciously, I suppose. Practice makes perfect, after all.*

*The next part is probably the hardest of all to get a handle on. You have to insert the spells into a magic circle, but it won't work if you insert them all at once. I struggled with this point myself for some time. I tried many different methods, such as inserting the spells at the same time, inserting them in sequence, and changing the sequence, but none of my efforts were successful. It was a painful process of trial and error, and I would probably have given up had my wife not been at my side to cheer me up. Those days helped us reaffirm our love for each other, so I don't regret them.*

*In any case, the answer was to mix all three spells together inside myself and then insert them into a magic circle. This point is a bit obscure, so let me elaborate. Think of the three spells as three different colors. What you have to do is blend those three colors together into a new color, which you then insert into the magic circle. That's how I at last succeeded. If you succeed as well, then you'll be able to earn a great deal of money and enjoy a luxurious life. Of course, you'll also need a life partner whom you get along with.*

*"What the hell is this?!" I exclaimed. "Most of this is just complaints about Time Magic and the writer rambling about how much he likes his wife! The only important information here was in the last few lines! Also, why is this information located in the advanced grimoire?!"*

*I had finished reading the section because Yuki had insisted, but most of it*

was useless. The advice that was in the last part was somewhat useful, but the writer could have just added a few lines to the section about magic bags in the beginner grimoire on Time Magic.

“Did the writer do this on purpose to annoy the reader?!”

Yuki nodded deeply. “Mm, I know exactly how you feel, Nao,” said Yuki. “This section was written in a way that makes the reader want to stop reading midway through, and it’s super long for no good reason. The fact that this section was labeled as an article also made it seem like it wasn’t relevant at first. The writer probably hid the important information there because he wanted the reader to struggle to find it, since he himself had struggled to figure it out.”

“Yeah, that makes perfect sense!” I exclaimed. “That would explain why he wrote this in the advanced grimoire!”

I would have probably read this article if it had been in the beginner grimoire near the section on magic bags, but it was located in the advanced grimoire instead. The advanced grimoire on Time Magic dealt with spells above Level 8 and difficult theoretical concepts, so most Time Magic mages probably wouldn’t even purchase it.

Haruka tilted her head as she watched me bond with Yuki over our shared hatred of the author of the grimoire. “Did you two find something useful?”

“It’s mostly useless, but there’s some advice that could be helpful,” said Yuki.

“Let’s just give it a try,” I said. “Are you ready, Haruka?”

“Yeah.”

The spells that I chose to use were Light Weight and Spatial Expansion, and I imagined them as the colors red and blue. I mixed them together to create purple and then began to insert the mix into the magic circle. *Oh, this went off without a hitch. I didn’t expect it to be that much easier than inserting two different spells at the same time. Hopefully the enchantment works.*

“Okay, I think we’re done?”

I hadn’t lost control of the mana that composed the mixed spell, so it felt like

I'd done better than on previous attempts. I wasn't sure if it had been a success, though.

"I didn't have any trouble either," said Haruka. "Let's test out the bag."

"Yeah."

The magic bag we had worked on this time was about the size of a convenience store shopping bag. I grabbed a spear that was leaning against the wall and thrust it into the bag.

"Whoa, it went in!"

It was quite surreal to see a two-meter spear go smoothly inside of the small bag without piercing through the other side. When I picked the bag up, I couldn't feel the weight of the spear inside it.

"Great job, Nao!" Yuki exclaimed. "This should make our lives much easier!"

"Yeah! I'm so glad! Let's mass-produce these right away!"

To celebrate our success, I clasped hands with Yuki and we jumped into the air together. We had both struggled with Time Magic, so the joy was mutual. *Man, Time Magic really is a difficult type of magic to master.*

"Don't be too hasty. We need to do other things before we produce more of these, like testing how much the magic bags can fit and how much the enchantment reduces their weight," said Haruka. "We also need to test if we can replicate this result with a larger magic circle. Oh, do you think you can add the Slow Time spell as well, Nao?"

Now that Haruka had stopped us from rushing ahead of ourselves, I paused in thought for a bit. "Hmm. It should be fine even with a larger magic circle. The process felt quite stable to me. However, I'm not sure about how mixing three spells will go." I was able to cast all three of the Time Magic spells at once, but I wasn't sure if I would be able to mix them together. There was another potential problem that I was worried about too. "This time, I assigned the colors red and blue to the different spells in my head, but what should I assign for the third spell? I don't know what the mixed color will end up as."

"Yellow would be a good choice to make it a set of primary colors," said

Haruka. “The result of mixing those three colors would be black, so it seems like you can’t mix more than three spells, right?”





“Yeah, that makes sense in terms of this method. Well, making magic bags is probably the only reason to mix spells, so I doubt you would ever need to mix more than three,” I said.

In fact, I couldn't think of a single situation where it would be useful to mix more than three spells. You could replace Slow Time with Time Stop if you wanted, but Time Stop was a Level 9 spell, so it was too difficult to be a realistic option.

“We don't know if you're capable of mixing three spells yet, Nao. Let's try this out first.”

“That's true.”

I took a deep breath to calm myself down before the next experiment. *I succeeded once, so I can succeed again.* After that, I slowly started to cast the three spells.

In the end, we managed to create a magic bag that was enchanted with Light Weight, Slow Time, and Spatial Expansion. However, we weren't able to enchant our backpacks in the same way. The largest bags that we succeeded with were about the same size as convenience store shopping bags. As a result, we disenchanting the backpacks and placed the smaller magic bags inside of the backpacks. This wasn't a problem for us at all as long as I did my best with enchanting the smaller bags. My Spatial Expansion was now capable of expanding the space inside the smaller bags by over one hundred times their original volume, and my Light Weight would reduce the objects inside to less than one percent of the original weight. We came up with those estimated values after we tested the bags by stuffing them full of different objects. The bags didn't seem to get anywhere near full, so those estimates were probably accurate enough.

Our new magic bags would essentially make it possible to carry an almost unlimited amount of orc meat from the woods back to Laffan. We would also be able to carry other things with us while working outdoors, such as tents, cooking utensils, and even the dried dindels and meat that we had left in storage back at The Slumbering Bear. The only problem with these new magic bags was that whatever went in them had to be small enough to fit through the

mouth of the bag. Unfortunately for us, you couldn't put an object inside a magic bag simply by touching them together the way you could in a video game. However, at the moment, the only thing we needed to store that wouldn't fit into the magic bags were the barrels of dried meat. We could just take the dried meat out of the barrels and then store the meat inside of the magic bags. Now that the barrels were empty, I kind of wanted to take one outside and bathe in it like an oil drum bath, but that probably wasn't going to be practical until we could make a magic bag with a large enough mouth to fit a barrel into. There was also a chance that we would get a house with a bath unit before that happened.



Our daily routine changed a bit after we had completed our new magic bags. We would head to the forest to look for game, gut them, and repeat the process until it was time to head back to town. Our new magic bags meant that we didn't really need to worry about the amount and condition of the materials we wanted to carry back, and that allowed us to operate on a fixed schedule each day. Orcs, being a decent source of money, were our main targets, and tusk boars were our second priority when we came across them. As for goblins, we would ignore them as long as they weren't anywhere near us. If we did run into some goblins, Yuki and I would just blow their heads off with the Fire Arrow spell. That would allow us to easily retrieve their magicites, although there were some occasions when the goblin heads would fly off in an unexpected direction and go missing. It was better than wasting a lot of time on goblins, though, so those incidents weren't really a loss for us.

As far as gathering plants and fungi, we would pick magical mushrooms if we came across them, but they were much rarer than they had been in the areas where we'd first found them. It made sense that they were as valuable as matsutake mushrooms. We had more or less stopped gathering herbs; they weren't worth our time anymore. We would only gather a few herbs so Natsuki could practice her Pharmacy skill.

Overall, our schedule had changed a lot thanks to our magic bags. It now consisted mostly of combat, although that was also because we decided to work on leveling up by slaying monsters. We all wanted to level up, but we

hadn't had an easy way to do so in the past, and if we'd gotten injured or even killed taking greater risks to level up, it would have defeated the purpose, which was to get stronger and better at defending ourselves. However, we had now discovered a monster that we could hunt down pretty easily—a monster that also happened to be a good source of income. We would probably have hesitated to hunt every day if we'd had to leave behind a lot of the meat, but that wasn't a problem anymore due to our new magic bags, so there was no reason for us not to hunt as many orcs as we could, and that was just what we did. In fact, we slew so many orcs that we had to make more magic bags to haul them back to town.

Our activities were a disaster for the orcs, but monsters couldn't really complain about being slain. However, the frequency with which we encountered orcs seemed to remain the same despite how many of them that we had slain, so they were truly a good resource for us. However, it was fairly obvious that we would invite unwanted attention if we were bringing materials worth a lot of gold to the guild day after day, so we decided to sell no more than four orcs at a time. We had discussed limiting it to just two orcs per day since that was the amount we would be able to carry back without magic bags, but we came to the conclusion that it was too difficult to hide the fact that we had magic bags. It would be a waste to not make use of them, so we had abandoned that idea.

Even so, trouble would eventually find us if word got out that we could make magic bags, so we purchased a cheap old knapsack and turned it into a decoy magic bag. We told Diola-san that we had borrowed it from an elf who had taught us how to fend for ourselves. It was still possible that other adventurers would attack us in an attempt to get the decoy bag, but it was a risk that we would have to take. If that did happen, we would just have to do our best to defeat our assailants. Laffan was relatively safe compared to other towns in this world, but that was no reason to let our guard down. It would probably be a good idea to work on ranking up as adventurers in order to dissuade potential attackers from the temptation of obtaining a magic bag by force. However, our main goal was still to get a house and to have our own private rooms. That goal seemed like it was coming close to fruition when we received an update from Diola-san about her negotiations with the owner of the land plot we wanted.

## Side Story—Tomi's Aspirations and Journey

After I had parted with Azuma—or rather, with Haruka-san's party—I went off on my own down the road that supposedly led to a town called Laffan. About a week had passed since my two companions had been killed, and while I hadn't been close with them back on Earth by any means, we had survived together for a few days in this world, so it was quite shocking to see them die in front of me. After a few days, that shock faded away and was replaced by fear and unease. I had nobody I could rely on for help now, and I felt quite disgusted with myself when I realized that.

However, that feeling of disgust also faded away after a day or so; I didn't have the time to wallow in self-pity. There wasn't much food for the foraging in the woods. What edible plants I did find, I had no choice but to eat raw since I didn't succeed at starting a fire. It wouldn't have been too difficult if I'd had a bow drill, but when I tried rubbing sticks together instead, that didn't work at all. As the days went by, I grew weaker and weaker until one day I collapsed to the ground from fatigue and hunger. I closed my eyes and was ready to accept death. When I opened my eyes again and saw a beautiful girl in front of me, I thought I must be in the afterlife. However, I realized that wasn't the case when I noticed Nagai-kun standing nearby. I felt quite relieved and thought I was saved, but my hopes were quickly dashed when Haruka-san told me to fend for myself.

At the time, I got quite emotional and even a bit angry, but in retrospect, Haruka-san's conclusion was actually perfectly reasonable. Haruka-san, Nagai-kun, and Kamiya-kun had all been transported to this different world under the same conditions I had, and they were probably struggling to survive as well. I would only hold them back if I tried to tag along. It was true that we were classmates, but that didn't mean we were duty bound to look after each other financially. I only understood that after talking with them. In fact, back on Earth, if one of my classmates had suddenly barged into my house one day and demanded to freeload off of me, I would definitely have called the police to kick

him out.

Life was much harsher in this different world, so I was the one who wasn't being realistic by expecting people to take care of me for no good reason. I was lucky that Haruka-san's party was kind enough to give me some advice despite my unreasonable request to join their party. They had some harsh words for me, but it was out of the goodness of their hearts, and Haruka-san even lent me thirty large silver coins in the end—three times the amount of money I'd had on me initially. Haruka told me that those thirty coins were worth the equivalent of about thirty thousand yen. I had no idea how I could possibly earn enough to pay her back, but as she handed the coins to me, she told me that it would be good to have some sort of mental comfort. The fact that I was all alone in this different world still made me feel somewhat uneasy, but I was glad that I was essentially starting out with four times the amount of money that most of my classmates had. I had no idea if I could actually grow enough as a person to be of use to Haruka-san's party in the future, but I was going to try my best. My first goal would be to earn money to pay them back for the loan.



I arrived at Laffan about an hour after I parted ways with Haruka-san's party. I paid the toll of one large silver coin to enter the city walls and asked someone for directions to the Adventurers' Guild. Along the way, I looked around at stores and market stalls to check the prices of goods in this world.

"It seems like prices differ a lot on a case-by-case basis..."

Based on an exchange rate of about one Rea to one yen, there were a lot of goods that seemed cheap, but also others that seemed way too expensive. One thing that stood out to me was that labor seemed to be cheaper in this different world. Products would usually cost more if they were more labor-intensive to make, but that didn't seem to be the case here. For example, the price of sugar sculptures back in Japan would be based on the amount of time and effort that went into each one, but the price in this world seemed to be more closely tied to the cost of ingredients like sugar. Maybe sugar was an atypical example, but it made sense in my head. In any case, the food offered at stalls was definitely cheap for the quantity. On the other hand, fruits and spices seemed to be somewhat rare and were priced like luxury goods. In fact, they were so

expensive that I couldn't afford to eat them every day, even with the extra money that Haruka-san had given me.

"Oh, that looks like one of the fruits that Nao-kun gave me earlier. Wait, six hundred Rea apiece?! That's super expensive!"

I was shocked when I saw that price tag at a stall. Back in Japan, I had never bought a fruit that was anywhere near that expensive. The fruits Nao-kun had given me were definitely delicious enough to justify the price, though. Of course, anything would taste good to an empty stomach, but...

"I ate three of these fruits earlier, right...?"

Nao-kun's party hadn't said anything about the value of the fruit, but I felt kind of bad now that I knew. They'd had a lot of these fruits on them, so they had probably picked them instead of purchasing them, but that didn't change the fact that they'd probably done so in order to sell them.

"Ugh! They even healed me for free too. I really shouldn't have acted the way I did..."

I had read about some social experiments that explained how most people would ignore someone who had collapsed to the ground from fatigue or hunger. However, Haruka-san's party had gone out of their way to save me in spite of the fact that my beard made me look suspicious, which I was quite aware of now. They couldn't have known that I was one of their classmates, so they really were the type of people who look out for others even though they must have been struggling to look out for themselves in this world.

"Yeah, I should thank them again the next time I see them."

But I had to achieve financial independence first. I reaffirmed that goal in my mind as I headed towards the Adventurers' Guild. It took me a while to get there—Laffan was a fairly large town—but the guild building was quite easy to spot once I got closer; it towered over the other buildings around it.

"All right, here I go!"

I felt somewhat nervous as I opened the door and entered the Adventurers' Guild. It was emptier than I'd thought it would be. I didn't see any drunk adventurers loitering around, but there were guild receptionists standing

behind what looked like counter tables. I was quite excited to see a standard fantasy trope like that, but my excitement didn't last long, because as I was looking around, I heard someone screaming, "What do you mean the guild won't find me a new job?!"

"The other day, you abandoned your job midway through your shift, didn't you, Yasue-san? The café filed a complaint with the guild."

"Well, uhm..."

"You may have had a reason for abandoning your job, but you did so without asking for permission or explaining yourself, so this punishment is entirely fair."

"Ugh!"

*Yasue?* I looked in the direction of the shouting and saw a girl who seemed to be one of my classmates. She was arguing with a guild receptionist. I remembered Haruka-san's advice and found a spot where my classmate wouldn't notice me. My new body looked very different from the old one—in fact, the only trait I had in common with my past self was that I was short—and Nao-kun's party hadn't realized that I was a classmate at first, so I probably didn't need to hide, but it was still better to be safe than sorry.

"In any case, it will be some time before the guild introduces you to another employer. Please return to the café and apologize for your conduct. If you refuse, the guild will never introduce you to another employer."

"Fine!" The girl stamped her foot and then wheeled around and stormed out of the guild. As she passed the spot where I was hiding, I avoided making eye contact with her by pretending to look at the bulletin board near the entrance of the guild. Even if she didn't realize I was one of her classmates, she seemed like she would be a pain to deal with.

"Damn it! I managed to copy some of their skills, but I can't use them for some reason! And I got fired from my part-time job! This is ridiculous!"

The girl—Yasue—was grumbling to herself and didn't seem to notice me as she exited the guild and slammed the door behind her. *I wonder who Yasue is. I only remember the first names of a few girls in my class—the cute ones, of course. What kind of guy wouldn't remember the names of his cute classmates?*



*All of the guys in my class probably know Haruka-san's first name, plus Shidou-san and Furumiya-san's names since they were Haruka-san's best friends. I don't remember who Yasue-san is, so she's probably not one of the girls who hung out with them. Her face looked really familiar, though.* She looked like she had gone with the default human race, so she had probably gotten some skills that affected her appearance.

More importantly, I had caught the word “copy” when Yasue-san was complaining to herself under her breath. She was probably talking about the Copy skill, which sounded like one of those land mine skills that Haruka-san's party had warned me about. Well, I'd had a negative opinion of the Copy skill even before I learned about land mines, so it gave me a bad impression of Yasue-san as a person completely apart from her obnoxious behavior. It sounded like she had copied other people's skills without asking for permission. Now she was complaining to the guild even though she had no one to blame but herself. Anyone would get fired for ditching her part-time job in the middle of a shift for no good reason. I hadn't gotten a job yet, but I still knew that trust and reliability were even more important in this world than they were back on Earth. It wasn't like we'd been able to bring our resumes with us, and we didn't have references who could vouch for us. It was only natural for employers to avoid hiring people who didn't seem trustworthy. With that in mind, it would probably be difficult for me to find a blacksmith who'd be willing to take me on as an apprentice. Even back on Earth, live-in jobs like that would probably only be willing to hire people who the employer knew personally.

“Oh, I should finish registering first before worrying about other things.”

I also had to find an inn to stay at tonight, so I didn't have any time to waste. I walked up to the guild receptionist who Yasue-san had been yelling at earlier. “Hello.”

She looked quite exhausted from her encounter with Yasue-san, but she managed to put on a smile before she replied. “Hello. How may I help you?”

“I'd like to register as an adventurer.”

“Very well. The registration fee is three hundred Rea.”

“Here you go.”

Haruka-san's party had already told me about the registration fee, so I took out three large silver coins right away and handed them over to the guild receptionist. I had now used a total of four large silver coins, so I would have been down to six if Haruka-san hadn't lent me some money. I would probably have been feeling pretty bleak about my future prospects by this point.

"Thank you. Please fill out these forms and turn them in when you're done. Do you need any assistance filling them out?"

"Yes, that would be great."

I listened to the receptionist's explanation as I filled out the forms. All I could write was my name, race, and a simple introduction. I wrote that I was strong and had confidence in my own toughness. I could have written that I had an aptitude for blacksmithing, but I avoided doing so because based on what Haruka-san's party had told me earlier, it sounded like people in this world weren't aware of the existence of skills. If I wrote about "blacksmithing aptitude," I would probably just come off as weird and overconfident.

Once I was done, the guild receptionist took the form from me and used it to fill out an adventurer card. The card was a simple one and didn't seem to have any special functions, which disappointed me a little; in light novels about characters getting transported to different worlds, it was a classic trope for adventurer cards to have all sorts of useful magic functions.

"Do you have any other questions?"

"I don't think so... Oh, would it be possible to get help with finding a job?"

"Oh, are you looking for a job rather than quests to take on?"

"Yes."

I did want to take on quests like Nagai-kun's party, but I'd decided not to pursue that path for the time being. The idea of going out to gather materials or hunt monsters sounded attractive to me, but since I was on my own at the moment, I wouldn't realistically be capable of either of those things. Another classic light novel trope was a character getting transported to a different world, immediately becoming an adventurer, and finding success all on their own, but you'd have to be pretty brave to try that in real life. The average

person back in Japan probably wouldn't be brave enough to explore the uninhabited mountains alone, so there was no way they'd pull off something that would require even more courage, and in a different world at that. A completely unfamiliar world would probably be way more dangerous than a mountain back in Japan, after all.

If there was someone out there who thought the mountains weren't that dangerous, I'd like to see them prove it by spending a night alone in the wilderness—somewhere really remote, with no campsites. I had experienced something like that during my time alone in the forest, and it had been more than enough for me. *Reality's not as easy as fiction makes it seem. I don't want to go through that kind of life-and-death struggle ever again...*

"All I have to offer you at the moment is manual labor, Tomi-san. However, there's a lot of competition for jobs with decent working conditions."

"Really?"

"Yes. People who are looking to do manual labor line up here at the guild early in the morning. I'm afraid to say that this late in the day, the only remaining jobs are the ones that people didn't accept because the working conditions were too grueling..."

"Does that mean I might be able to get a good job if I come back early tomorrow?"

"I can't guarantee it, but your chances will definitely be better."

It sounded like the competition was on a first-come, first-served basis. If I didn't have much money left, I would probably have needed to take on any kind of work I could get right away, but I still had three thousand six hundred Rea on me, so I could probably afford to wait a bit to see if I could get a job with decent working conditions.

"Um, do I have to line up every day for a new job?"

"No. Even if you get a job as a day laborer, you can continue working until there's no more work to do or until you tell the employer that you want to quit. That's one of the reasons that adventurers compete with each other for jobs with good conditions."

*Oh, so the first job you get sort of decides your future in a way.* If you had trouble finding a decent job, you could swap between different jobs each day, but you would have to line up at the guild every morning, and it would also be hard to build trust with your employers and coworkers.

“Oh, incidentally, is there a way to become an apprentice to a blacksmith? I’m aiming to become a blacksmith myself in the future.”

“Apprenticeship? Hmm...” The guild receptionist paused in thought for a moment. “To be honest with you, it would be quite difficult. Blacksmiths generally only take on apprentices who are introduced to them by people that they know well. The most common method would be to obtain an apprenticeship through relatives, but based on your question, I take it you don’t have any personal connections whom you can rely on, correct?”

“Yeah.” The only people I knew in this world were Kamiya-kun, Nagai-kun, and Haruka-san. Yasue-san technically counted as well, but I didn’t want to get anywhere near her.

“One method would be to take on day jobs in order to make acquaintances and build up a reputation as a trustworthy worker. Once you’ve gained enough trust, you can ask someone with connections to a blacksmith to introduce you. However, it won’t be easy.”

That sounded like the slow-and-steady method—working hard in the hopes that someone would be willing to vouch for me eventually. However, it would be asking a lot of the other person, almost like asking them to cosign a loan with you, so it would probably be hard to find someone who was willing. Even back in Japan, very few people would be willing to cosign with a mere coworker. In fact, my parents had told me to avoid cosigning a loan with someone at all costs.

“Another method would be to raise your adventurer rank. Every adventurer starts at Rank 0 when they register, but an adventurer who manages to climb up to about Rank 5 or 6 is considered a trustworthy person. If you can achieve that, you might be able to find a blacksmith who would be willing to take you in as their apprentice.”

“Oh, okay. Thank you for the advice.”

I had Level 3 Blacksmithing and the Craft Aptitude: Blacksmithing skills, so I'd thought I would be able to work as a blacksmith, but it turned out that the hardest part was just obtaining an apprenticeship. It would probably be easier to become a swordsmith back on Earth, although it might not be possible to make a living that way in modern-day Japan. *I didn't expect that I would gain more respect for my parents' hard work as a result of being transported to a different world. Social credibility really is important...*

"All right, I'll come back again tomorrow to see what kind of jobs are available then. Also, are there any inns that you would recommend?"

"Inns? What kind of inn are you looking for? Every inn is different in terms of the food and accommodations provided, and in terms of how safe the vicinity is."

"I'd prefer to stay at an inn with cheap lodging fees. I don't mind sharing a room with others as long as the inn is located in a relatively safe area."

The guild receptionist took out a map of the town and pointed at one spot in particular. "In that case, I would recommend the inn located here. It'll cost one hundred Rea per night with breakfast and dinner included. It's a very cheap inn, but it's safe to stay at."

The inn appeared to be located in an alley a bit away from the center of the town, quite far away from the Adventurers' Guild. When I asked the receptionist if I could have the map, she told me that maps weren't free, so I did my best to memorize the complex route to the inn. It looked like the name of the inn was The Wooden Pillow. *That doesn't exactly sound great. In fact, it sounds like I won't be able to get a good night's sleep at all, but oh well. It'll have to do for now.*

"Thank you for all the help. I'll be back tomorrow."

"Take care." The guild receptionist sent me off with a smile as I exited the guild building.

"Hmm, I guess I should buy some food and other necessities before I head to the inn."

Earlier this morning, I'd had the good fortune of filling my stomach with

expensive fruits thanks to Haruka-san's party, but now it seemed like it was past noon and my stomach was growling. Given that it had already digested the fruits from earlier, my body must have been much healthier than I'd thought it would be.

I couldn't afford to waste money on expensive food, so I looked around some nearby stalls to see if there was anything cheap. "There's a huge variance in the prices, but it seems like meat is more expensive than most other types of food. I wonder if that's because there's no livestock industry in this world."

Well, a livestock industry wouldn't necessarily guarantee cheap meat. Meat would be cheaper if the animals were fed with grass but more expensive if they were fed with grains, since it would be more efficient to feed people with grains instead. For meat to get really cheap, the livestock industry would have to be industrialized. Back on Earth, I had come across some information that suggested it wasn't efficient to raise mammals as livestock. There had also been a United Nations report a while ago that had suggested people should eat insects as food since insects were the most efficient source of protein. However, I wasn't brave enough to eat insects, so I would personally prefer a less direct option such as animals or fish raised on insects, although I had no idea how efficient that would be. *Oh, I remember an article about a silk-producing region where carp was a common food because people used silkworm pupae to raise the carp.* They'd grow mulberries as food and use the leaves to feed the silk worms, and the silk worms would produce silk. The silkworm pupae that they didn't use, they fed to the carp, and then they could eat the carp. *Yep, very efficient! I'm not willing to eat silkworm pupae, but I wouldn't mind eating fish.* There were apparently some people who would eat the pupae themselves, however...

"Ugh, I don't feel so confident about this anymore..."

I didn't have any prejudice against people who ate insects, but I couldn't relate to them at all. I just couldn't stand the idea of having to eat insects. Back on Earth, there were places where people used insects as ingredients in prepared food too, so there was a chance that some stalls in this world offered such dishes as well. It would be easy to avoid eating insects if they were obvious at a glance, but that might not always be the case. If it wasn't obvious at a

glance that a dish contained insects, I'd prefer not to know. *Ignorance is bliss.*

"Well, I'll just go with some bread and fruit-infused water for today."

Now I was preoccupied with the mental image of dishes full of insects, so until it faded away, I decided to avoid most prepared food. I purchased some rye bread and fruit-infused water from a stall for a total of ten Rea and took a bite into the bread first.

"Hmm, this should be satisfying enough."

The rye bread was dry and bland, while the fruit-infused water didn't really taste very different from regular water. The bread roll itself was quite large and dense, however, so in combination with the water, it was enough to stave off my hunger. It was probably the type of bread known as brown bread in Japan, and it wasn't as tough as I had thought it would be. It wasn't really a bad choice of food as long as you could put up with the bland taste, but you'd have to get your vitamins elsewhere.

"All right, next I should go buy a change of clothes."

Based on what the guild receptionist had told me, day labor generally meant manual labor, and that meant my clothes would definitely get dirty. Most jobs probably wouldn't provide work clothes, so I would need to have my own change of clothes. After I drained the fruit-infused water, I returned the empty cup to the stall that I'd bought it from and asked about secondhand clothes stores and general good shops, then resumed my search. It didn't take me too long to find a secondhand clothes store, but the clothes that looked like they could be used as work clothes were more expensive than I had thought they would be. Two pairs would be ideal so that I could still wear one while the other was in the laundry. Unfortunately, I didn't have a lot of options, since I needed clothes that would fit me and were at least somewhat sturdy.

However, I was lucky in that the clothes that would fit me were relatively cheap. There wasn't much variation in terms of how those clothes looked, so dwarf customers were probably quite rare. I didn't really care about how my clothes looked as long as they would fit me, so I was just glad that they were cheap. It didn't change the fact that those clothes were my most expensive purchase of the day, though. I had bought other things at a general goods shop,

like a bag I could carry around my neck or a change of underwear, but those were cheaper than work clothes. After all these purchases, the amount of money I had on me had fallen to half of what I'd originally had, so I would have been screwed if Haruka-san hadn't lent me some money earlier.

"How did they manage to make do with the amount of money they started with? They would have had less money than I did even if they'd pooled it all together..."

I'd arrived in town with four times the amount of money I'd had initially, and now I barely had any to spare. They were a party of three, so they'd had to make do with even less than I had.

"They must have struggled a lot to survive too..."

It made sense that they hadn't been happy when I'd begged them to help me out just because we were classmates. I hadn't been thinking about what they'd been through. Really, if I was being honest with myself, I'd wanted to join their party so I could rely on them for help instead of contributing in some way myself.

As I arrived at the inn that the guild receptionist had told me about, I once again felt ashamed of how I had acted earlier. I reaffirmed my determination to fend for myself. "Yeah, I need to try as hard as I can."

The inn was much older and more worn out than I had expected. I paid the lodging fee of one hundred Rea and went to the room that I'd registered for, and it was quite small. It looked like a maximum of ten people could huddle together on the floor, with each person having only about one hundred square feet of space to themselves. The inn provided me with one very smelly blanket. The food that was included with my lodging was barely edible; it was a struggle to force it down my throat. *I'm really confused. How did Haruka-san's party manage to survive in the beginning? Nagai-kun and Kamiya-kun could probably put up with these conditions, but I have a hard time believing that Haruka-san managed to withstand them as well.* I swallowed down my questions and my confusion along with the disgusting food and then went to bed early in order to wake up as early as I could the next morning.

I succeeded in getting up early and immediately hightailed it towards the



Adventurers' Guild. When I arrived, there was already a line of people outside despite the fact that it was still somewhat dark. They all stared at me as I got into line, so I tried my best to put on a friendly smile. However, none of them said anything to me, so maybe my efforts were in vain.

After I got in line, two hours passed, and then the doors of the Adventurers' Guild finally opened. We all entered the guild one by one. I had expected everyone to dash inside, but they remained in line. The people in line all looked quite scary, so the fact that none of them cut in front of each other seemed quite strange to me. I asked the guild receptionist about it at a later time, and she told me that the guild would forcibly remove people who caused a commotion and wouldn't help them find jobs again, so it made sense that everyone was well-behaved.

In a way, the Adventurers' Guild was a business, so building a reputation for trustworthiness was as important for them as it was for us as workers. The guild wasn't the typical fantasy guild that would ignore conflicts between adventurers. At least, they wouldn't ignore adventurers who caused trouble in plain sight of people who worked for the guild. Adventurers who did so would get demoted in rank, and some would even get expelled from the guild. It made sense to me since the Adventurers' Guild served as a type of temporary employment agency. Employers would file complaints with the guild if the workers that the guild sent caused trouble on the job, after all. With that in mind, the punishment that Yasue-san had received yesterday was actually quite light. All the receptionist had said was that the guild wouldn't introduce her to any new jobs for a while.

"Next in line, please."

I had gotten up early in the morning, so although I hadn't been first in line, it wasn't long before my turn came. I placed my adventurer card on the counter table just like I'd seen the person in front of me do. "Here's my adventurer card."

The guild receptionist in front of me was the same person who had helped me out with registering as an adventurer yesterday. "Hello. You're looking for manual labor that pays well, correct, Tomi-san?"

“Yes. I’m confident in my muscles and stamina.”

The receptionist flipped through what looked like job postings and took out two fliers to show me. “This job here is only for three days, but the pay is quite good. This other one will require you to work for ten days, but for less pay. Which one would you prefer?”

Both jobs were at construction sites. I decided to take on the first one because I desperately wanted to earn enough money to stay at a better inn. “I’ll go with the first one.”

“Very well. Take this flier with you and head to the construction site described in the posting.”

“Okay.”

I took the flier from the guild receptionist and left the line right away. There were many more scary-looking people still in line, so I didn’t want to make any of them angry by dawdling. As I left the guild building on my way to my new job, I did my best to hide my fear from the people who were still in line. They all remained completely silent.



My first day on a construction site ended up being pretty tough, but I actually had an easier time than the other people working there. I wasn’t sure if it was because I was a dwarf or if it was thanks to skills like Level 3 Robust, Level 2 Enhanced Muscles, and Level 2 Indomitable. For tasks that required workers above a certain height, there was nothing I could do, but I put my back into everything I could do. I must have done a good job too; the site foreman praised me for my work. There were many different types of work to be done, and the work that I got the most praise for was piling. After my first time inserting piles into the foundation, the foreman took notice of me and made me responsible for all of the piling going forwards.

In fact, by the end of the day, the foreman was praising me as a professional at piling. It was all probably thanks to my Blacksmithing skill. I was glad to get praise from the foreman, but I didn’t feel completely satisfied since I wanted to become a blacksmith rather than a construction worker.

Work ended before sunset, right as it was starting to get dark. I received my pay for the day and returned to The Wooden Pillow. Once I got back to my room, I washed my clothes and finished up the other things I had to do to prepare for tomorrow. I managed to put up with the disgusting food by convincing myself that I had to eat in order to have energy tomorrow.

The next day, I got a decent lunch at a food stall that I'd heard about from the other workers at the construction site. Work wasn't much different from yesterday, but I knew what I was doing now, so it went much more smoothly. I had also gotten better at coordinating with other people when we had to work together.

By the last day of the job, I felt like I'd gotten a hang of construction work. I had a good reason for feeling confident too: the foreman told me that he would love to work again with me at another construction site. I managed to finish my assigned tasks earlier than I had on the first two days, so the foreman rewarded me with a bonus. Money wasn't the only thing that I had gotten out of those three days of work, however. I was now on friendly terms with all of the guys with scary faces who had seemed so intimidating when I first saw them in line outside the guild.

"Yo, Tomi, wanna go get some drinks together?"

Drinking with your coworkers at the end of a long day of hard work sounded like something a dwarf would enjoy. I needed to be frugal and save up money, but a few drinks wouldn't hurt. "Sure! Let's—"

I was cut off by a voice from behind me. "Tomi!"

When I turned around, I saw Touya-kun. "Hmm? Oh, Naga—I mean, Touya-kun." *Right, he goes by the name Touya in this world, and Kamiya-kun goes by the name Nao. I need to be sure to remember that. I got used to calling Haruka-san by her first name right away, but that's probably just because I didn't have many opportunities to call her Azuma-san back on Earth.*

"There's something I want to talk with you about, but..." Touya-kun glanced back and forth between me and my coworkers.

The coworker who had invited me to go drinking with him nodded to imply that he didn't mind. "Go ahead, Tomi! We'll get a drink some other time."

“Sure, of course!”

He smiled and waved before wandering off with my other coworkers.

“Sorry about this. It looks like I made you cancel your plans.”

“Don’t worry about it. We don’t know each other that well—we’ve only been coworkers for three days. I did want to try out some alcohol, though.” I’d been transported to a different world and turned into a dwarf, but I still hadn’t had a chance to try ale...

“Oh yeah, you have the Drunkard skill, right, Tomi? I wouldn’t mind treating you to some drinks, but—”

“Really?!”

“Calm down, dude. Did you forget about the downside of the Drunkard skill?”

“O-Oh, no, I remember. It prevents me from getting drunk, but it doesn’t actually make me immune to alcohol poisoning, right?”

“Yeah. You won’t feel sick from drinking, so it’ll be hard for you to tell how much alcohol your body can actually handle.”

“I guess that’s true...”

People would normally get a rough sense of how much liquor they could handle depending on the amount that would make them feel sick or cause them to black out. They could then adjust their consumption to avoid repeating the same mistakes. However, none of that would apply to me. Blood alcohol tests would be another way to measure alcohol intake, but they weren’t available in this world.

“Also, is there any point in drinking alcohol if you can’t get drunk?” Touya asked. “Why not just get some regular juice?”

“W-Well, even if you can’t get drunk, you can still enjoy the taste of alcohol!”  
*Being able to enjoy the taste of alcohol without getting drunk... That makes me sound like a cool adult!*

“Sure, I agree about the taste, but I wonder how alcohol will taste to you with the Drunkard skill. Oh well. By the way, when I tried some ale, it tasted really bad. I couldn’t really taste the alcohol either.”

“Huh, really?”

“Yeah, it tasted worse than beer. It was somewhat similar to room-temperature beer with no carbonation, and it was a bit sour, I guess? I’m not sure exactly how to describe it.”

“It sure doesn’t sound tasty, Touya-kun.”

“Well, there might be people out there who enjoy the taste. I’ve seen a few people who looked like they were having a good time drinking ale. It’s not like I have any previous experiences with alcohol back on Earth, so who knows?”

*Hmm. I’ve heard stories before of people who like to drink dark beers or craft beers at room temperature, so maybe temperature isn’t that important.*

“You can just try some ale yourself to find out how it tastes,” said Touya. “We normally just drink water, though. It’s free and tastes okay.”

“Free? That’s good to know. But yeah, I’m down to try out some ale if you’re willing to treat me!”

“All right, come with me to the inn where I’m staying. The food there is decent as well.”

“Okay!”



The inn that Touya-kun led me to was located closer to the center of the town than The Wooden Pillow, but it was also located in an alley that was a bit hard to find. You would probably need directions to find this inn. However, even though it was hard to find, the dining hall was packed full of people. *Maybe they’re all regular customers or people who live nearby.*

Touya-kun sat down at the counter table and urged me to sit next to him. “Take a seat... Innkeeper, ale for this guy here and water for me! Also, some snacks for both of us, please!” He seemed quite familiar with this place.

Soon after Touya-kun had put in his order, the innkeeper placed a mug of brownish liquid in front of me. It definitely looked like ale to me. Touya-kun had said that it didn’t taste good, but I still grinned in excitement.

“Cheers!” I exclaimed.

“Yeah, do your best to chug it down,” said Touya.

I lifted the mug and took a sip from it. *Hmm? It doesn't taste good by any means, but it also doesn't taste that bad. I can't really taste the alcohol either. Is it because of my Drunkard skill?*

Touya-kun had a bitter smile on his face. “How is it?”

I tilted my head in confusion. “Uh, I can't say it's very good, but it isn't awful either. I don't mind it.”

Touya-kun looked quite surprised when he heard my response. “Really? Let me take a sip from the other side of the mug.” He lifted my mug to his lips, took a sip, and immediately grimaced. “Yuck. Does it really taste that different to you, Tomi? I wonder if it's a racial trait or if you just have a messed up sense of taste.”

“Please, don't just make assumptions about my sense of taste! Also, what do you mean by a racial trait?”

“Oh, it's nothing that important. It's just things like how elves are nimble and good at keeping their balance when they're climbing around in the treetops, or how beastmen like me are strong and have a heightened sense of smell. I was just wondering if dwarfs have a trait that makes alcohol taste good to them.”

“Hmm, that could be the case.” It would make sense for dwarfs.

“Well, feel free to order more ale if you like how it tastes. It's not that expensive, and if you work hard to earn money, you can probably afford to order some yourself in the future. I do think you should decide in advance to limit how much you drink, though. You can't tell when to stop drinking based on how your body feels, right?”

“That's a good idea since I can't get drunk. I guess Drunkard is actually kind of a pointless and dangerous skill.”

“It is one type of land mine skill, yeah, but it isn't that bad compared to other ones since there are ways for you to work around it.”

“Yeah, I'll keep your advice in mind, Touya-kun.”

I had thought the Drunkard skill would allow me to drown myself in alcohol

like a stereotypical dwarf without any side effects, but I'd been quite wrong. The idea of a dwarf suffering from alcohol poisoning sounded extremely weird to me. I wasn't into it at all. Of course, it wouldn't be an issue if dwarfs in general had high alcohol tolerance, but I wasn't brave enough to test out that possibility with my own body. The fact that the Drunkard skill prevented me from feeling drunk meant that it would be quite easy for me to overindulge and die from alcohol poisoning. *Ugh, the Drunkard skill really is a land mine...*

“On a sidenote, what were you doing hanging around the construction site, Touya-kun? I thought you guys had gone to another town to deal with some business.”





“Yeah, we did, but we finished our business pretty quickly, so we returned to Laffan soon after. We’ll probably continue to take on adventurer work here for a while.”

“Ah, I see. Oh yeah, do you know someone called Yasue-san? I think she’s one of our classmates.”

“Yasue? Who’s that? Did you get into a bad situation with them?”

“Nah, I managed to avoid getting noticed, but it seems like she has the Copy skill.”

Touya-kun paused in thought and then clasped his hands together as if he had come to a realization. “Are you talking about Umezono? I don’t remember her first name.”

“Umezono-san? Uh, I think that’s her, yeah. Have you met her before in this world?”

“Yeah. She copied our skills, but the real problem is that she gloated about it before running off. That’s how she made an enemy of Haruka.”

“Wait, she made an enemy of Haruka-san? That’s pretty brave...”

I was terrified at the very thought of getting on Haruka-san’s bad side, especially after I had seen that scary smile of hers before we had parted ways in the forest a few days ago. She had said that she wouldn’t hold back when dealing with her enemies, and I was sure that she was dead serious about that.

“Hold on, doesn’t the user of the Copy skill need to know the names and levels of the skills they want to copy?” I asked.

“Yeah, that’s one of the prerequisites. Umezono actually did ask us about our skills.”

“And you guys told her everything she wanted to know? You guys knew that she had the Copy skill, right? At least, I highly doubt that Haruka-san didn’t notice.”

Touya-kun grinned in response. “Of course. Haruka has the Third Eye skill, so she easily saw through Umezono’s intentions.”

“So you guys told her all of your skills without telling her about the restrictions on the Copy skill?”

“Oh, nah, not all of them. We didn’t mention the skills that don’t have levels.”

“Wouldn’t Umezono-san have known that you could see through her ruse once she heard that Haruka had the Third Eye skill, though? Hmm.”

*Maybe Umezono-san just copied their skills without thinking very hard about it. Did she not find it suspicious that Haruka-san’s party told her their skills with zero hesitation, or did she just think they were honest suckers?*

“Well, Haruka was probably just testing Umezono to see how she would react. She knew Umezono was lying about her own skills, so she probably wanted to see if Umezono would act differently after she learned that Haruka had the Third Eye skill.”

“So in the end, Umezono-san just copied the skills that you guys told her without asking for permission and then picked a fight with Haruka-san, huh?”

*Why did she do that? Haruka-san might have forgiven her if she just apologized for lying. In fact, based on my experience, Haruka-san might have even helped her out if she’d asked before copying everyone’s skills. Is Umezono-san stupid or something? Maybe she just didn’t notice that Haruka-san had seen through her lies, or maybe she had thought she would be able to make a clean getaway after copying their skills, but...*

“Haruka probably wouldn’t have cared if Umezono had just copied our skills and disappeared, but Umezono went out of her way to gloat and antagonize us before she ran away, so yeah. I honestly felt more dumbfounded than angry at the time,” said Touya.

“Yeah, it sounds like everything backfired for her since you guys knew about the downsides of the Copy skill.” *And she was complaining to the guild receptionist when I ran into her. Yikes! She’s totally unreasonable.* “Actually, Touya-kun, the reason I asked about Yasue-san’s name is that I saw her a few days ago at the Adventurers’ Guild. You guys might bump into her again if your party’s going to stay here in Laffan doing adventurer work, so you should probably be careful to avoid her.”

“Oh, thanks for the advice. That might be a bit of a pain, though. We visit the guild almost every day, so...”

“If you want, I can report back to you guys any time I see Umezono-san since she doesn’t know who I am yet. You guys have helped me out a lot, so I don’t mind.”

“Nah, I appreciate the thought, but we have to report back to the guild whenever we complete quests or have materials to turn in.”

“Oh, that makes sense. Sorry.”

“Don’t worry about it. Besides, I doubt Umezono will come up to us to complain about the fact that she can’t use the skills that she copied without our permission.”

“Yeah, that sounds highly unlikely. She’ll never know why she can’t use the skills unless someone tells her.”

Umezono-san probably wouldn’t be willing to listen to a classmate with the Help Guide. Or rather, given her personality, I had no idea how she was going to make friends with someone who had the Help Guide.

“All right, that’s enough about Umezono. We have more important matters to discuss. Let’s talk about why I came to visit you.”

“Oh yeah, we kind of got sidetracked. Um, can you guys wait a bit longer on the loan...?” I had earned some money from the three-day job, so I could pay Haruka-san back, but doing so would put me in a dire financial situation.

“That’s not important—well, it is, but there’s no rush. I came to observe how you were doing at work. In fact, I visited the job site yesterday as well.”

“Wait, what? Really? I didn’t notice you at all.” I hadn’t had the luxury of paying attention to my surroundings yesterday; at that point, I still wasn’t confident in what I was doing.

“Well, I hid so you wouldn’t notice me. It seems like you’ve been working quite hard at that job.”

“Yeah, I’ve done the best I can.”

I was a complete amateur at construction work, but I hadn’t been slacking off.

I'd tried my hardest to get more done than my coworkers precisely because I wasn't used to the work yet, and I wanted to be contributing as much as people who were more experienced. Fortunately, it seemed like my efforts had paid off, since the site foreman had praised my work.

"I wasn't going to get involved if you were slacking off on the job or complaining all the time, but it looked like you were working hard, so I thought of a way to help you get ahead if you're down to try it."

"An idea? What is it?"

"Do you want to try making a shovel, Tomi?"

I tilted my head. At first, I didn't quite understand what Touya-kun had just said, but even after my brain had processed his words, I was still confused. "A shovel? Huh? I assume you mean a regular shovel and not something like a power shovel?"

"Well, it would be amazing if you could make power shovels, but that's impossible in this world, right?"

"Yeah, it's impossible."

To make a power shovel, you would need a hydraulic system, and that kind of machinery wasn't easy to make from scratch. I was just a high school student, but I had a rough idea of how Pascal's law worked in relation to hydraulic systems. For starters, you would need hydraulic hoses and pistons that wouldn't leak oil. Neither was available in this world given the preindustrial level of development.

"I figured. That's why I'm asking about a regular shovel. Did you notice that there weren't any shovels at the construction site where you were working?"

"Oh yeah, now that I think about it, that's true..."

We had used hoes for digging, and then people would shift the loose earth into rope baskets with a small scoop or spade and carry it away. The scoops they had been using weren't quite as good as a regular spade back on Earth, however. On a sidenote, based on the standards set by the Japanese Industrial Standards Committee, shovels were defined as tools for digging holes while spades were defined as tools for scooping up snow or soil. However, different

regions or industries had different names for such tools, so the conventions were kind of complicated and hard to remember.

“Do you think shovels would sell well, Tomi?”

“Hmm. Well, shovels would help increase productivity, so I’m pretty sure they’d sell well. However, how do you make shovels? I don’t think it’ll be that easy even with the Blacksmithing skill.”

In games, you could easily turn iron ore into ingots and then turn those ingots into items, but in reality, you would need a forge and fuel to work the iron ore. The process required all sorts of other tools as well, besides which iron ore probably wasn’t easy to obtain. Even if we managed to solve all of those problems and succeeded in making shovels, there was another problem: where and how to sell the shovels. I wasn’t sure if we could just set up a stall in the market and sell shovels.

“Don’t worry, I didn’t come to you without a concrete plan in mind. I made a deal with someone I know who’s the owner of a weapons shop,” said Touya. “You can use his tools and facilities, and he’ll provide the iron as well.”

“Huh?! Would an artisan in this world really let a stranger use his tools like that?!” *Didn’t you tell me previously that it wasn’t that easy to borrow blacksmithing tools?*

“It wasn’t easy to convince him, Tomi. I only succeeded in negotiating a deal because he’s someone I know well. I had to accept some conditions too.”

Touya-kun didn’t go into that much detail, but apparently the person he was talking about was the owner of the shop where his party had bought all of their weapons and armor. He also mentioned in passing that he had promised to hand over the rights to sell the shovels if we succeeded in making some. It sounded like the shop owner had only accepted the deal because Touya-kun’s party were regular customers. After all, there was no guarantee that he’d be able to sell the shovels Touya-kun wanted to make, so the owner was taking a big risk himself by agreeing to the deal.

“Oh yeah, when I asked Diola-san about you at the Adventurers’ Guild, she told me that you want to become a blacksmith, Tomi. Is that true?”

*Diola-san? Oh, that must be the name of the guild receptionist who helped me out. I guess Touya-kun knew her and asked about me beforehand. He wasn't just visiting me on a whim, after all.*

"Uh, yeah. Are there no privacy laws in this world?"

"Nope. The only way to protect your privacy is to avoid confiding in people you don't trust to keep your secrets. I've known Diola-san longer than you have, and the information she told me about you wasn't that sensitive, so that's probably why she was willing to tell me."

"Oh, I see..."

"Diola-san wouldn't tell me any information that really needed to be kept secret. Well, probably not."

"Probably not?"

"Yeah, so just don't tell people anything that you don't want others to find out eventually."

"Ugh, okay. So yeah, why did you bring up my dream of becoming a blacksmith? Diola-san basically told me that it would be almost impossible."

She'd made it sound like it would take me a few years before I'd even be in a position to start thinking about pursuing that dream. The path of gradually raising my adventurer rank sounded quite difficult, and it would probably take at least as long to build up personal connections through day labor.

"Yeah, but I have a workaround. It depends on how hard you work and whether you can produce results, but if things go well, you might be able to become an apprentice blacksmith."

"Huh?! Really?!"

"Yeah. The blacksmith I asked only said that he would give it some thought, but it means you have a chance if you can show him your aptitude and work hard at it."

"Oh, thanks a lot! I really appreciate it, Touya-kun!"

"However, even if you manage to become an apprentice, you'll get kicked out if you slack off or don't produce. I told him that he shouldn't hesitate to let you

go in that case.”

“I don’t mind! That’s better than not having a chance at all!”

I wasn’t yet guaranteed an apprenticeship, but I was glad to have a chance with an actual blacksmith. Just a few moments ago, I’d been uncertain about how I should even begin working towards that goal. The most difficult part of becoming a blacksmith was apparently finding someone who could vouch for you, so I truly appreciated Touya-kun’s help.

“Well, like I said, it all depends on whether you succeed at making good shovels. We’ll start work tomorrow morning, so tonight, let’s chill and have some drinks and food. The food here is quite delicious!” The plates of food that Touya-kun had ordered finally arrived, and he handed one of them over to me.

I took a bite and was almost shocked. “All right, time to dig in! Whoa, this really does taste delicious!”

The food that I’d had from stalls and at The Wooden Pillow had tasted pretty bad for the most part, so I’d figured that I wouldn’t find any decent food in this world unless I got really lucky, but the food at this inn had totally proven me wrong. On top of that, the ale went quite well with the food. I chugged it down and burped.

Touya-kun smiled at me when he saw that I was enjoying the food and drinks. “Right? So far I haven’t found anywhere in Laffan that serves better food than this place, and it’s not that expensive to stay here either. It’s a great inn.”

*Oh yeah, Touya-kun’s party is staying here at this inn. He said it’s not that expensive, but I’m sure it’s more expensive than the inn I’m staying at. I’ve kind of gotten used to The Wooden Pillow by now, but I don’t think it’s suited for long-term lodging. I kind of want to move to an inn with single rooms, and ideally one that’s similar to this inn here...*

“Uh, Touya-kun, how much does a room at this inn cost per night?”

“This inn? Innkeeper, are there single rooms available at this inn? There are? How much does one cost? Oh, okay. Three hundred Rea for the room itself, eighty Rea for breakfast and dinner, and fifteen Rea for a bucket of hot water if needed. The total is about four hundred Rea, give or take.”

“Huh? How do you know? The innkeeper didn’t answer you at all!”

“The innkeeper doesn’t talk much. You saw how he just nodded and raised three fingers, right?”

*Oh, so that’s how Touya-kun was able to tell? I guess he already knew the price of the meals and hot water since he’s been staying here. The total cost would be four times the amount that I’m paying at The Wooden Pillow, but I can afford it if I continue to earn the amount of pay I got from my day job over the past three days. It might be worth it for the sake of being able to sleep well.*

“You’re probably thinking of changing inns, but I think you should hold off on that idea until you’ve produced some results with blacksmithing, Tomi. Things might change depending on whether or not you succeed at becoming an apprentice blacksmith.”

“Oh, that makes sense. Will I have to do live-in work if I become an apprentice blacksmith?”

“I’m not sure about that. I’m the one who’s vouching for you with Gantz-san, the blacksmith that I know, but it doesn’t change the fact that you’re a complete stranger to him at this moment. You’ll probably just have to walk to work every day.”

“That makes sense. It would be weird to let a stranger live and work in your home right after meeting him. Do apprentices get paid for blacksmith work?”

“Yeah, they do. You should get paid enough to afford the lodging at this inn. Or rather, it’s either you succeed at blacksmithing and get offered decent conditions as an apprentice, or you fail and you don’t get to be an apprentice at all. There’s no middle ground.”

“I’ll do my best, then!”

“Oh, do you want another drink? I’ll treat you to one more to celebrate and wish you good luck. Innkeeper, one more mug of ale, please!”

“Thanks, Touya-kun!”

It had been quite a while since the last time I had eaten delicious food, and the ale tasted decent as well. I had quite a good time with Touya-kun since he



was treating me. However, tomorrow could be a turning point in my life, so I parted ways with Touya-kun before sunset and headed back towards The Wooden Pillow in order to prepare for the next day.

Touya-kun had told me to meet up with him at the plaza in the center of the town, so I headed there early in the morning to wait for him. He arrived around the same time that my day labor job would normally have started.

“Morning,” said Touya. “Did I keep you waiting?”

“Nah, not really,” I said. “Do you guys start work each day around this time, Touya-kun?”

“Work itself, yeah, but we’re taking some time off for a couple reasons.”

“What do you mean by work itself?”

“Well, I usually wake up much earlier than that. I get up and allocate about one to two hours for training and then eat breakfast before heading out. I usually head back to town anytime between early afternoon and early evening and then train some more until dinner time. Then I head to bed a bit after dinner.”

“Um, does everyone in your party follow that schedule?”

“More or less, yeah. Nao and Haruka spend time after dinner practicing magic, but I don’t because I can’t use magic. I’d be a nuisance to the other lodgers if I was training in the yard behind the inn after dark, so I have nothing to do after dinner.”

I’d set out for the plaza right after finishing breakfast, so I’d been getting impatient about the fact that Touya-kun was late, but it sounded like he had a good reason. *Sorry for thinking that you were late, Touya-kun. You’re way more diligent than I am...*

“All right, let’s get going. Follow me!”

“Oh, okay.”

Touya-kun led me to a weapons shop that was located down a straight thoroughfare off of the main street. When we entered the building, a muscular middle-aged man greeted us.

“Yo, Touya! Is this the guy you said you wanted to introduce me to?”

“H-Hello!” I exclaimed.

“Hello, Gantz-san,” said Touya. “Yeah, he’s a hardworking guy, so please take care of him.”

“That depends on whether he can produce results. Hey, you’re Tomi, right?”

“Yes! It’s nice to meet you!”

“As you can see, I’m a human. You got a problem with that?”

“Hm? Not at all. I’m just happy to have a chance to become your apprentice.”  
*Oh, is there racial discrimination in this world? I haven’t met any other dwarfs yet, so I’m clueless.*

“I see. Well, anyway, you better give it everything you’ve got. Like I said, everything depends on the results.”

“Thank you very much!” I exclaimed.

“I already discussed the specifics with Touya, so give it a shot and craft a good tool.”

“Okay!”

“All right, follow me, Tomi,” said Touya. “We’ll be borrowing your facilities, Gantz-san.”

“Go ahead. I’ll charge you guys if you mess anything up, though! I’m sure Haruka can pay for you!”

“Come on, have a little faith in me, Gantz-san!” Touya exclaimed. “She’d roast me alive if I screwed up like that.”

“Ha ha! Just don’t break anything, then! Don’t cause any trouble for your girl!”

“Please, she’s not *my* girl!”

I listened to the friendly banter between Gantz-san and Touya-kun and then followed Touya farther into the building. Before my eyes appeared a real blacksmith’s forge. It looked more or less how I would have imagined it.

“Thanks to your Blacksmithing skill, you probably have a rough idea of what to do, but I’ll explain things just in case,” said Touya. “We’d get in deep trouble if we break something and get billed for the repairs—especially since Gantz-san said he would send the bill to Haruka.”

“O-Okay!”

I had already borrowed money from Haruka-san; I didn’t want to get any further into debt. I made sure to listen carefully as Touya-kun explained how to use the forge and the tools.

“Okay, that should be all,” said Touya. “It’s not that difficult.”

“I guess not,” I replied. “Does the iron making itself happen somewhere else?”

“Apparently most blacksmiths just buy iron instead of raw ore. Smelting is more efficient at scale, so I bet they smelt the ore closer to the mines.”

“Are you sure about that, Touya-kun? Even if they have blast furnaces in this world, they’d still have to ship coal to the smelting sites.”

“Well, it’s true that shipping that volume of coal would cost a lot, but maybe there’s some magical workaround. There are devices powered by magic in this world, after all. If the miners had a magical furnace that didn’t require very much fuel, they could just smelt iron ore on site.”

“Do devices like that really exist?”

“Maybe? I dunno.”

“Oh, come on! Well, in any case, it probably is more efficient to smelt iron ore near the mines, but even with magic, smelting probably still involves a lot of waste.”

Without knowing the ratio of fuel to ore used in smelting iron, I couldn’t be sure about the specifics. A blacksmith could smelt ore himself with a bloomery, which was very ancient technology, but that wasn’t really practical in town.

“All right, for starters, let’s try making a portable shovel,” said Touya.

“A portable shovel?” I said. “Are we not going to try to make a shovel like you’d buy at a hardware store?”

“Nah, let’s take it one step at a time and start with smaller shovels. I kind of want a folding shovel like they use in the Self-Defense Forces, though.”

“Huh? That’s a huge leap in difficulty from a small portable shovel, Touya-kun!”

“Oh, do you know the kind of shovel I’m talking about, Tomi?”

“Well, yeah, I’m also a guy, so...”

The shovels used by the Self-Defense Forces back in Japan were known as Enpi. They were folding shovels that could be secured in place with a screw after you extended them. You could also secure the blade at a ninety-degree angle to the haft and use it like a hoe, so they were very good tools, but they weren’t easy to make since you would need technology like hinges and screws.

“Okay, so what about the shovels they used to use in the Imperial Japanese Army?” Touya asked.

“The ones with a detachable handle?” Based on what I knew, that kind of shovel just had two parts, the blade and the handle, so it seemed like a pretty simple tool to make.

“Yeah, exactly. Let’s try to make that kind of shovel.”

“The structure of those shovels is pretty simple, and they’re small too, so they’ll be perfect for practice,” said Touya.

“Yeah, that’s true.”

“All right, let’s give it a shot!” Touya-kun began to stoke a fire in the furnace.

“Are you going to try to make one too, Touya-kun?”

“Of course. I also have the Blacksmithing skill. It’d be a waste not to give it a shot after I went through the trouble of negotiating with Gantz-san to get access to his forge.”

“Oh, I guess that makes sense.”

I went and helped Touya-kun with preparing the furnace, and we took turns sticking metal plates into the flames to prepare them for welding. The process went quite smoothly, and we managed to get the shapes that we wanted on

the first try, probably thanks to the Blacksmithing skill. Touya-kun did struggle a bit, though, maybe because of the difference in level between our skills.

“Touya-kun, are there any thick rods here that we can use for the handle?”

“Yeah, I prepared some. Here you go.”

Touya-kun handed me a thick and sturdy wooden rod. It was about sixty centimeters long and had a diameter of about three centimeters. I kept those measurements in mind as I finished preparing the socket of the blade.

“Okay, that should do it.”

It had taken me about an hour of work to complete the shovel. I sharpened the tip a bit and attached the blade to the wooden rod. It certainly looked like a shovel, but I wasn't sure if it was actually usable.

“Touya-kun, I think I'm done.”

“Already? Well, you do have Level 3 Blacksmithing plus the aptitude skill. I guess it makes a difference!”

“Yeah, probably.”

“Why don't you go test the shovel? That door leads to the backyard.”

“Okay.”

I took the shovel with me. The backyard was small and cramped; there was scrap metal lying around everywhere. Luckily for me, the ground was quite hard—perfect for testing the result of my work.

I stabbed the shovel into the ground and pressed down with both feet. “Ngh! Hm? Uh...”

The shovel was in the ground, yes, but it didn't feel very steady under my feet. In fact, it felt like the shaft would snap if I exerted any more pressure on it. I tried to pull it out of the ground and immediately heard a loud cracking sound.

When I took a closer look, I saw a crack, as I'd expected. “It looks like this one was a failure...” I felt quite disappointed.

Touya-kun was waiting for me when I went back inside the forge. “How did it go?”

“No good. It broke, see? Maybe the metal plate was too thin.”

I handed the broken shovel over to Touya-kun and he inspected it, nodding to himself periodically. “I don’t think the thickness is the issue here. It’s the shape and how you welded it. Take a look here and compare it to the center part of my shovel. You can see how the socket of my shovel is the only part that isn’t flat, right? It’ll be more durable if you smooth out this part. Give it the shape and structure of a beam.”

“Oh, I see!” *The layers in corrugated fiberboard make it sturdier than regular cardboard. Maybe this is similar. I guess there’s a good reason that the shovels sold in hardware stores back on Earth had very specific shapes.*

“Also, you can adjust the scooping part of the blade a bit,” said Touya. “I think the main reason your shovel cracked was a lack of flexibility, so that’s the main thing you should work on.”

“Everything you’ve said so far makes sense to me, Touya-kun, but how come you’re this much better than me? I have a higher-level Blacksmithing skill than you.”

“Practical knowledge is separate from our actual skill levels, Tomi. Like, let’s say we need iron that has eighty percent stiffness and twenty percent toughness. You would be able to forge iron with that exact ratio, but I’d probably end up with eighty-five percent stiffness and fifteen percent toughness. But you can’t forge anything right if you don’t know what exactly you’re trying to forge, right?”

“Oh, I think I get it now. So my skill lets me successfully forge any shape I want, but if the shape I have in mind isn’t suitable for a shovel, the skill won’t magically make it functional.”

“Yeah, the design I had in mind was more functional than yours, but it was harder for me to get it how I wanted it.”

Touya-kun continued to work on his shovel while we were talking with each other. Before too much longer, he’d produced a blade that looked pretty similar to the ones I’d seen on Earth. He started sharpening the tip. *Wait, why is he sharpening it that much? It looks sharp enough to cut somebody.*

“Pretty soon, you’ll probably have more raw ability than Gantz-san, but that doesn’t necessarily mean you’ll be able to make a living as a blacksmith,” said Touya. “There’s other stuff you need to work on too. Keep learning new tricks and don’t get cocky. I’ll come and break your confidence if you do. And I’m kind of clumsy, so I might accidentally break some of your bones too, ha ha!”

*Wait, he’s going to break me physically, not psychologically?!* “O-Okay,” I stammered, “I’ll make humility my motto!”

“That’s a good idea. It’s good to be humble! For another thing, the girls will destroy you psychologically if they have to.”

*Oh yeah, Haruka-san’s party grouped up with Shidou-san and Furumiya-san. When it comes to psychological warfare, Haruka-san alone is overkill, and now they have even more firepower. Ugh, okay, I really need to make sure that I keep my ego in check.*

“All right, that should do it! It’s not perfect in shape, but it’s acceptable,” said Touya. “Time to test it out!”

Touya-kun sounded quite happy. He headed towards the backyard and I followed. He stabbed the shovel into the ground just like I had done, pressed down on it with his foot, and made use of the lever principle to loosen a chunk of earth. He then pulled the shovel out of the ground and inspected it. It looked like it was intact. Touya nodded to himself, flipped the shovel around, and placed it on the ground.

Then he started to stomp on it.

“Huh?!” I exclaimed. “What are you doing, Touya-kun?!”

“I mean, the shovel is no good if it bends when you step on it, right? Using a hammer would be too much, so I’m using my feet instead. Okay, one last test.”

Touya-kun fetched some large rocks from a corner of the yard and dropped them on the shovel with no hesitation. I hadn’t expected him to be so merciless just for the sake of quality assurance, but the shovel looked like it was still in okay condition.

“Hmm, that should do it for now. You have the Enhanced Muscles skill, right, Tomi? Can you try to bend it with all of your strength?”

“I mean, it’s survived all of your other tests, so there’s no way I’ll be able to bend it, but I guess I’ll try.” I took the shovel from Touya-kun, held it diagonally across my body to twist and bend it. Even my enhanced strength didn’t do a thing. “Yeah, it seems like it’s fine.”

“Hmm, it isn’t very refined—you can see dents from when I was hammering it in the forge. That bugs me a little, but I guess it’s not that bad for my first work,” said Touya.

“Well, I think it’s actually amazing that you succeeded in making a functional tool on your first try,” I said.

“Nah, not really. All I did was copy a shape that I already knew. It would have been amazing if I’d come up with this shape on my first try without ever seeing a shovel before, but that wasn’t the case.”

*Uh, there’s a guy right here with Level 3 Blacksmithing who still failed to copy a shape he kind of knew about.* I wasn’t sure if that was because my memory was bad or because Touya’s was good.

“Hmm, the blade of your shovel seems to be about as thick as mine,” I said. “Or maybe a bit thicker, actually. Can I use your shovel as a reference?”

“Yeah, go ahead. You’ll be able to make a better shovel for sure if you imitate mine.”

Having gotten Touya-kun’s permission, I started on my second shovel, using his as a reference. It took less than thirty minutes to forge. When I brought it to the backyard to test it out, it proved much tougher than the first one. I had barely changed the thickness of the iron, so it was definitely the shape and the way I’d tempered the iron that had made the difference. I tried to make a third shovel the same way, and it ended up looking more or less exactly like my second attempt, but I managed to finish making it in even less time.

“It seems like the difference in our skill levels has kicked in,” said Touya.

“Yeah, after you’ve done something once, it seems like it’s a lot easier to do it again,” I said. “The hard part is the first time when you don’t know what shape to aim for, so regardless of your skill level, you probably need to keep studying the techniques of blacksmithing.”



“Of course you do,” said Touya. “Everyone else in my party decided to get magic skills. Haruka got alchemy too. But they all bought books on magic, and they study every day.”

“That makes sense. I should do my best to study too.”

“The only problem is that books are expensive in this different world and libraries don’t exist.”

“I figured that was the case,” I said. “Just how expensive are books, Touya-kun?”

“Converting to yen...be ready to pay at least a hundred thousand per volume.”

“Yikes, that *is* super expensive!”

Apparently I couldn’t afford a single book if I spent every coin I had to my name currently. In retrospect, I’d never realized how lucky I was back on Earth; I could look things up on the internet or at the public library whenever I wanted at basically no cost.

“That’s why the system of apprenticeship exists. A master can pass down his knowledge to his apprentice,” said Touya. “All right, practice is over. Let’s try making regular-size shovels now.”

“Okay!”

Our ultimate goal was to make regular-size shovels like the ones sold at hardware stores back on Earth. My family had never had much need for a shovel since we lived in an apartment, but I’d used one before, of course.

“We can’t just make the same shape bigger, right?” I asked.

“Yeah, that won’t work. The handle will be about double the length, so the amount of force exerted on the tip of the shovel is also going to double.”

*Will the shovel blade bend if I use a handle with the same diameter as the handles of the smaller shovels? There’s probably some room for error. I guess I’ll have to test out different options...* “How thick should the handle be?” I asked.

“Not too thick. You have to be able to use and carry it easily. The cross-sectional area of the handle is directly proportional to the square of its radius,

after all. The handles we've been using are already pretty sturdy, so they should be fine in terms of tensile strength."

"Are you sure tensile strength also doubles with the cross-sectional area, Touya-kun?" I asked.

"Hm? Doesn't it?"

"Uh, I remember reading something about the tensile strength of cylinders... I think it's about three times harder to stretch them than bend them or something like that. I'm not sure, though. I don't remember all the details clearly."

We both paused in thought for a moment.

"Haruka might know more, but I don't think it's important," said Touya. "I doubt I could have bent the handle of one of these shovels back on Earth."

"I mean, yeah, but the average person on this world is stronger than the average person back on Earth, right?" I asked. That applied to Touya and me as well, so it didn't seem like we should be applying Earth standards.

"Oh, right, we need to take that into account too! Hmm, after we decide on the thickness of the handles, it might be a good idea to get some advice from Gantz-san about what kind of material we should use," said Touya. "Like, there are some trees in this world that are way more durable than Earth trees."

According to Touya-kun, Nao-kun was using a spear with a shaft of ironwood, which was supposedly very sturdy. However, Touya also mentioned that ironwood was expensive, so it probably wasn't suited for the production of shovels aimed at the ordinary citizen.

"In any case, I'll try making the shovel blades first," I said. "I'll test them after they're done to see if they work as is."

"Sure. I'll give it a go as well."

My initial goal was to make a larger version of the shovel I had copied earlier. When I tried to remember shovels I'd seen in the past, it seemed to me like the blades had been a little thicker, so I didn't hammer the iron quite as thin. Next, I hammered it into the shape I wanted. We were going to delay attaching a

handle until we had a chance to speak with Gantz-san, so that was all I had to do for the time being. It didn't take too long—the larger shovel blade wasn't that different from the ones I'd made before—but I was fairly sure already that I had messed up somehow. The blade didn't bend when I exerted force on it, but I still had a bad feeling.

“Hmm. If anything, I made it a little thicker than I remember shovel blades being, but it doesn't seem durable enough...”

Touya came over and touched my shovel before voicing his thoughts. “Hmm, yeah, it's a bit thick, but I think you've forgotten the difference in the quality of the iron.”

*“Oh yeah!” Now that I think about it, there are strict standards for the amount of carbon and other minerals in the iron used in modern-day manufacturing back on Earth. The iron I'm using here has to be a lot lower in quality, so it makes sense that it wouldn't be as durable.*

“Try making another one that's on the thicker side and see how it goes,” said Touya.

“Okay,” I replied.

I followed Touya's advice and made a fairly thick shovel blade. After I was done, I attached it to a handle that was about one and a half times the length we had originally planned on using and then pressed down on the shovel with my entire weight.

“Ngh, it looks like it won't bend,” I said. “Can you give it a try as well, Touya-kun?”

“Sure.”

Touya-kun was heavier than I was. He pressed down on the shovel as hard as he could, but he couldn't bend it either. It seemed like it was tough enough, but that meant that it was heavy too. It would be exhausting to use for construction work, so I had to find a way to make it lighter. I didn't have enough time to devise the ideal shape, so I tried to see how much thinner I could make the blade without changing its shape. I also adjusted the way that I had tempered the metal plate a few times. Finally, I came up with a blade that was half as

thick as my initial attempt but still durable. The hard part was over; there were just some minor adjustments to make. I used a thinner handle that even a dwarf like me could easily grip, and I crafted a grip shaped like an inverted triangle; I'd seen grips like that before. I attached the blade to one end of the shaft and the grip to the other. The shovel was complete.

"Hmm, not bad," said Touya. "The shape looks great. I like it!"

"Yeah! Let's test it out right now!" I exclaimed.

I headed out into the backyard and dropped rocks on the shovel like Touya-kun. I also attempted to dig a hole in the hard earth. Luckily for me, the shovel passed both tests. Touya-kun suggested dropping even heavier rocks on the shovel, and at first, I refused, but he noted that all kinds of heavy things could fall on a shovel at a construction site, so I went along with his idea in the end. At the construction site where I'd been working, no one would have ever purposefully used tools in a way that would damage them, but plenty of tools had gotten broken anyway in the course of three days. With that in mind, customers would probably prefer a sturdier shovel even if it were a little more expensive.

"Do you think this is good enough, Touya-kun?" I asked.

"Yeah! Think about how long people back on Earth were using shovels and what they had accomplished with them. That's how you know it's a reliable design."

"Mm, that makes sense. I don't think the shovel I've made is perfect by any means, though."

*How did they mass-produce shovels back on Earth—press forging? And they probably had computer-aided design to model the ideal shape, which isn't exactly an option for me. All I did was attempt to imitate shapes I've seen. I can probably make some adjustments, but it won't be that easy to get the ideal shape.*

"I kind of want to make this shovel lighter if possible," I said.

"You'll probably have to use different materials, then," said Touya.

"Different materials? Oh, what about, like, mithril?!" I exclaimed. "That's a

classic fantasy metal!”

I was very excited, but Touya dashed my hopes right away. “What kind of person would use mithril for a shovel?! I’m not even sure if mithril actually exists in this world. I was thinking of different *alloys*.”

“...Do you have any good alloys in mind?”

“Not really!” He sounded way too confident in that response.

“So my idea is no good, then?”

“Well, we can ask Gantz-san. Oh yeah, speaking of... Gantz-san said my sword and Nao’s spear are made of blue iron and yellow iron respectively. I have no idea if those are alloys of regular iron or completely different kinds of metal, though.”

“Well, can we use them for our shovels, Touya-kun?”

“Uh, probably not. Bear in mind that our weapons were insanely expensive. I don’t think the price was just because of the metals, but they were definitely part of it.”

We’d been chatting earlier while toiling away in the forge, and Touya-kun had mentioned that his party had paid Gantz-san at least eight hundred gold coins for weapons and armor. That was the equivalent of eight million yen. It sounded like the armor they’d bought was forged from similar materials, so it would probably be too expensive to use in shovels. I’d just end up with a shovel-shaped object that was more suited as a powerful weapon. It would probably be great against enemies like zombies, but it definitely wouldn’t be anyone’s weapon of choice.

“Given what we know about blacksmithing, I guess this is all we can do for now,” I said. “Well, we’ve got a sample ready, so let’s show it to Gantz-san. What did you settle on for your final product, Touya-kun?”

“Check it out.” Touya-kun showed me a shovel blade that was shorter and wider than mine and more sharply curved.

“Is that, like, a scoop?”

“Yeah. When I visited you at the construction site, I noticed your coworkers

were having a hard time moving around the earth that got churned up,” said Touya. “Shovels are great and all, but it would be nice to have a scoop specialized for the purpose of moving earth, right? And that means it can be a lot lighter than a shovel.”

“I feel like you could probably use a shovel for both purposes, but I guess you make a good point. Actually, we might be able to sell the shovel and scoop together as a set.”

A scoop would let you pick up more earth at one time than you could with a shovel, but the scoop was still lighter overall, so it would take less energy to carry. I felt like there would definitely be a market for it. Touya’s scoop also looked quite sturdy despite being lighter than my shovel, so it was probably good enough for the purpose of carrying earth around.

“Okay, I’ll attach this blade to a handle as well, then,” I said.

“Great. After you’re done, let’s take a break for a bit, Tomi. We both need to rehydrate.”

“Oh yeah, that’s true. I completely forgot about drinking water. I was so focused on working!”

We had been dripping sweat working in front of the hot forge. My clothes were soaked but my throat was dry.

While I finished attaching a handle to Touya’s shovel blade, he went and got some water. “Here, drink this, Tomi.”

“Thanks.”

“Hmm, it’s almost noon now.”

“Already?”

Time had passed quite quickly while I was focused on work. I took a deep breath, then exhaled and stretched my stiff limbs. Touya-kun grabbed a piece of meat out of a bag and took a bite out of it.

*Oh yeah, I didn’t prepare lunch for myself. I’ve been buying lunch from nearby stalls. I should probably go get something.*

Touya-kun noticed that I was looking at him. He reached into his bag for

another piece of dried meat and extended it towards me. “Want some?”

“Oh, may I have some? Thanks.” As soon as I took a bite, I said, “Whoa, this is delicious! I didn’t know dried meat could taste this good!”

Unlike the beef jerky I’d had back on Earth, it wasn’t too chewy or salty. *I wonder if it’s expensive. If it’s cheap, I could survive on this along with bread instead of gambling with food from stalls every day.*

“Yeah, Haruka made it,” said Touya. “The dried meat that we bought from stalls around here was disgusting.”

“Oh, I see.” *Damn it, just when I thought I had finally discovered something delicious I could buy...*

“Well, I wouldn’t mind selling you some at market price,” said Touya. “How does that sound?”

“Are you sure?”

“We made a lot, so it wouldn’t hurt us to share some with you, Tomi. It is meat, however, so it’s not cheap.”

“Right. I know meat skewers definitely aren’t cheap in this world.”

Even back on Earth, beef jerky was rather expensive, so I hadn’t been able to buy it very often with the allowance I got from my parents. This, however, was too good to pass on.

“Okay, I’ll buy some! In the future, that is. First I need to save up some more money...”

“Good luck with that, sincerely. Here, this is a gift from me.” Touya-kun placed the whole bag into my hands. It felt like there was still plenty of meat inside, so it would probably have cost more than I had.

“Are you sure?! Thank you very much!”

“Enjoy! Just do your best with your training.”

“Mm. Do you think Gantz-san will take me as his apprentice, Touya-kun?”

“Well, I think the shovels you made are good enough. If he disagrees, then you’ll have to keep working at gaining his trust.”

“Ugh, I don’t feel so confident...”

“Relax, Tomi. It should be fine. Oh, here he comes.”

“Huh?”

Touya-kun was looking towards the shop, but there was nobody behind us when I turned around. A few seconds later, I heard footsteps headed our way, and then Gantz-san appeared.

He seemed pretty nonchalant. “Yo, how’s it going?”

Touya-kun grinned in response and pointed at our shovels. “He he, we’re done, Gantz-san! Check out what we made!”

“Huh?! Already?!”

“Yeah, I told you before that I already had an idea of what I wanted to make,” said Touya. “All we had to do was make some samples, test them, and make some minor adjustments.”

“Having an idea doesn’t make blacksmithing easy, you know. Let’s see...” Gantz-san started to inspect the shovels. “Hmm. There’s a big difference in quality between some of these.”

“Oh, I made this one and this one here,” said Touya.

“Looks like the ones you made are worse than the others.”

“Come on, my main trade is adventuring. Why would I be better at blacksmithing than my buddy here?”

Gantz-san didn’t respond to Touya-kun’s banter immediately; he was still examining the shovels thoughtfully. “The ones you made are a bit better than the average apprentice could do, but as for the ones Tomi made, they’re—actually, Tomi, make another one of these right now.”

“O-Okay!”

I obeyed Gantz-san’s command and started to temper a metal plate. I was quite nervous since Gantz-san was watching over my shoulder throughout the process, but I had already made several shovels, so I finished another without making any mistakes.



“I see... So you do have some technical ability as a blacksmith. I have some questions, but I made a promise to Touya not to get too nosy. Oh well.”

*Oh, thanks for including that in the terms you negotiated, Touya-kun! I'd have no idea how to explain why I want to become an apprentice given that I'm already pretty proficient thanks to the Blacksmithing skill. I'm glad I can dodge this topic even if Gantz-san sounds suspicious!*

“All right, this tool that you made—show me how it works,” said Gantz.

“Okay!”

We all migrated to the backyard. It didn't take much time or effort to demonstrate the basic concept, so I also attempted to emphasize how durable and sturdy the shovel was.

Once we'd finished up and headed back inside, Gantz-san said, “Hmm, okay, the tool you made looks fine. What about these over here?” He pointed at the scoop and the portable shovel.

“This scoop here is specialized for scooping up and carrying earth,” said Touya. “As for this one here, it's a small portable shovel. It's easy to carry around since it's an assembly type. Don't you think adventurers will want to buy these, Gantz-san? I would definitely want them for myself.”

“They'll sell, but it depends on the price.”

“Yeah, true,” said Touya. “Gantz-san, are there any metals out there that are sturdy, light, and cheap? The shovels we made are sturdy, but the trade-off is that they're pretty heavy.”

“Of course there isn't a metal like that! If there was, every weapon and every piece of armor would be made of it.” Gantz-san picked up a pair of shovels again and paused in thought before continuing. “I don't really think the weight is a problem. It's not going to be women and kids using them, right? Your average construction worker can handle these just fine.”

Touya-kun shook his head. “People on construction sites work long hours, so it's better to have lighter tools, right? Oh, what about the blue iron and yellow iron that were used to make the weapons we bought?”

“Brother, blue iron’s heavy as hell! Besides, it’s more expensive than the iron you used for this tool. If you want something more affordable, there’s red iron, which costs about four times the price of regular iron, but it’s much harder to work with.”

*Oh, it sounds like there are a lot of different types of iron. I wonder if they’re alloys or if they’re entirely different metals that just happen to have the word iron in their names.*

“What are the types of iron in the stuff you sell here, Gantz-san?” Touya asked. “Blue, yellow, red, and black, right? Anything else?”

“Hm? Yeah, white iron’s the other one I use. It costs about ten times as much as regular iron, but it’s worth its price in sturdiness,” said Gantz. “The only problem is that it’s even harder to work with than red iron is. Your chain mail is white iron, you know?”

“Oh, really? No wonder it feels so nice to wear. We haven’t gotten a chance to test it out in action, though.”

“It’s a good thing you haven’t. For that mail to be of use for you guys, you’d have to be in real danger. Well, if your mail never gets dinged, then I can’t earn any money repairing it, so it’s a shame you haven’t gotten in trouble, ha ha!”

*Whoa, Touya-kun, the materials that went into your armor are that expensive? It sounds like blue iron and yellow iron are even more expensive, so I guess good equipment for adventurers really costs a lot of money...*

“Well, anyway,” said Gantz-san, “the cost of white iron means it isn’t a realistic option for construction tools.”

“Hmm. What about portable tools aimed at adventurers, Gantz-san?” Touya asked. “Adventurers would be willing to pay a premium for lighter tools, right?”

“Oh, sure, adventurers can afford tools made of white iron. There’s also the option of selling two different kinds, the regular iron and the white,” said Gantz. “The adventurers who can’t afford white iron can just buy the regular iron. They’ll just have to put up with the weight. What about you, Touya? Would you buy one of these yourself if it were regular iron?”

“Nope!”

“Huh?!” *Why did you bring up the topic, then, Touya-kun?!*

“I’d rather have one made to order right now! Gantz-san, share some white iron with us! I’ll pay for it so that Tomi can try his hand at making a portable shovel with white iron!”

“Um, what do you think, Gantz-san?” I asked.

Gantz-san sighed and went to fetch what looked like a metal ingot from a shelf. He handed it to me. “I won’t charge you any money. Just give it a go. I’m interested in seeing how this guy handles white iron—and what he manages to make.”

“Thanks, Gantz-san! I knew I could count on you!” Touya exclaimed.

“Cut it with the flattery. Give it a shot, Tomi.”

“Okay!”

I took the white iron ingot from Gantz-san. Proportionate to its size, it was very light in my hands—as light as aluminum.

“White iron has about two or three times the durability of regular iron. Keep that in mind as you work on it,” said Gantz.

“Okay,” I replied.

*I can’t simply halve the thickness, though. I can probably make the tip of the blade thinner, but I’m not sure by how much.* I continued thinking as I placed the ingot into the flames of the forge. Once it was hot enough, I took it out and started to hammer it. The recoil from the first strike made my hands tremble. I probably wouldn’t make a dent in it if I used the same method I used with regular iron. It truly was a different beast. However, I had a gut feeling of what to do, so I followed that instinct as I tempered the white iron. When I’d finally managed to get it into the shape that I’d had in mind, it felt like it had taken me twice as long as my previous shovels. I started to sharpen the tip of the shovel blade, struggling a bit due to how hard the white iron was, although it was much easier hammering it.

“Okay, I’m done!”

The final product of my labors was about the same shape as the previous

shovels that I'd made, but it was much lighter and had a luster to it that made it look kind of like stainless steel.

"Hmm, let me take a look." Gantz-san took the shovel in his hands and tested it out by smashing it with a hammer as hard as he could. When it survived the test, he nodded to himself in satisfaction. "This is quite well-made. What do you think, Touya?"

"It's great! It's much lighter and easier to carry around than the previous shovels! The tip is also sharp enough that I'd like something to cover it with when I'm not using it. I guess I can ask Haruka to make a leather cover."

"This type of shovel might sell quite well. Hey, Touya, can I sell these tools here at my store, including the scoop thing that you made?"

"Sure, I don't mind. In exchange, take care of Tomi for me."

"Fine. Hey, Tomi. You have some chops as a blacksmith, but you've still got a lot to learn. That's why you want to become an apprentice, right? I'll take care of you, so come back tomorrow."

"Oh, did I pass?!"

Gantz-san seemed a bit embarrassed—he looked away from me—but he responded in a booming voice. "Yes, I'll take you on as my apprentice! That's my final verdict!"

I bowed deeply. "I really appreciate you having faith in me, Gantz-san! I won't let you down!"

"Yeah, I'm looking forward to it. You'll probably finish your apprenticeship faster than the average apprentice, but when the time comes for you to strike out on your own, do me a favor and open up shop in a different town. It'd be strange losing customers to my own apprentice, ha ha!" Gantz-san slapped me on the back. I knew he was just being friendly, but being a blacksmith, he slapped *hard*. I decided it would be smarter not to complain, though.

"Congrats, Tomi. Give it everything you've got. I'll probably order some equipment from you once you become a better blacksmith than Gantz-san!"

"Whoa now, Touya, you're already declaring that you'll change your

allegiance to Tomi in the future?”

“Relax, Gantz-san. As long as me and my party are working here in Laffan, we’ll be your loyal customers. What, are you scared he’ll surpass you in no time?”

“Hell no! There’s no way I’ll slack off so bad that this kid will surpass me that fast! I might let him craft weapons for you once he’s good enough, though, ha ha!”

“All right, sounds good. Tomi, like I said, give it everything you’ve got and learn everything you can from Gantz-san.”

“Uh, yeah, I will. Thank you for everything, Touya-kun. You’ve really done me a solid here.”

While I was wandering alone in the forest, the fear of death had consumed my thoughts and negative feelings had built up inside of me. When I met up with Haruka-san’s party and they told me to fend for myself, I was on the verge of developing a grudge against them for no good reason. However, after a few days here in Laffan, I’d come to realize how much they had helped me out by lending me money and by healing me for free, and I now felt sincere gratitude in my heart. Touya-kun had even helped hook me up with a real apprenticeship, so I was truly indebted to him and his party. I didn’t want to think about what would have happened to me if I hadn’t bumped into them back in the forest.

Nao-kun had compared this world to a hell mode or nightmare mode in a video game. It definitely would have been a nightmare for me if his party hadn’t helped me; in fact, I might not even have been able to afford an inn.

Touya smiled and slapped me on the shoulder. “All good, dude! Cheers for the future!”

My life as a blacksmith was about to begin. However, it was already a rough beginning; Touya-kun’s slaps were even more painful than Gantz-san’s. After all, Touya-kun was an adventurer who specialized in close combat.

## Chapter 3—The First Step towards Obtaining Our Own Home

“Haruka-san, I’ve sealed the deal,” said Diola. “The owner of the plot agreed to sell it for three hundred gold coins.”

Diola-san had a beaming smile on her face as she greeted us and told us the news, but that only made us feel uneasy about this turn of events. Diola-san had told us before that the market price of land in that area was around four hundred gold coins per plot.

Even Haruka sounded a bit confused at this as she asked Diola-san to confirm the price. “Um, were there really no problems at all...?”

“Yes, it went quite smoothly. I told the owner that if he insisted on hanging onto that plot, the guild might not be able to act as the middleman in the future. That was how I twisted his arm into giving up—I mean, convinced him to make a decision. Plots in that area are more or less within the guild’s jurisdiction, after all.”

Diola-san’s smile didn’t falter in the slightest as she explained. *I guess she has a lot of authority as the vice-branch master of the guild here.*

“Are you absolutely sure about this, Diola-san?!” Yuki exclaimed.

“Mm, there’s nothing to worry about. Besides, there are all kinds of things wrong with the plot—things that are the owner’s own fault. If he truly wanted somebody to rent the plot, do you think he would have demolished the house?”

*Oh yeah, Diola-san said something about how there used to be a house at that plot, but it fell into disrepair over time and got demolished.*

“The owner only wanted to rent the land after the house got demolished, but there was no way the guild could find a buyer given the conditions that the owner had set.”

That made sense. It sounded like nobody had wanted to rent that plot even

back when there was still a house on it, so it would be hard to find someone who was willing to rent *and* pay for the construction of a new house.

“The owner probably set the rent at two gold coins per month because he wanted someone to rent the plot and build a house on it for him. Then he’d come up with some reason to kick the tenant out and claim the house for himself. But there’s no way the guild could permit something like that to happen.” Diola-san sighed; she sounded quite exasperated at her experience. Based on the way Diola-san described the landowner, he didn’t sound like a great person.

“So are situations like this the reason you said it’s safer to use the guild as the middleman when looking for real estate, Diola-san?” I asked.

“Quite. There are an awful lot of landowners out there who look down on young adventurers and try to cheat or deceive them however they can. Of course, your party has people like Haruka-san who are careful enough, so I doubt any such scheme would work on you. However, it would be troublesome if you got embroiled in a dispute with a landowner, so it’s still a good idea to do transactions via the guild or other real estate agents.”

We didn’t know anyone in this world who could back us up in a legal dispute, so if we attempted to negotiate a real estate deal on our own, we would definitely be at a disadvantage. We just had to accept the commission fee to the guild as the cost of staying safe.

“Why did nobody try to rent that plot in the past, though?” Touya asked. “I feel like there must be *somebody* out there who’d be willing to rent if it was just a little bit cheaper.”

I nodded. We would probably have rented that plot ourselves if there had been a house on it—or if the rent had been closer to the rent for nearby plots.

“It’s because that plot is quite large. People who don’t want or need a yard wouldn’t find it attractive. It might have been a different story if the owner had lowered the rent so it was in the same range as the rent for smaller nearby plots and houses, but...”

The owner had probably thought that he shouldn’t lower the rent because his property was much larger and had a big house on it. That reasoning wasn’t

exactly wrong, but over time, real estate would just fall into ruin if nobody was renting it. By the time the owner had bowed to reality and started to lower the rent, the house that had been on the plot had already become unfit for habitation. It sounded like the owner still hadn't been able to find renters even after he lowered the rent, and thus, the house had gotten beyond the point of repair.

"The best plan would have been to split the plot into multiple smaller plots and build a house on each one to rent out or sell, but the owner wasn't brave enough for that," said Diola. "After all, it would have required him to spend more money developing the land, and even if he did, there was no guarantee that he would have succeeded in attracting renters."

According to Diola-san, Laffan was a fairly stable town and didn't see many new immigrants each year; as a result, there wasn't much demand for real estate. Real estate transactions would still occur from time to time, but the plot that we wanted to buy was located in an area of town that wasn't popular on the market. That meant that the chances of selling or renting the plot would have been low even if the owner had built multiple houses on it. Diola-san mentioned that she had brought up these same points during her negotiations with the owner and had convinced him that rather than effectively gambling with his investment, it would be a better idea to sell the plot now while he could still count on a payout. I wasn't sure if Diola-san was telling us the whole truth, though. Based on the way she was smiling, there was probably some catch (at least for the owner) but it would probably be smarter not to pry any further into this matter.

"Thank you very much, Diola-san," said Haruka. "We'll have to pay for our own house as well, so it's wonderful that you negotiated a cheaper price for the land itself. Later today we'll bring the money—and some gifts to thank you for your hard work."

"Oh, I appreciate the sentiment, but you don't have to bring me any gifts, he he!" said Diola-san, but she was grinning widely. She definitely looked and sounded like she was eagerly anticipating the dindels. We probably wouldn't have been able to seal the deal if we'd been negotiating on our own, so expressing our gratitude through gifts was perfectly reasonable.



“And please let me know if anything else comes up,” said Diola. “I managed to convince the owner to sell his plot, but he wasn’t an easy person to negotiate with by any means.”

*Mm, yeah, we definitely need to give her some “gifts” to make sure she’ll back us up.* The five members of our party all exchanged knowing glances and then nodded in tacit agreement.



“What do you guys think about giving Diola-san about fifty dried dindels?” Haruka asked.

We had returned to our inn in order to take three hundred gold coins out of our savings. Haruka had started to prepare the dried dindels as well.

“Diola-san managed to reduce the price by one hundred gold coins, right? I think it wouldn’t hurt to give her more than that,” said Yuki. “Sure, dried dindels are expensive, but it’s not like the market price is anywhere near one gold coin apiece, right?”

“I’m not so sure about that. We don’t stand to profit by giving Diola-san the equivalent of one hundred gold coins in dried dindels,” said Natsuki. “Diola-san might also get in trouble if she took gifts from us that were equivalent in value to the amount by which she haggled the price down.”

“Yuki, the market price for dried dindels is actually around one gold coin apiece,” said Haruka.

Yuki’s eyes opened wide in surprise at that information. “Huh, really?!”

The dried dindels were unbelievably expensive, but they were also unbelievably delicious. I had eaten plenty of dried fruits back on Earth, but none of them came close to the flavor of dried dindels.

“If I recall correctly, fifty dried dindels would fetch us forty gold coins if we sold them at the guild,” I said. “So that’s not bad, but I think we can afford to give Diola-san a few more.”

“Yeah, I agree with Nao,” said Touya. “Diola-san helps us out a lot every day. Plus, she made it sound like more problems might still crop up...”

“Mm, that’s a real possibility. It is a plot that the owner had been hesitant to sell, after all,” said Haruka. “All right, let’s go with sixty dried dindels, then. We’ll have fewer for ourselves. Is that all right with you, Natsuki?”

“Are you implying that I didn’t want to give her more dindels because I wanted them for myself, Haruka?”

“Am I wrong?”

“You’re totally wrong! Well, okay, I do feel like it’s kind of a shame. That much is true. But only kind of!” Natsuki had strongly rejected Haruka’s skepticism, but she couldn’t meet Haruka’s gaze while doing so.

“Mm, I know how you feel, Natsuki,” said Yuki. “Sweets are rare and precious in this world. I’d love to eat as many as I can.”

“Listen, that’s not it! I’m not a big eater like you are, Yuki!”

“Huh?! I can’t believe you’d say that! You love eating dried dindels too! Come on, eat some! You know you love them!”

“D-Don’t force dried dindels on me!” But even as Natsuki protested, Yuki stuffed a dried dindel into Natsuki’s mouth, and Natsuki took a few bites seemingly in spite of herself. “U-Ugh, they taste really sweet...”

“He he, eat as much as you want—actually, that’s kind of a waste...”

Natsuki had eaten half of the dried dindel by the time Yuki snatched it back and ate the rest herself. We got sidetracked for a bit as a result of their antics, but in the end, we managed to obtain a large plot of land in exchange for three hundred gold coins—and sixty dried dindels.

“We finally own a plot of land now!” Yuki exclaimed. “Let’s all clap in celebration!”

We had paid Diola-san earlier in exchange for the deed, and we were on our way back when Yuki suddenly started clapping. The rest of us were a bit taken aback, but we all played along and applauded together.

“I can’t feel any excitement from your claps!” said Yuki. She flailed her hands around in distress.



“Well, ‘finally’ doesn’t seem like the right word,” I said. “It’s only been a week since we started saving up money to purchase the plot, right?”

“I mean, yeah, but we’ve gone through a lot over this past week! We’ve ventured deep into a dangerous forest, gathered rare mushrooms, and defeated monsters that were over three meters tall!” Yuki exclaimed. “And we bought land with the rewards we got from those adventures, so don’t you feel a sense of accomplishment?”

“Mm, that makes sense, but to be honest, I don’t really feel anything in particular,” said Natsuki. “Maybe it’s because the orcs turned out not to be as dangerous as we thought they’d be.”

Nobody else seemed especially proud of themselves either; it wasn’t like we had survived any truly dangerous experiences. That said, we might have felt a greater sense of accomplishment if we had earned the equivalent of three million yen in a more mundane way, like by working part-time jobs. But of course, that was just a hypothetical. In reality, it would have been almost impossible for each of us to earn six hundred thousand yen at part-time jobs, especially the kind of part-time jobs available to high school students.

“Well, in any case, we’re landlords now!” Touya exclaimed.

“What kind of asshole wants to become a landlord, Touya?” I asked. “No wonder you have asshole problems. Speaking of which, how are your hemorrhoids?”

“Oh, absolutely awful. It’s tough since there are no bidets in this world—okay, enough of this joke! I meant *landowners*, obviously!”

It was a sad fact that bidets didn’t exist in this different world in any form. However, apart from that, our toilet conditions weren’t that bad. The toilets at The Slumbering Bear had been created through alchemy and incinerated human waste. Some residue would build up on the toilets over time, however, so that had to be disposed of periodically—about once a year, according to Haruka. In any case, the toilets at the inn were quite clean and didn’t give off a bad odor, so we truly appreciated them. However, Haruka had warned us that most private individual houses had regular squat toilets, and it seemed like those were unpleasant and probably reeked.

“Yuki, it’s true that owning a plot of land is a big step for us, but before we move out of the inn, we still have to pay for the construction of a house,” said Haruka. “Winter is approaching as well, so we need to hurry.”

“Oh, right. I asked the carpenter about this topic before, so I guess I should repeat it to you guys now.”

Yuki explained that when she’d tagged along with Aera-san to the carpenter’s shop to order a display board for the café, she had asked the carpenter how houses were built in this world.

According to Yuki, ordinary citizens would never give carpenters detailed instructions when paying for the construction of a home. Finely detailed blueprints didn’t exist, and carpenters wouldn’t make scale models either. Obviously there were no three-dimensional computer models either. Ordinary citizens would just tell a carpenter their budget and give a rough description of the layout and facilities they wanted, and then the carpenters would fine-tune the details on their own and fulfill the clients’ requests to the best of their abilities.

“It’s a shame we can’t design our own house from the ground up, but apparently that’s not how it works,” said Yuki.

Natsuki nodded in agreement. “Mm, I was looking forward to choosing wallpapers and so on. I even had ideas in mind for the kitchen and bath units, but...”

“In any case, we have no idea what a normal house looks like in this world,” said Haruka. “Our house might end up missing some necessary features if we insisted on a specific design.”

Come to think of it, back in Japan, there were some luxury apartments and houses that seemed like they would actually be pretty uncomfortable to live in. It would be interesting to take a tour of that kind of house or maybe stay in one for a few days, but although they might have unique or striking features, they were often unique in a way that wasn’t suited for everyday living. It was shocking to me that there was a market for those kinds of properties even among people with the money to waste; real estate was expensive enough that

most people would only purchase a house once in their whole lives—and those were the people who could afford one at all. If you dropped millions of yen on a house only to discover that it wasn't fit to live in, you couldn't just move out the next day, so you'd have to be rich *and* stupid to take a chance on *avant-garde* architecture.

"In any case," Haruka added, "fancy things like built-in kitchens don't exist in this world."

"The only things we can truly choose on our own are, like, furniture and curtains," said Yuki. "That'll cost more money, though."

"So we'll have to save up even more money," said Natsuki. "We don't have enough to pay for a house yet, do we?"

"Mm. Yuki, how does the payment work?" Haruka asked. "Do we have to pay the full sum in advance?"

"Well, you do have to pay in advance, but not the full sum," said Yuki. "The most you would usually have to pay up front is half."

"That works for us, then. We can pay six hundred gold coins right now, so we can set a maximum budget of one thousand and two hundred gold coins," said Haruka. "We can pay for the rest if we just sell off the orc meat that we're hoarding in our magic bags."

"Oh yeah, I forgot about our strategic orc reserve," I said.

We had enough orc meat stored in the magic bags, where it would basically never go bad, so we didn't have to worry about lost income from rainy days. On the other hand, rain would delay both the work on our house and the payment.

"Okay, we should go and contract builders for our house as soon as possible, so let's discuss what kind of house we want," said Haruka.

"Mm. I don't have many requests, but I'd like a house that has a decent kitchen, though it doesn't have to be as good as Aera-san's kitchen," said Natsuki.

"I'd like to have individual rooms for all of us," said Touya. "If it's not asking for too much, I'd also like an indoor area for training."

“I’d like—”

All of us put in our own requests and then took votes on each idea. In the end, we agreed on five main points.

- Individual rooms and guest rooms for a total of eight rooms
- Four workrooms for tasks like research and alchemy
- A well-equipped kitchen
- A dining room, a living room, and a parlor
- A laundry area wide enough for a bathtub

Those five points were the absolute necessities. A few people had ideas that we rejected as a group, but we decided that we would still tell those ideas to the carpenter in case some of them were actually feasible. We’d leave the rest to the carpenter to decide based on the budget we’d agreed upon: one thousand and two hundred gold coins. We also agreed to pay half of that amount in advance and pay the rest when the house was complete. It would be okay to go over budget a little bit if it was necessary to improve the house, but first we’d need to discuss it further with the carpenter. Given the number of rooms we wanted, our budget probably wasn’t that big, but that was only if we were applying the standards of Earth housing. The cost of living in this world was quite different; housing expenses felt cheaper to us, whereas food seemed more expensive. In any case, we were total greenhorns when it came to housing, so eventually we just concluded that we’d have to discuss the details directly with the carpenter tomorrow.



We ended up taking the next day off from hunting due to bad weather, so the girls all went to meet up with the carpenter and Touya and I were left with some free time. The girls had asked the two of us if we wanted to tag along, but we both knew about how carried away girls could and would get when it came to things like fashion and interior design. The obvious answer was no, and that

was what we said in order to get some time to ourselves.

After we all finished breakfast together, the girls set out in high spirits. Touya and I returned to our rooms to discuss our plans for the day.

“All right, what should we do with our free time, Touya?” I asked.

“Dunno. Oh, why don’t we take this opportunity to go view the plot that we bought? It’s a large plot, so we’ll have plenty of room for sparring!”

“Oh, I didn’t realize that brawn was all you had left, Touya. It seemed like you were fine not too long ago. Does being a beastman reduce your brainpower...?” I pretended to sob as if I was devastated at how much my friend had changed.

Touya responded with a bitter smile and scratched his head. “Hmm, well, I definitely enjoy moving my body much more than I did before. Like, I wouldn’t have been able to perform cool moves with a sword back on Earth! I also like that I can feel my own progress as a swordsman.”

“Oh, I know exactly what you mean. I enjoy the feeling of getting better at using a spear.”

It was a feeling that every guy could probably relate to since it was kind of similar to the urge you would get to imitate martial art moves after watching an action movie. In this world, we could actually imitate the moves of characters in manga and movies now, which made us even more eager to improve our own abilities. However, there were some crazy manga moves that we couldn’t imitate, sadly.

“Well, the biggest reason for training is still to improve our odds of survival,” said Touya. “Orcs aren’t that tough, but they’d probably kill me if I was alone and got surrounded.”

“Mm, we’re not superhuman or anything,” I said. “We can’t trigger shock waves with the swing of a sword, we can’t mow down or blast away the foes in our path...”

“Actually, that sounds like something a mage like you could do with magic, Nao.”

“Nah, I probably won’t be able to pull off anything like that for a good while.



Also, I'm guessing shock wave spells require a longer casting time."

Casting time wasn't exactly the right word for it. What you really needed to prime a spell was concentration; it wasn't like you absolutely had to use incantations to cast your spells. Grimoires contained incantations for spells, but they were more like training wheels; they helped a mage get a concrete mental image of the spell. The mages in our party would yell out the names of their spells when casting them, but that wasn't absolutely necessary; it was just a convenient way to trigger spells without messing up. It was similar to the way that a kendo practitioner would yell out the names of different techniques when swinging his sword at different parts of his opponent's body.

With all that in mind, Haruka's Swiftcast skill had seemed useless initially, but that turned out not to be the case at all. It helped you cast incantations faster, and we'd hypothesized that it also reduced the time it took you to prepare a spell even if you didn't use an incantation. We had no real way to test that hypothesis, though. It was true that Haruka could cast spells faster than me or Yuki, but that wasn't necessarily due to her Swiftcast skill. There was also the possibility that Haruka was faster because she was just better at magic in general. In fact, it was possible to reduce the time required to prepare a spell for casting through practice alone. We could determine how much of a difference Swiftcast made if either Yuki or I managed to learn it, but it wasn't a skill Yuki could copy.

"I guess magic isn't as...flashy as I thought it would be," said Touya.

"Well, if there were ranks for mages, then me and the girls would probably be classified as beginner mages," I said. I had no idea whether or not there were classifications like that in this world, but I felt like Level 3 was still well within the realm of beginner magic. "Anyway, it's not like beastmen have no mana at all, right? You might be able to wrap mana around your sword and create magical techniques to slice through stuff."

Some of the magical devices made by alchemists would consume their users' mana, and races like humans and beastmen could use such devices even if they weren't mages. What that clearly meant was that everyone had mana, and the only difference was how much each individual had relative to others.

“Hmm, you sure about that, Nao? I don’t know what mana feels like. How do you exactly sense or detect it?”

“Uh, no idea. I just have an instinctual feeling of what mana is, I guess because I can use magic.”

I probably would’ve been completely lost if somebody had told me to try to detect my own mana. I had been through a lot of trial and error with spellcasting before I developed an instinct for controlling my mana and sensing how close I was to depleting it, so it wasn’t something that you could really teach to others.

“Do you really have no idea, Nao?” Touya asked.

“I mean, no, I don’t. Besides, it’s probably a better idea to research whether beastmen can even use mana with weapons like swords.”

“Oh, that’s a good point. There are no libraries where we can look things up, though... Hmm, let’s go ask Diola-san about this. She can definitely help us out.”

“But drop the idea if she’s busy, okay? She’s on the job right now.”

“Yeah, I know. If she’s busy, we can just look for documents in the reference room. There was still some stuff from the other day that I wanted to look up.”

“Oh, good idea. In that case, I’ll tag along with you, Touya.”

According to Touya, there weren’t any documents or materials containing important or obscure information, but reading in the reference room still sounded better than spacing out by myself alone at the inn. I got to my feet and followed Touya out of the room.



It was drizzling outside as we headed towards the Adventurers’ Guild; when we arrived, the guild appeared pretty empty. The guild in Laffan was mostly busy in the morning and evening, so it made sense that it would be empty in the middle of the day, especially since it was also raining. Diola-san was sitting at her counter table as usual and looked like she had nothing to do. When she noticed us, she gave us a smile and a light bow.

“Hello, Diola-san,” I said. “Thank you for your help yesterday.”

“Oh, don’t worry about it! The Adventurers’ Guild exists to help adventurers. And I got a little something out of it myself as well.”

“So it was a good deal for both of us, right?”

“Mm, indeed. In any case, what brings the two of you here today? The rest of your party doesn’t seem to be with you. Is your party taking the day off work?”

“Yeah, because of the rain,” said Touya.

“Even veteran adventurers can get caught off guard in the rain, so I think that’s a good idea. Your party probably has plenty of savings, so it won’t hurt to take days off when it rains,” said Diola-san. “Oh, Nao-san, what with the incredible volume of orc meat that your party has been turning in, there’s been talk recently about the possibility that there’s a large nest of orcs somewhere in the environs of Laffan. Do either of you have any idea about this?”

Touya and I looked at each other. We did have some inkling that there was a nest out there, although we couldn’t be sure how big it was. Our party would usually rely on my Scout skill and Touya’s sixth sense to detect and hunt down orcs moving together in small packs. On one occasion, we estimated the location of their nest by triangulating the areas where we’d been running into orcs, and Natsuki and I went to investigate more closely, since we were the only ones with the Stealth skill. My Scout skill had detected forty signals ahead of us. We didn’t confirm that number with our own eyes, but there had to be a lot of monsters located in and around the nest that were at least as strong as orcs. As soon as I’d detected that big bunch of signals, we’d turned back the way we came. Afterwards, we had continued to slay plenty of orcs every day, so their total numbers had definitely dwindled, but...

“What counts as a large nest, Diola-san?” I asked.

“Well, formally, the classification isn’t based on the total number of orcs; it depends on whether there are stronger forms of orc present at the nest. But stronger forms of orc are born when the population of a nest exceeds thirty orcs.”

“Thirty? In that case, we did discover what seemed to be a large nest.”

“So there is one. I figured that was the case based on the amount of orc meat

that your party had brought back to the guild.” Diola-san laid the back of her hand against her forehead and sighed. “I suppose the guild will have to issue a hunt quest.”

“Are large orc nests really that much of an issue, Diola-san?” Touya asked. “Even rookies like us can slay orcs, so they don’t seem too dangerous to me.”

“If you leave them alone, large orc nests continue to grow bigger and bigger until orcs begin to appear near the outskirts of the forest and on the highway. Most rookies and travelers wouldn’t be able to protect themselves against orcs, so...”

On reflection, Diola-san was completely right. We ourselves would have probably been killed by orcs if we’d encountered them before buying more powerful weapons. At this point, we could easily slay orcs with little risk to ourselves, but orcs were stronger than the wipe bear that had almost killed us a few days after we arrived in this world, so orcs weren’t pushovers by any means.

“It wouldn’t be an issue if more adventurers slew orcs on a regular basis, but...”

“Are orcs not popular targets for adventurers, Diola-san?” I asked. “We’ve earned a lot of money from slaying them.”

“Well, experienced adventurers who also have magic bags can earn quite a lot from orcs, but it isn’t worth the trouble for adventurers who don’t meet these conditions. Orc meat is quite heavy, after all. Regardless of how many orcs a regular adventurer slays, he can only bring back the meat from one.”

The amount of meat you could get from one orc would weigh about three hundred kilograms, so each person in a party of six would have to carry fifty kilograms if they divided the burden up equally. The only reason our party had been able to carry back twice that load every day was that we had backpacks and, inside them, magic bags enchanted with the Light Weight spell.

“For parties of average size, the meat from just one orc would only fetch about five to six gold coins per adventurer, so it’s not an attractive source of money,” said Diola. “In addition, orcs rarely move around alone. That means that whenever a party of adventurers slays a whole pack of orcs, they generally

have to throw away most of the meat, which is bad for morale.”

“Oh, that makes sense,” I said.

The prospect of throwing away the equivalent of three hundred thousand yen would be pretty hard to swallow. In this case, adventurers who had risked their lives to slay orcs would have even more cause for regret.

“It’s not as bad as it used to be thanks to the backpacks we’re making with Haruka-san’s guidance, but two orcs is still the limit for most parties,” said Diola.

According to Diola-san, more adventurers than ever before were hunting orcs for a living as a result of Haruka’s backpacks. If they all had backpacks, an average party could haul about one and a half orcs’ worth of meat back to the guild. A party of stronger adventurers could bring back two orcs’ worth. That still wasn’t enough for each adventurer to earn double digits in gold coins, but it wasn’t a bad source of income for parties that were decently handy at slaying orcs.

However, carrying back meat from two orcs still sounded like way too much work with ordinary backpacks. Even with a party of six, each person would end up carrying one hundred kilograms of meat. *Actually, maybe it’s feasible as long as they avoid any further combat after slaying orcs. I’ve heard stories about how professional hikers back in Japan would get paid to carry well over a hundred kilograms of luggage through the mountains of Oze National Park. People in this world are stronger than people back on Earth too...*

“Oh, Diola-san,” I asked, “will there be adventurers who’ll take on the quest to exterminate that orc nest?”

“Honestly speaking, here in Laffan, it’s unlikely that there will be many adventurers willing to do so.”

According to Diola-san, low-rank adventurers weren’t capable of exterminating an orc nest, while the rewards weren’t worthwhile for high-rank adventurers. What that meant was that if the guild issued a hunt quest, it would remain on the bulletin board for a long time.

“What happens in that case?” Touya asked. “Does the guild just ignore orc

nests until the orcs start hurting people?”

“No. That would be unacceptable to the local lord, so he would issue money directly to the guild before things got that bad.”

Diola-san explained that in the event of a large-scale hunt quest, the guild would recruit huge numbers of adventurers. Participation wasn’t mandatory, but more people would take part knowing there was safety in numbers. On top of that, the guild would organize a squad of porters; so adventurers could pay a small fee to have the orc meat carried back to town. It sounded like it wasn’t hard to find willing participants.

“It would be ideal to organize a large-scale hunt as soon as possible, but it would be an enormous loss for the guild unless the local lord financed it, so it’s not a realistic option...”

Diola-san paused and sighed before continuing. She explained that the safety of the highways was what mattered most to a lord, so adventurers dying in the woods due to an orc nest wouldn’t be enough to persuade the castle to finance a guild quest. The guild had an interest in protecting adventurers, particularly greenhorns, but they couldn’t squeeze enough money out of their budget to finance the quest themselves. As a result, all the guild could truly do for the time being was issue warnings to adventurers.

“I see,” said Touya. “It’d be great if our party could exterminate an orc nest by ourselves, but...”

“Oh, don’t worry about it. And please don’t take any unnecessary risks, all right?” said Diola. “Your own safety comes first. Don’t risk incurring any casualties to your own party, Touya-san.”

“Well, orcs aren’t that hard for us if we only take on a few at a time,” I said. “How dangerous are the stronger forms of orcs?”

“It depends. Orc leaders aren’t that dangerous for a party of adventurers that can slay regular orcs, but it’s a different story for stronger forms like orc kings,” said Diola. “Such adventurers would be no match at all for an orc king. But orc kings have never been spotted before in this region; I’ve only heard rumors about them.”

It was fortunate for us that orc kings had never appeared in the area around Laffan; if they were that much more powerful than ordinary orcs, we'd be no match for them.

"On that note, is hunting orc leaders a good source of income?" I asked.

Diola-san smiled bitterly and hesitated a bit before she answered me. "Oh, um, not as such. The magicite and fur from orc leaders are worth more than twice as much as those from regular orcs, but the taste of their meat is more or less the same, unfortunately," said Diola. "It would be safer and more profitable to hunt two or three regular orcs instead. Of course, that's another reason that most adventurers ignore hunt quests for orc nests..."

That made sense; the main way to turn a profit on hunting orcs was by selling their meat. Apparently there was no relationship between the taste of a monster's meat and how powerful it was. In fact, it was sometimes the case that stronger monsters would have tougher and less tasty meat. The fur from an orc leader was probably more valuable than the fur of regular orcs because it was more durable, but that also meant it would be that much harder to deal damage to orc leaders.

"In any case," said Diola, "the magicite and fur from orc kings do sell for quite a lot, but I'm not sure if it's worth the risks you would have to take to slay one."

Diola-san added that based on the rumors she'd heard, even the meat of orc kings tasted more or less the same as the meat of less powerful forms of orc. At the same time, there was always the possibility that you could sell the meat to nobles with a taste for the rare and the novel, so it might fetch a decent amount of money if you played your cards right.

"Oh, I should add—the guild will purchase orc magicite at twice the going rate while a hunt quest is active," said Diola. "Magicite from an orc leader is worth fourteen thousand Rea."

"Twice the going rate? Wow, that sure is a lot," I said. "Wouldn't it still be more profitable to sell the meat and fur, though?"

"Mm, orc meat is usually worth much more than their magicite."

"Does the price that the guild pays for meat and fur go up at the same time?"

“Unfortunately, it does not,” said Diola-san.

*I guess that’s why hunt quests still get ignored. It doesn’t sound like there’s any real reason for us to go out of our way to exterminate an orc nest. It might be worth it just for the experience, but I doubt Haruka would agree to take that kind of risk.*

“On a sidenote, Diola-san, I wanted to ask you something,” said Touya. “Is there any way for people like me to use mana? By that, I mean people who can’t use magic.”

*Oh, right, that’s the main reason we’re here today.*

Diola-san paused in thought and then asked, “Hmm, are you asking whether you can use mana to enhance your physical abilities? You’re not asking about magical devices, correct?”

*So there are actually techniques for enhancing your physical abilities with mana?!*

Touya’s tail began to wag. “Yeah, I was wondering about enhancing my physical abilities! I figured you might know about that since you work here at the Adventurers’ Guild, Diola-san.”

“Well, I don’t know much about it, but I can give a simple explanation if you’d like, Touya-san.”

“Yeah, I would really appreciate that!”

“Very well. Hmm, where to begin... Ah, yes. Have you heard stories about experienced adventurers—the way they become ridiculously impervious to attacks if they slay large numbers of monsters?”

“Yeah, like how a kitchen knife can’t pierce their skin, right?”

*Touya, that was just a random example that one of the girls used when we were discussing this phenomenon. Diola-san won’t have any idea of what you’re talking about... Oh, yep, she’s giving him a weird look.*

“Why a kitchen knife, of all things? But, well, yes, that’s true. As for the exact nature of this phenomenon, there are two main schools of thought.”

“Two? Only two?”



“Yes. To put it simply, one school believes that the phenomenon can be explained in rational terms and another doesn’t.”

*That’s a bit too simple!*

“The latter school—those who believe the true reason defies human understanding—attribute the phenomenon to various supernatural causes. They call it a gift from the gods for slaying monsters, for example, or say that adventurers somehow absorb a mysterious power from the monsters they slay. People who favor these disparate explanations have one thing in common: they believe that we can’t know the exact mechanism for certain.”

*Hmm, that sounds like the character level system that Haruka speculated about when we were discussing this phenomenon among ourselves.*

“As for the other school, they theorize that one becomes more proficient at the use of mana by slaying monsters, which results in the unconscious use of mana to enhance one’s physical abilities. However, few people subscribe to that theory.”

“Why’s that?” I asked. “It makes sense to me.”

That theory sounded plausible regardless of whether it was actually true. However, Diola-san once again put on a bitter smile when she heard my response. “If that theory is true, Nao-san, then elves like you ought to be much stronger than humans from the time you begin adventuring.”

“Oh, right.” It was common knowledge in this world that elves were, on average, much more proficient in the use of mana than humans.

“So does that mean the theory that you enhance your own physical abilities with mana is wrong?” Touya asked.

“Not exactly. There are people who have never slain monsters but nevertheless have physical abilities far beyond the ordinary. Some say that those abilities result from the use of mana,” said Diola. “For another thing, few people are capable of such feats, which makes it plain that not just anyone can achieve such prowess through training. But however mysterious the process, it is possible to gain abilities that defy explanation.”

“I see. That also means it’ll be hard to find someone who’s both willing and

able to teach us the secrets of their physical abilities, right?" I asked.

"Mm, it would most likely be quite difficult."

Our conversation with Diola-san had left me, if anything, less certain of whether there was any hope of us figuring out the secrets of mana. It sounded like the only choice we had was for the girls and me to try teaching Touya how to control mana and then leave the rest for him to figure out via trial and error.

"I should mention another rumor I've heard along the same lines—how certain adventurers who are true masters at combat can smash boulders with their bare hands and slice through walls with a sword," said Diola. "It's possible that mana is the root cause in that case as well. After all, it's possible for a common swordsman to batter down a wall with a heavy sword, but slicing through one is a different matter entirely."

"So to summarize, it probably is possible to enhance your physical abilities with mana, right? Thanks for the information, Diola-san," I said.

"I'm only sorry I couldn't be of more help..."

"Oh, not at all. The information that you gave us will be a huge help," I said. "Also, can we sell some orc meat while we're here?"

"Of course. Follow me to the backyard."

We followed Diola-san to the warehouse behind the Adventurers' Guild. There, we took a huge heap of meat—about four orcs' worth—out of our magic bags and plopped it down on the tables.

"It seems your magic bag has room for an awful lot of meat," said Diola.

"I don't know what counts as a normal amount, but yeah, there's a decent chunk here," I said. "Can you keep our magic bag a secret?"

"Of course. I give my word as an employee of the Adventurers' Guild."

Recently, we'd been stuffing all of the orcs that we slew into the leather bag I had on me. We hadn't yet run into any problems fitting them all inside. The actual magic bag was a hemp sack that was inside of the leather bag. We had discussed drawing a magic circle on the leather bag itself—using ink, since embroidering leather sounded like a pain—but we'd come to the conclusion

that it would be easier just to enchant a hemp sack and carry it inside a leather bag, so we'd ended up trimming down some large hemp sacks for that purpose.

"Please be careful, however. You don't have to worry too much here in Laffan, but if word gets out that your party has magic bags, there's a chance you might be attacked in other towns," said Diola. "There are plenty of unscrupulous adventurers out there who would go so far as to resort to force to obtain a magic bag."

"Thank you for your warning, Diola-san," I said. "What should we do in situations like that? Is it okay to kill our assailants?"

"Well, to put it bluntly, it isn't a problem as long as you kill them outside of a town. That's where you're most likely to be assaulted in any event. Adventurers who attack others in an attempt to rob them are more or less the same as common bandits. Besides, there probably won't be any witnesses."

What Diola-san had said made sense to me; there was no way for the authorities to confirm that someone had gotten murdered in the wilds, and it wasn't like a "murderer" badge would appear in our status display screens. We probably wouldn't be forbidden to enter any given town either unless someone placed a bounty on our heads and circulated detailed descriptions of us. Or rather, there was no real way for the authorities to prevent us from entering a town. It might be possible if there were a magical device that could somehow detect your criminal record. Light novels with settings similar to this world sometimes described devices like that, but based on our experiences so far, it seemed unlikely that that kind of device existed here.

"With respect to combat inside the town walls, the rules are a bit different. In the main, it's fine to kill anyone who attacks you, but you will be punished for any collateral damage," said Diola. "And if you find yourself in a situation in which it's not clear to bystanders who attacked first, there's a chance that the law will punish you even if you were defending yourselves. The safest option would be to flee and avoid combat if possible."

"Hmm, so the rules are kind of unclear?" Touya asked.

"Well, the chances of being attacked inside a town are quite low unless you venture into the slums."

Diola-san said there were no neighborhoods in Laffan that were seedy enough to be considered slums, but there were other towns that had neighborhoods like that; any ordinary person who set foot there would get the clothes robbed off his back and then get dumped on a corner. At the same time, slums were more or less like the lawless wilds outside of town in that you could kill attackers with impunity. It was still scary to think about, however.

“Here is your payment. As for the magicite, I’m returning it to your party for now,” said Diola-san. “Magicite will be worth twice as much once the orc extermination quest has been issued, so it would be wise to hold on to it until then.”

“Um, are you sure about this?” I asked.

It was a great deal for us, but it would be a loss for the guild. The magicite would be from orcs that we had slain before the quest was issued, so it would make more sense if it didn’t count, but...

Diola-san winked at me and smiled in a mischievous way. “Of course I’m sure. Let’s keep this a secret between us, shall we? The guild has earned quite a lot selling your orc meat to butchers, after all.”

“Well, it works out for us too since it saves us the time of having to go to a butcher.”

In the beginning, we had gone directly to a butcher shop to sell tusk boar meat, but recently we’d just been turning everything in to the Adventurers’ Guild. Butchers would generally pay us a bit more, but we would have to haggle for it, and there was always the chance that they wouldn’t be willing to purchase the sheer volume of orc meat that we generally brought back all at once. The guild, on the other hand, would just purchase the meat from us at a set price, and we valued the convenience.

“The hunt quest should be issued within the next few days, so please check back soon.” Diola-san smiled and lifted a finger to her lips before continuing. “I wouldn’t recommend taking on the quest itself as just one party, but as I said, orc magicite will be worth more.”





The reference room of the Adventurers' Guild was much smaller than I had expected from its name; it only had one small table and four chairs. There were four booklets on the table; that appeared to be it as far as reference materials. The booklets were entitled *Monsters & Creatures in the Nearby Region*, *East Forest*, *South Forest*, and *Herbs et cetera*. The titles left little to the imagination, and the booklets themselves weren't very thick either.

"Oh, I didn't expect there to be so little here..." I said.

"Right? But I guess Natsuki managed to read through all of these booklets in one day," said Touya.

"I guess we should have known."

I could probably read through everything here in one day if I tried my hardest. Whether I could remember it all and put it into practice was another matter entirely.

"I'll probably finish reading the rest today," said Touya. "I dunno how much I'll be able to remember, but I'm counting on my Appraisal skill for that."

"Oh, right, the Appraisal skill kind of stores information for you," I said.

Appraisal was a useful skill to have; the information in the display window would be updated as long as you'd encountered that information at least once before. The only downside to the skill was that in order to retrieve information, you had to select an object to use the skill on. You could remember specific types of medicinal herbs, for example, but first you'd have to see those herbs in the wild and use Appraisal on them. But that was generally helpful enough, and there was probably no need to worry about remembering facts wrong.

"Anyway, I'm glad I may be able to learn a way to enhance my physical abilities!" Touya exclaimed. "I wonder if some day soon I'll get a move where I shout 'Something Slash!' and slice through foes."

"You'd really shout an embarrassing technique name like that?" I asked.

"Is it that embarrassing...?"

"I mean, it's not like I'm going to stop you if you want to do it, Touya. Feel

free to use that kind of technique while we're out adventuring. But if there are other people nearby for some reason, I might pretend like I don't know you."

"Come on, man. You don't think girls will wonder who I am and start whispering about me?"

"Is that your plan for getting a wife with animal ears? What kind of situation would require you to use sword techniques in front of a random girl?"

"Well, you know, there are plenty of cliché light novel scenarios... A ruffian assaults a beautiful young girl in town... Highwaymen attack a horse-drawn carriage with a beautiful young girl inside... Uh... A beautiful young girl comes to see me prevail in a fighting tournament... It's possible, is the thing, right?"

"Bro, don't be delusional. Have you already forgotten what Diola-san told us? We can get in big trouble for using weapons inside town! You'll probably get arrested if you use that 'Something Slash' of yours and cause collateral damage."

It would probably be impossible to avoid collateral damage if Touya was confronting a foe who was strong enough to warrant special moves. On the other hand, if Touya had the finesse to defeat a foe like that without causing any collateral damage, then he probably wouldn't need to use a technique like "Something Slash."

"As for the carriage scenario, I don't think it would go that smoothly," I said. "You won't always necessarily manage to save the girl in situations like that. Remember what Tomi told us about what happened to those two other guys who were with him? Oh, what were their names again?"

"Oh, have you already forgotten their names? They were, um... Tanaka and Takahashi, I think."

"Come on, it took you some effort to remember their names too. But yeah, I'm not saying you'll end up like those guys for sure, but I still think the odds of you pulling off a daring rescue are pretty low, man."

Come to think of it, I had no idea what would put a carriage in danger of attack. It seemed like bandits would probably only go after merchants and travelers along certain stretches of road, although it was also possible that they

would attack nobles for political reasons. Bandits presumably weren't stupid, so they would probably only attack targets that they were certain they could defeat. If our party ever got in a situation like that, we could probably defeat the bandits as long as they didn't seriously outnumber us. However, there was no guarantee that we would be able to prevent other casualties. On top of that, I would personally avoid getting involved if there was a risk that my friends would suffer serious injuries attempting to help out a bunch of strangers, even if they happened to be beautiful young girls or innocent children. I was a pretty egocentric person; I cared about my own friends and acquaintances more than the heroic ideal of saving women and children.

It might be an even worse idea to help out a noble in distress. If a party of bandits were strong enough to take down a noble's bodyguards, there was no way we could drive them off without suffering casualties of our own. Besides, if we appeared out of nowhere, it was highly unlikely that a noble would instinctively recognize us as allies; he might even assume we were more bandits and order his bodyguards to kill us. With that all in mind, I concluded that to intervene in a cliché light novel scenario, you'd need cliché light novel cheat skills.

"As far as fighting tournaments go, you'd probably have to place among the top ten contenders to stand out," I said. "Do you really think we could place that high in a tournament that was accepting contestants from all over the country? We don't even know if there *are* tournaments like that in this world."

"Ugh! Yeah, I guess you're right. In the future, when I'm stronger, maybe I could place that high, but right now..."

We didn't have any cheat powers, so training and self-discipline were the only realistic ways for us to get stronger. Even if we participated in a tournament tomorrow, we'd probably lose to seasoned competitors who'd spent their lives training. Getting stronger might take dozens of years, which didn't really fit Touya's fantasy of winning the attention of young girls.

"Actually, hold on. The population of this world has to be smaller than the population of Earth, right? Being the strongest person in an entire country in this world might be more like winning a tournament at the prefectural or city level back in Japan," said Touya. "If that's true, there's a chance we could do



well in a tournament.”

“I mean, if that’s true, then yeah, but...”

A number of cities back in Japan had populations of over a million people, and some prefectures had populations of several million people. I had no idea about the population of this country, but it probably wasn’t anywhere close to that of Japan. However...

“Nah, giving it some thought, I still don’t think it’s possible,” I said.

“Why’s that?” Touya asked.

“First of all, the proportion of the population that’s capable of participating in tournaments is probably greater than it was back on Earth. There are monsters in this world, remember? That probably means there are a lot of people who are capable of combat to some extent.”

“I guess that makes sense.”

“Also, even if a lower proportion were capable of combat, that wouldn’t necessarily mean that the contestants are less skilled on average.”

After all, doubling the population of a country wouldn’t make the strongest person in that country twice as strong, and doubling that person’s strength wouldn’t double the population either. A higher population meant that there would be more and stronger contestants in a fighting tournament, but that didn’t mean a lower population would make it easy to climb up in the ranks.

“Hmm, yeah, I guess you’re right,” said Touya. “If somebody wins a tournament at the prefecture level, there’s a chance that he could perform well at the national level too, so I guess there’s no reason to assume that tournaments here in this world would be easy.”

A higher population would make it easier for any given contestant to find a strong partner for tournaments with a tag team format, however. In any case, it would take a lot of effort and training to stand out in a fighting tournament. It wasn’t something we could pull off in the short term.

“Anyway, the most delusional aspect of your scenarios is that you included beautiful young girls in all of them!” I exclaimed. “Do you seriously think that’s

how real life works?!”

Only in a game or a light novel would every single young girl be beautiful. The only beautiful girl that I had met since being transported to this world was Aera-san. Most of the people that I had met were middle-aged men, and I had yet to meet any beautiful middle-aged women working as waitresses or clerks in stores. The only young waitresses that I had met so far were at the inn back in Sarstedt and at the slightly high-class café that I had visited before I met Aera-san, and they were really more pretty than beautiful. As for Diola-san, she fell more into the category of a beautiful young woman, which was different.

“Oh, come on, a guy can dream, right?” said Touya. “Doesn’t it make you sad to imagine competing in a tournament and only having the deep voices of middle-aged men cheering you on?”

“Face facts, Touya. Beautiful young girls just aren’t that common! Even if we did end up in one of your light novel scenarios, the odds of a beautiful young girl being involved are probably one percent or less.”

In fact, one percent might be optimistic. It wasn’t likely that a teenage girl would tag along with some merchant traveling between towns, and it was even less likely that she’d be gorgeous.

“Are you sure about that? We’ve walked past plenty of cute girls in this town. It’s just that we haven’t been lucky enough to get involved with any of them. To be honest, I think your standards are too high, Nao.”

“Really?” *I think my standards are normal...*

“Hmm. Okay, let me ask you something, Nao. What do you think of the idol groups on Japanese TV? Do you think those are beautiful girls?”

“Huh? Uh, I rarely watched stuff like that. I wasn’t really interested, so I guess my answer would be not really.”

The idols I had seen weren’t ugly by any means, but I didn’t think they were the kind of young girls that guys would get excited about. *Actually, can they even be considered young girls? Not being that interested in idols, I have no idea how old they are on average.*

“Yeah, I figured you would say that. Most people would consider idols to be

the definition of beautiful young girls. It might just be a matter of personal taste.”

“I see...”

I’d never really given it a lot of thought. The only thing that mattered to me in a female singer was her ability to sing; I never paid attention to her appearance. In fact, there were plenty of famous musicians who I wouldn’t recognize on sight; if I looked up anything online, it would be the lyrics to their songs, not their faces. *Not like it matters, right? I just want to listen to some tunes, that’s all.*

“Oh, I think I’ve figured it out. It’s because you’re used to seeing girls like Haruka, Yuki, and Natsuki,” said Touya. “You’re probably used to comparing other girls’ looks to theirs.”

“I mean, yeah, I guess you’re right. But what about you, then, Touya?” I asked.

We had both been friends with Haruka since childhood, and she had always been beautiful. That applied to Yuki and Natsuki as well, so I couldn’t really deny the possibility that I was subconsciously comparing other girls to them. However, if my taste was a result of my history with the girls, the same should apply to Touya.

“Me? Hmm. Well, yeah, I’ll admit that I think Haruka, Yuki, and Natsuki are all cute. However, that doesn’t define what I consider cute in other girls. You know, they’re in a whole different category.”

“Huh? You make no sense. Oh well, let’s put that aside for now and start reading the booklets here. We didn’t come here to chat about stuff like this.”

“Right. Hold on, what led to this in the first place? Oh, right, we were talking about techniques for using mana to enhance your physical abilities.”

“Yeah, you got us sidetracked when you started talking about how you’d use techniques like that to impress girls, Touya.”

“That’s not what I was saying...”

Touya sounded a bit unhappy about my conclusion, but he couldn’t really say

I was wrong. Regardless, it would be good for Touya to work hard at learning techniques like his “Something Slash.” Hopefully he really could learn to use mana that way. However, if techniques for enhancing physical abilities were based on mana, then they would probably be easier for Haruka or me to learn. There was no way that Touya was better than me at controlling mana when he couldn’t even use magic. There was a huge difference in our base strength, so I kind of hoped I could use mana to enhance my own strength to match his. *Wait, hold on, “enhance”? That reminds me...*

“Hey, Touya, something just popped into my head. The Enhanced Muscles skill that Tomi has—that’s a form of *enhancing* his physical abilities, right?”

“Hmm? Oh, yeah, duh, that makes sense! I don’t know if that skill actually uses mana, but it lets him exert way more strength than a normal person could, right? I’ll go ask him about it!”

Touya sounded quite excited. He stood up and was about to leave, but I grabbed his hand and pulled him back down into his seat. “Calm down, Touya. Tomi’s in the middle of work at the moment, right? Are you going to interrupt him when he’s just managed to get a job?”

“Oh, right. He’s not a freelancer like us.”

“Freelancer? That’s not really the term that I would use...”

Back on Earth, there were plenty of freelance jobs that paid decently, but there were also plenty of NEETs who called themselves freelancers, so I wasn’t exactly fond of the term.

“Tomi told me he wanted to switch inns to The Slumbering Bear soon, so I guess I’ll ask him about the Enhanced Muscles skill when he does.”

“Oh, really?”

Touya hadn’t mentioned this before at all. I hadn’t seen Tomi since we parted ways with him on the highway, but it sounded like Touya had continued to meet up with him even after introducing him to Gantz-san and obtaining a shovel.

“Yeah, he said the inn that he’s staying at right now is pretty bad. He wants to move out as soon as he’s got some money. Apparently the food at his current

inn is awful.”

“Mm, a lot of the food in this world is pretty painful for the average Japanese person. Well, I guess there are places that serve good food... Aera-san’s café, the dining hall at The Slumbering Bear...”

“Tomi said something about how he didn’t mind the taste of ale, though,” said Touya.

“Wait, seriously?” I asked. “You sure he didn’t force himself to drink it?”

Ale wasn’t something that I would ever want to pay money for, but I could force myself to drink it if I had to. If I had to spend money, I would sooner spend it on plain old water. However, water was free at The Slumbering Bear, so there was no reason for me to order ale.

“Pretty sure. But yeah, he really seemed to enjoy the food when I treated him to dinner at The Slumbering Bear, so the food he’s getting at his current inn is probably quite bad,” said Touya. “The fact that he actually enjoys ale... I’m not sure if it’s a matter of taste or if it’s because he’s a dwarf.”

“Hmm, the dwarf theory makes the most sense to me.” I definitely imagined dwarfs being like “I can chug down any kind of alcohol, including methyl alcohol!”

“Well, anyway, Tomi wanted to role-play as a typical dwarf from the very beginning of the character creation process, so I guess it’s a good thing that he enjoys ale,” said Touya. “It’d be kind of weird for a dwarf to ask for water instead of ale, right?”

“Mm, he did go out of his way to get the Drunkard skill,” I said. “I guess I’ll talk with him if I bump into him. Maybe he can teach me how to enhance my own physical abilities with mana.”

“It’d be great if you could learn the secret first, Nao. You’ll probably have an easier time teaching me than Tomi would.”

“If I get the chance, I’ll make sure to ask him. All right, it’s about time that we start reading the booklets here.”

“Yeah, you’re right.” Touya picked up the booklet that was entitled *South*

Forest.

*Oh, has he already read through the East Forest booklet? I guess I'll read Monsters & Creatures in the Nearby Region. The booklet wasn't fancy by any means; it was basically just a few dozen pages of paper bunched together. It made sense that this place was called a reference room rather than a library or something like that, since the booklets here weren't anywhere close to scholarly monographs. When I flipped through the booklet, all of the text looked like it was handwritten, and there were no pictures or drawings. It was a shame that the booklets weren't proper books, but they were better than nothing. I opened the booklet to the first page and began to read.*

### *What are monsters?*

*Monster is the generic term for organisms that have a magicite crystal inside of their bodies. They are intrinsically dangerous and should ideally be slain on sight, but it is also important to calmly assess the difference in strength between different monsters and muster the courage to retreat when needed. In addition to the presence of magicite crystals, there are a few other differences between monsters and regular animals. One major difference is that monsters are driven by bloodlust. Most animals do not attack people unless they feel threatened; monsters, however, almost always attack people on sight. Some monsters will flee if outnumbered, but stronger forms of monsters tend to not analyze differences in strength and numbers. It is dangerous in the extreme to let one's guard down even if one's own party outnumbers a pack of monsters.*

*Another key difference between monsters and animals is that monsters lack a territorial instinct. Many animals naturally tend to chase away other animals of the same species that trespass in their territory, but monsters, as a rule, cooperate and form packs with other monsters of the same kind. However, they do attack other types of monsters that trespass in their territory; thus, it is rare to encounter different types of monsters in the same general area. If an area happens to be home to several types of monsters, there is usually a reason specific to the ecosystem, such as a lack of conflict due to the existence of several parallel niches (with the territory being divided, e.g., between monsters that are primarily active on land, in the air, and underground) or due to the fact that different monsters feed on different kinds of prey. Nevertheless, there are*

*special environments such as dungeons in which none of the above rules apply, so caution is required.*

### *How to earn money from monsters*

*Magicite crystals are a guaranteed source of money present in every monster. They are usually located near the heart or center of a monster's body, although in some monsters they are located inside the head. Anyone can retrieve magicite crystals; besides being easy to preserve, they do not occupy much space. Thus, it is always recommended that adventurers retrieve the magicite from slain monsters. Some monsters, such as orcs, are also valuable for their meat and fur, but dressing monsters requires some practice. It is a good idea to learn the ropes from adventurers already familiar with this process. With no knowledge of which parts of a monster are valuable, there is a high likelihood that one will have to discard and waste most of its carcass.*

*If financially feasible, it is often desirable to purchase resources such as a monster encyclopedia. Studying monsters before slaying them will help increase the amount of money one can earn and also help guarantee one's safety in combat against monsters. If a local nest of monsters becomes sufficiently populous and active that it inflicts casualties upon the citizenry, the Adventurers' Guild will issue an extermination quest. When such a quest is active, adventurers will, as a rule, be paid a bonus for slaying monsters in addition to the usual payments for materials like skin, fur, and magicite. There are some instances in which the guild will demand a monster's magicite as proof that an adventurer has slain it, but there are also instances in which the guild will demand other parts. Thus, it is important to confirm the contents and conditions of a hunt quest.*

All of the information that I had read so far was probably common knowledge among adventurers, but it was nice to see it all written out. It looked like the rest of the booklet was just information on the monsters and animals in the surrounding region, so I flipped around in search of information on orcs since that was the most relevant to my party at the moment.

### *Orcs*

*Orcs have the appearance of a much larger and bipedal form of boars. On*

average, their height exceeds three meters; their torsos are quite girthy as well. Indeed, the average person would die instantly if an orc slammed into him at full force. Orcs are far from nimble, but what they lack in agility, they make up in the sheer power of their attacks. It is therefore recommended that when facing orcs, adventurers dodge their attacks rather than block or parry. Orc fur and meat sell for a decent amount of money, as do their magicite crystals. This being the case, they are an efficient source of income for adventurers who (1.) are strong enough to slay them and (2.) have a means of transporting orc meat. Numerous stronger forms of orc exist as well, e.g., orc leaders. These forms often begin to appear in nests that are home to a few dozen orcs. Orc leaders are, as a general rule, approximately one and a half times the size of regular orcs and are approximately four times stronger. Only adventurers who can easily defeat four regular orcs should attempt to fell orc leaders. The safest way to deal with an orc leader is for multiple adventurers to surround it and slowly wear it down while dodging its attacks.

In addition to orc leaders, even stronger forms of orc exist, viz. orc captains, orc generals, and orc kings. The increase in size between each successive form is not extreme, but as stated, each successive form is approximately four times stronger than the previous one. For adventurers who underestimate these orcs, death is all but certain. Orc captains are the strongest form of orcs that a single party of adventurers can handle if every member is an adventurer of moderately high rank. If one should encounter an orc general or orc king, a hasty retreat is recommended. There are few obvious differences in appearance between each form of orc; in order to identify stronger forms of orc, adventurers ought to pay close attention to the number of orcs in the surrounding environs and to the size of their fangs. As a general rule, the size of an orc's fangs is proportionate to its strength. In addition, orc generals and orc kings can be readily identified by the orcs that accompany them, which are always, at minimum, orc captains. Note that adventurers must take on multiple very powerful forms of orcs when attempting to slay an orc general or orc king.

Here we refer to one adventurer's account of orc kings. Orc kings, in his words, project "an intimidating aura" that makes it impossible to mistake them for orc generals. It must be emphasized that this adventurer was strong enough to escape alive from multiple encounters with orc kings. There is no guarantee that



*low-rank adventurers can accurately gauge the strength of the orcs they encounter.*

So there were four different stronger forms of orcs. *Wait, if each successive form is four times stronger than the last, doesn't that mean an orc king is as strong as 256 regular orcs?! Okay, yeah, orc kings aren't the kind of foe anyone can slay solo. Maybe you could pull it off if you attacked from long range, but unless you had a really good spot to camp at, the orc king would probably be able to close in on you and turn you into mincemeat.* Orc leaders were probably the most powerful form that my party could slay. Natsuki might even be capable of handling one on her own given that she could slay a regular orc in one hit. Taking on an orc leader probably wouldn't be that dangerous if we all surrounded it, so taking on an orc nest didn't seem too unrealistic depending on how we approached it.

I glanced through the information about other monsters as well. I finished the whole thing pretty quickly; there weren't that many other monsters listed. I wasn't sure if that meant there weren't many types of monsters in this region or if the booklet was just encouraging the reader to purchase an encyclopedia on monsters for further study. In any case, I was done with this booklet. Only a few parts stood out in my memory, but it wasn't really an issue; I could just ask Touya for the details he had logged in his Appraisal skill.

I closed the booklet and looked up to check on what Touya was doing now. He seemed to have finished reading the *South Forest* booklet since he was reading *Herbs et cetera* now. I started to read through the *East Forest* booklet, since that was the main place where we worked.

### *East Forest*

*This area surrounding Laffan is an ideal hunting ground for rookie adventurers. Monsters do not appear in the forest bordering the highway, so it is relatively safe to gather herbs in this area. Tusk boars do appear from time to time, but they will not attack if one looks them in the eye and slowly backs away. However, they will charge if one is so unfortunate as to encounter them when they are agitated or when they are raising shoats. In this case, one may have no alternative but to fell them; their meat and fur can be sold in town. Note that tusk boars do not have magicite crystals as they are not monsters.*

*If one ventures deeper into the forest, monsters such as goblins, hobgoblins, and orcs will begin to make their presence known. Goblins and hobgoblins are hardly a serious threat even to rookies, but adventurers should prepare weapons of good quality if they wish to hunt orcs. Rookies will not be able to inflict serious damage wielding cheap weapons against orcs. There is no clear line of demarcation between the territory of the goblins and that of the orcs. A not inconsiderable number of rookies have lost their lives after unwittingly crossing into orc territory. Adventurers are cautioned not to venture deeper into the forest until they are capable of felling an ordinary tusk boar with a single blow.*

*If one ventures even deeper into the forest than the domain of the orcs, one will eventually reach the foot of a mountain surrounded by the forest. This area is inhabited by monsters such as ogres that are functionally impossible for rookie adventurers to defeat. Even the majority of adventurers who are capable of pressing this far into the woods would be better served by turning towards the south forest, where it is much safer and easier to earn money. The mountain extends some distance to the west and has not been explored exhaustively; it is therefore recommended only to adventurers who have the utmost confidence in their own abilities. There is practically no information on file concerning the monsters that appear in the deep mountains, but adventurers capable of defeating ogres have gone missing in this area, which ought to be an indicator of how dangerous it is.*

It sounded like it would be a good idea to avoid venturing deeper into the forest than the area where orcs generally appeared. The following pages listed which herbs were common in each area. Eventually I came across a section on orc Stampedes.

### *Orc Stampedes*

*Orc Stampedes occur in the east forest about once every few years. When adventurers, for whatever reason, fail to slay enough orcs to keep the population in check, the orcs form a large pack, establish a nest, and begin to encroach upon the open highway. Under such conditions, even the highway near the east forest is dangerous. Rookies should scrutinize the bulletin board at the Adventurers' Guild and be on the lookout for warning posters or for any other information that might indicate an impending stampede. In addition, for their*

*own safety, adventurers should immediately report to the guild if they come across any orcs in the outskirts of the forest, beyond their usual range.*

*If the orc population is culled routinely, Stampedes do not occur. Regrettably, slaying orcs is not a popular source of income among adventurers, owing in part to the difficulty of transporting materials from orc carcasses. It would be ideal for adventurers equipped with magic bags to slay orcs.*

*In the event of an Orc Stampede, the guild will recruit adventurers for a large-scale hunt quest to exterminate the source nest. The guild will also offer transportation services for any spoils that adventurers obtain from the orcs. It is recommended that any adventurer capable of slaying orcs take part in a hunt quest, which will always be highly remunerative.*

The information in the booklet was more or less the same as what Diola-san had told us earlier. Actually, given that it seemed to be handmade and the information sounded specific to Laffan, maybe Diola-san was the one who had written this booklet. In any case, the information inside was easy to digest. I flipped through the booklet one more time in search of anything else that might be of interest, and I came across a section on greater salamanders.

### *Noria River*

*Upon walking about half a day from the east gate of Laffan, one arrives outside of a town called Sarstedt. Next to the town flows a river known as the Noria. The forest that begins east of Laffan extends along this river as well. The river itself is quite deep and wide; it is difficult to cross on foot. However, adventurers are also advised not to swim across the river, as there is some danger of being attacked by monsters in midstream. The recommended option is to pay for passage on the ferry at the town of Sarstedt.*

*Upon venturing one day's journey upstream on the Noria, one arrives at an area in which the river is narrow and the water transparent. It is in this habitat that one can find greater salamanders. Greater salamanders are a rare delicacy and thus can serve as a good source of income for adventurers who are confident in their abilities to capture one. These salamanders are ordinary animals and not especially dangerous. However, greater salamanders are only worth money if they are frozen immediately after death. Adventurers wishing to*

*sell greater salamanders will require either a mage capable of freezing them or an enchanted bag.*

So the round trip up the Noria would take a total of at least two days, and each salamander would fetch at least twenty gold coins. On average, orcs would make us more money, so there was no point in going out of our way to hunt salamanders unless we had other business in the area. The booklet mentioned that the water upstream was clear, so maybe you could catch some delicious fish there too. The fish that we had eaten back at Sarstedt had been disgusting, but freshwater fish like cherry salmon and sweetfish were decent with just salt. Maybe it was possible to catch them in that length of the Noria. Unfortunately for me, the booklet didn't contain any information about the fish in that area.

While I was thinking about fish, Touya suddenly said, "Nao, I'm done reading. What about you?" I noticed that he had placed his booklet back on the table.

"I still haven't read the *South Forest* booklet or the *Herbs et cetera* booklet," I said. "I've skimmed through the other two for information that's relevant to us right now."

"Gotcha. What's the plan now? I think it's almost noon."

"Dunno. Do you think the girls will be back at the inn by now?"

We hadn't decided what to do for lunch yet, but I kind of wanted to head to Aera-san's café. I had no intention of splurging, but I felt like it wouldn't hurt to pay for a relaxing experience after days and days of hunting orcs.

"I feel like they should be done after half a day, but it is a construction order for a house, so..."

"Yeah, that's true..."

Preconstruction meetings back in Japan would definitely last longer than half a day, but in this world, a lot of the details were left up to the carpenter, so there was a chance that there wouldn't be much for the girls to discuss.

"Well, let's head back to The Slumbering Bear first," said Touya. "There's no point in debating this between just the two of us."

"Sounds good to me," I replied. "If they aren't back yet, we can just head out

for a delicious lunch on our own.”

Touya and I nodded at each other and lined up the booklets in their original positions on the table before heading out of the guild.

Touya and I returned to The Slumbering Bear together. When we knocked on the door of the girls’ room to check if they were back yet, they responded immediately. They explained that the preconstruction meeting hadn’t lasted long; all they’d had to do was tell the carpenter our budget and the features we wanted and then ask a few simple questions.

“So how long will the actual construction process take?” I asked.

“According to the carpenter, anywhere from two to three months depending on the weather,” said Yuki. “He said that it would be done before the new year at the absolute latest.”

There were less than four months left in the current year, so that seemed pretty fast considering that the house we wanted was going to be quite big.

“The carpenter really appreciated the fact that we made such a large down payment—and the fact that we gave him a decent budget,” said Haruka. “I think he knows he can count on us for the rest, so he seems happy.”

“Sure, we paid a lot up front, but was that really enough to earn his trust?” I asked. The carpenter knew that we were adventurers, but it wasn’t like we were famous enough that he could guess our income.

“Apparently it’s because we helped out Aera-san. The carpenter said he eats at her café from time to time since he was the one who did the renovations, so he knows that we provide the meat that Aera-san uses in her dishes.”

“Oh, so he probably figured we’d be able to pay the full amount based on the value of the meat we’ve been selling.” And he was completely right about that; we had more than enough meat saved up in our magic bags to cover our future needs.

“Nao-kun, what did you and Touya-kun do today?” Natsuki asked.

“Us? We went to the Adventurers’ Guild to ask Diola-san some questions and then looked up some information in the reference room.”

I told Natsuki about what we'd discovered regarding orc nests and Stampedes. It seemed that she had already given some thought to the possibility of a Stampede; she had read the booklets in the reference room as well. However, she wasn't aware that the guild would organize a large-scale hunt quest and pay a premium for orc magicite during a Stampede. If we brought back four orc magicites per day while a large-scale hunt quest for an orc nest was active, then we would get an extra twelve gold coins for each, so I was grateful that Diola-san had provided us with this information.

"Uh, switching gears, I'm kind of hungry," said Touya. "None of you have eaten lunch yet, right?"

Touya's stomach grumbled as though synchronized with his words, and the girls responded with dry laughs

"Mm, we planned to wait for you two to get back before eating lunch," said Haruka.

"In that case, wanna head over to Aera-san's café for lunch?" I asked. "Sounds like today's special is pork chops."

"Really? How did you find that out, Nao?" Yuki asked.

"Oh, Aera-san told me when I went over to deliver meat yesterday."

All of us would take turns delivering meat to Aera-san's café; yesterday it had been my responsibility, and Aera-san had told me about the pork chops and invited me to drop in for a meal. The inspiel sauce that we'd made under Aera-san's guidance was sitting in a corner of our room ready to use, but we didn't have a kitchen where we could deep-fry food, so it would be a shame to miss out on an opportunity to eat pork cutlets. I hoped that everyone would agree with my idea.

"Hmm, now that you mention it, I could go for some pork cutlets," said Yuki.

"Yes, I have no objection," said Natsuki.

"All right, then let's head out right now," said Haruka. "If we don't hurry, she might run out of supplies."

"Sounds good!" Touya exclaimed. He hopped to his feet and asked, "Oh, can I

invite Tomi to come with us as well? I kind of want to treat him to a meal, so...”

After all, it was Haruka who held the purse strings. Touya probably wanted to invite Tomi to lunch in order to ask him whether it was possible to enhance your own physical abilities with mana. Tomi would be in the middle of work right now, but he probably had time for a lunch break.

“Tomi? I don’t mind treating him to one meal, but where did this idea come from, Touya?” Haruka asked.

“Well, remember how Nao and I went to ask Diola-san some questions earlier? You see...”

Touya started to explain what Diola-san had told us about using mana to enhance your physical abilities and sword technique. He also shared his own theory that Tomi’s Enhanced Muscles skill was an example of mana-powered strength. The girls all looked thoughtful as they listened. Unlike Touya, all of them were capable of using magic, but they were also physically weaker than him, so the idea of enhancing their physical abilities was probably appealing.

“Mm, paying for one meal would be more than worth it if we can learn how to use our mana in that way,” said Haruka.

“Hmm, what if I just ask Tomi to let me copy his Enhanced Muscles skill?” Yuki asked. “If you’re right that the skill is powered by mana, then maybe I can teach the rest of you how to use your mana the same way.”

“Oh, that’s a great idea!” Touya exclaimed.

Not only did Yuki have the Copy skill, she had some experience controlling her own mana as a spellcaster, so she would be perfect for the job. However, even if Tomi was willing to teach Yuki the Enhanced Muscles skill, I wasn’t sure if he had the free time.

“Tomi said he wanted to move over to The Slumbering Bear, right?” I asked. “What if we offer to pay for his lodging and meals for a few days in exchange for him teaching Yuki his Enhanced Muscles skill?”

Haruka nodded, but it looked like she had some reservations. “A few days’ worth is fine, but what about afterwards? It would be cruel to tell him to go back to his previous inn after Yuki has learned the skill, wouldn’t it?”

“Oh, that’s not an issue at all. He’s already decided to move to The Slumbering Bear, and he’s earning enough from his job to afford it,” said Touya. “But if we cover his expenses for a couple days, he’ll be able to save his own money, so I’m sure he’ll be appreciative.”

“All right, let’s go with that idea. We might as well give it a shot and invite him.”

“Okay! I’ll go over and ask if he wants to join us for a meal. Meet you guys at Aera-san’s café!”

Touya dashed out of the room as soon as he had finished that sentence. The rest of us looked at each other and laughed before setting out ourselves.



We arrived at Aera-san’s café and waited outside briefly. Soon Touya arrived with Tomi in tow. In fact, it looked like Touya had made him jog the whole way. Tomi was a good deal weaker than Touya, so Touya had probably stopped short of forcing him to sprint. It looked like Tomi was doing well; his face looked much healthier than it had when I first met him. His hair and beard looked properly trimmed now too. *I mean, he was wandering around in the woods, so I guess it’s not surprising that he looks better now.*

“Sorry, did we keep you all waiting?” Touya asked.

“Nah, you got here sooner than I expected,” said Haruka. “Hello, Tomi.”

“Hello. It’s been a while, Haruka-san, Nao-kun.”

“Yo. Good to see you again. Sorry about inviting you on such short notice.”

“Oh, don’t worry about it. I’m happy to go the distance for a free meal,” said Tomi. “Also, maybe this is a weird thing to say, but it’s nice to meet you, Furumiya-san and Shidou-san.”

“I suppose it is technically our first time meeting you in this world, Tomi-san,” said Natsuki. “You can just call me Natsuki.”

“You can just call me Yuki as well,” said Yuki. “I gotta say, though, you look quite different from before...” She sounded impressed—a little shocked, even.

Tomi chuckled. “Ha ha, yeah. I bet it would be hard to figure out who I am if



nobody had told you in advance.”

Of course, Natsuki and Yuki didn’t look much different than they had on Earth. The rest of us weren’t human anymore either, but we all looked more similar to our past selves than Tomi did. Looking at Tomi, it was much harder to connect the dots between his dwarf and human selves.

“Well, in any case, you can look forward to a great meal today,” said Touya.

“Are you sure you want to hype it up like that?” Tomi asked. “Now I’m going to have really high expectations.” He grinned as if he were ready to accept a challenge.

“Don’t worry, we’re sure that you’ll enjoy it!” I exclaimed. I gave him a confident nod and a thumbs up before we headed inside of the café, and Aera-san greeted us with a beaming smile when she saw us.

“Oh, you came to visit, Nao-san! Ah, it looks like everyone else is—oh, there seems to be someone new with you?” She looked at Tomi with open curiosity.

“Yeah, this guy’s an acquaintance of ours,” I said. “Is there a table for six available?”

“Yes, over there in that corner. I’ll bring over some chairs right away.”

I looked where Aera-san had pointed and saw a single empty table. Every other seat in the café was occupied, including the counter seats, so it looked like business was booming as usual.

“Oh, we can carry the chairs ourselves,” said Haruka. “Where are they?”

“Thank you very much. They’re right over there.” Aera-san pointed to some chairs lined against the wall. They hadn’t been there the last time we had visited, so she’d presumably purchased them to accommodate larger groups of customers.

Touya and I took two chairs and carried them over to the empty table, and then we all sat down.

“Would you all like the daily special?”

“Yes, please,” said Haruka.

“Very well. I’ll just be a moment.”

After Aera-san headed back to the kitchen, Tomi sat up straight and bowed his head. “Let me take this opportunity to thank you for saving me back then, Haruka-san, Nao-kun,” he said, sounding quite formal. “The money that you lent me truly helped me out a lot. I would have probably struggled without a buffer like that. Please allow me to return the money I borrowed.” He handed over three gold coins to Haruka.

“Do you have enough savings now that you can afford to pay us back?” Haruka asked.

“Yeah, with Touya’s help, I’ve managed to get a job, so I’m fine now.”

“I see. In that case, I’ll accept your repayment.”

Our party was making enough now that three gold coins were basically nothing to us, but I hadn’t really expected Tomi to pay the loan back, so the fact that he’d been good for his word gave me a good impression of his character. It seemed like Haruka felt the same way; as she took the coins and put them in her wallet, she gave him a gentle smile.

“Oh, just to make sure, did Touya tell you why he invited you here today, Tomi?” Haruka asked. “Or rather, did you tell him anything at all, Touya?” Tomi and Touya both shook their heads, and she sighed when she saw that. “Touya... Well, never mind. It looks like our lunch is here, so let’s eat before we discuss any further.”

I looked over my shoulder and saw Aera-san approaching our table with plates in both hands.

“Thank you for waiting! Here is the daily special.”

Aera-san started to swiftly line up the plates on our tables.

Tomi looked surprised. “Oh, are these pork cutlets?!”

“Yeah,” said Touya. “Better than your expectations?”

“Yeah, easily! They’re also covered with some delicious-looking sauce!”

The daily special also included soup and bread, but the main dish was definitely the cutlets. They were twice the size of regular pork cutlets back in

Japan, and there were two for each of us. However, there were three cutlets on each of the plates that Aera-san lined up in front of Touya, Tomi, and me.

“Aera-san, why do some of us get extra cutlets?” I asked.

She smiled playfully. “Well, I remembered that the last time Touya-san finished one of my daily specials, he looked like he was hungry for more, so these are on the house. Keep it a secret between us, okay?”

It surprised me that she had noticed that Touya hadn’t been fully satisfied, especially since it wasn’t really her fault; the main target demographic for this café was women.

“Thank you very much, Aera-san! I really appreciate it!” Touya exclaimed.

“I’m sorry for your trouble, Aera-san.” Haruka bowed her head.

“Don’t worry about it. It’s only thanks to your party and the meat you deliver that I’m able to serve this kind of fare. Please take your time and enjoy the food.” She headed back to the kitchen.

Tomi grabbed a fork as soon as Aera-san had left. “I-Is it really okay for me to eat this?!”

“Go ahead. See, Touya’s already started,” said Haruka.

“Hm? I mean, it’s a sin not to eat pork cutlets while they’re still hot and crispy, right?” said Touya.

“I dunno about a sin, but pork cutlets are best when they’re hot and crispy,” said Yuki. “Mm, delicious!”

Touya had already inhaled a whole cutlet, and Yuki had devoured half of one of hers.

“See? All right, let’s dig in,” said Haruka.

“Mm. Let’s eat,” said Natsuki.

“Okay! Whoa, this is delicious!” Tomi exclaimed. “The sauce on these pork cutlets tastes like an actual sauce too!”

It looked like Tomi was overwhelmed. Tears appeared in his eyes the moment he took his first bite. *I guess even someone who can stand the taste of ale thinks*

*the taste of most food in this different world is bad.*

“Actual sauce? Well, I guess you weren’t completely sure about the sauce before actually digging in,” said Touya. “It’s good enough for pork cutlets as long as you don’t prefer some specific other sauce, right?”

“It’s more than good enough! I wouldn’t have complained even if these pork cutlets were covered in yakisoba sauce, but this sauce is perfect!” Tomi exclaimed.

The best sauce for pork cutlets was, of course, a matter of personal taste, but after you’d lived in Laffan for a week and put up with the kind of food that was served most places, your preferences would go out the window.

The girls mentioned that you could use all kinds of different ingredients to adjust the flavor of the sauce, but Tomi didn’t seem to care at the moment; apparently it was more than good enough for him as it was.

“I wanted to discuss things while we ate, but it looks like it would be a better idea to wait until after we’re all done,” said Haruka.

“Mm, we need everyone’s complete attention for the issue we want to discuss,” said Natsuki.

Haruka and Natsuki both had bitter smiles on their faces, and I nodded in agreement. Tomi was totally focused on his food at the moment.

“Yep,” I said. “Oh yeah, does anyone want an extra cutlet?”

Aera-san had probably only given extra cutlets to all three of us guys because she would have felt weird giving Touya special treatment. All the same, I had a smaller appetite now than I had back on Earth, probably because I was an elf. I also hadn’t really burned any energy today, so two pork cutlets was more than enough for me.

Yuki’s hand shot up the second I asked who wanted an extra cutlet, and then Natsuki raised her hand more hesitantly. Touya stared at me too, but he had a whole cutlet in his mouth, so I decided to ignore him.

“Natsuki and Yuki... You two can have half each,” I said.

“Thank you very much, Nao-kun.”

“Thanks!”

I sliced one of my pork cutlets in half and transferred one half to each girl’s plate, and then I started to eat my remaining cutlets. When we had all finished our meals, we ordered some tea to drink while we chatted.

“Once again, thanks for treating me to lunch,” said Tomi. “It was delicious. I didn’t know there were pork cutlets in this world—or that kind of sauce.”

“Well, these cutlets are technically orc meat, not pork, but they taste quite similar,” I said. “And actually, it was the girls who taught Aera-san how to make pork cutlets.”

“Oh, that makes sense. Was the sauce also something you guys came up with?”

“No, it’s called inspiel sauce,” said Haruka. “It’s unique to this world. The recipe is kind of an elf secret, so this café is probably the only place in Laffan where you can find it.”

Aera-san had told us that inspiel sauce was a staple in elf households, but it sounded like it wasn’t common knowledge in the wider world, so it kind of was a secret in that way. In any case, given our own business supplying Aera-san with meat, it was good for our purses if her café continued to thrive, so it wasn’t such a bad idea to praise the sauce and make it sound rare and valuable even if that was a little bit of an exaggeration.

“Oh yeah, the person who took our orders was an elf. I didn’t really take note since I got distracted by the pork cutlets. The other food was delicious too.”

“Yeah. As far as I know, this café has the best food in this town,” said Touya.

For the most part, we avoided wandering around town in search of food, but it wasn’t like we skipped out on gathering information about places that served food. One of the places we’d learned about was the café that we’d visited before we set off in search of Yuki and Natsuki. It had a good reputation among the locals, but the dishes that Aera-san served were way better than anything we had tried at that other café—in spite of which the prices at that café were more expensive. Maybe Laffan had some fancy establishments for upper-class citizens that were really worth the premium, but in terms of the ratio of cost to

quality, Aera-san's café was the best choice for us.

"Hmm. If the recipe of the sauce is a secret, that means I can't buy it, right?" Tomi asked. "I would be able to put up with bad-tasting food if I could use that sauce on it..."

We all exchanged glances, but we ended up shaking our heads. We could share our own inspiel sauce with Tomi, but the problem was that the inspiel sauce was just too good—and too easy to make; you could just throw your own fruits and vegetables into the base. If word got out that it was that easy to make, someone would end up mass-producing it, and then Aera-san's café would lose one of the things that made it unique. She had shared the recipe and some of her own sauce base out of the goodness of her heart, so we couldn't nonchalantly spread that information without her permission.

Aera-san returned with our cups of tea. "Um, how did the pork cutlets taste?"

"Amazing," I said. "Are they popular?"

"Yes, they are! People have started to reserve seats for dinner, and I'm finally making a profit now. It's all thanks to your help. Thank you very much!" Aera-san gave me a huge grin and then bowed her head.

*Mm, it's nice to see a smile on a cute little girl's face.* It filled me with good feelings, especially when I remembered the way she'd been crying back when I'd first entered her café. *Well, she's actually older than me, but that's not relevant.*

"Your success is really thanks to your own skills, Aera-san, and the delicious dishes you make," said Natsuki.

"Yeah, exactly," said Yuki. "All we did was offer some advice."

"Your advice was what got me on the right track, though," said Aera. "Regardless, the tea is on the house as well. Please feel free to relax and take your time." Aera-san took our empty plates and quickly departed before we could offer to pay for the tea. Of course, that probably wasn't the only reason she was in a hurry; given the lunch rush, she genuinely needed to get back to the kitchen. There weren't that many tables in the café, but she was the only person working here.

“Um, did you guys help that lady with other stuff too apart from teaching her how to make pork cutlets?” Tomi asked.

I paused in thought for a moment and then decided to answer his question with a question. “Overall, what do you think of this café, Tomi?”

“I think it’s very nice and clean, and it has a calm atmosphere. These teacups here look like good quality porcelain as well. In fact, this is the first time I’ve seen porcelain tableware in this world.”

Cheap dining halls would never use porcelain; it broke too easily. Generally, they’d provide wooden cups. In fact, some places didn’t even provide plates; they’d just dump your bread directly on the tabletop. Slightly nicer venues might offer metal tableware.

“Anything else that stands out to you?”

“Anything else? Uh, the elf girl that works here is pretty cute, I guess?”

*I mean, you’re right, but that’s not what I’m trying to get at.* “I completely agree, but that’s not directly related to the café itself, right? Try again.”

“Hmm. Well, this seems like a pretty normal café to me...” Tomi looked down at his hands as he pondered my question. Suddenly, he raised his head and looked at me. “Wait, hold on, that in itself actually kind of makes it *not* normal, right? Not in this world, at least. It would be normal back in Japan, but...”

I nodded. “Yeah, that’s the key thing. It seems like one of our classmates also gave Aera-san some advice, but it was incomplete advice, which is why this café looks the way it does. She ended up in a pretty dire situation as a result. We came across Aera-san by chance and told her how to adjust her business model to fit the economic realities of this world.”

“Oh, I see. Yeah, it makes sense that a normal café back in Japan wouldn’t be able to survive here in this world,” said Tomi. “I have no idea which of our classmates did this, but whoever it was sure caused some real trouble.”

“Yeah, things work differently in this world, so Aera-san didn’t have any customers at first,” I said. “On top of that, our classmate charged her for that ‘advice’ and then immediately vanished, so Aera-san basically got robbed.”

“Yikes, really? That’s outright malicious...”

Apparently that classmate had vanished before Aera-san had even opened her café for business, so there was a chance that her “adviser” had known her business was doomed to fail. That would be even more malicious if it were the case, but we had no way of finding out at the moment.

“Ugh. As a Japanese person, I kind of feel guilty about this whole thing even though I wasn’t involved at all,” said Tomi. “But it looks like everything worked out in the end thanks to the help you guys provided, and I’m happy to know about a place where I can get delicious food. What about you guys?”

“We’re happy as well—and in fact, we actually profit from this arrangement too,” I said. “Aera-san buys meat from us, as she mentioned earlier.”

I was also happy that we’d managed to help out a cute elf girl. In the end, we’d found a place where we could eat delicious food and even received some inspiel sauce from Aera-san, so getting involved had been more than worth our time. I’d had to do all sorts of things, like act as a waiter for a bit, but I didn’t really mind considering what we’d gotten in return. *But one day I am going to make you pay for ditching me, Touya.*

“I see! So it all worked out in the end. It still bothers me to think about that classmate of ours who caused all this trouble, but...” Tomi paused for a moment, but then he shook his head as if to dispel those thoughts for now. “By the way, you guys mentioned something about a specific reason you had for inviting me to lunch, right?”

“Mm. We wanted to ask you about something,” said Haruka.

“Well, you guys have helped me out a lot, so as far as most things, I don’t mind answering at all, but...” He cocked his head as if he were pondering what kind of question he knew the answer to that we didn’t.

“Can you tell us about how your Enhanced Muscles skill works?” Haruka asked.

Tomi blinked in surprise.



## Chapter 4—A New Power and a New Foe

“The Enhanced Muscles skill? I do have it at Level 2, but I don’t really know how to explain it,” said Tomi. “I just got it during the character creation process.” He cocked his head again; clearly he had no idea why we were interested.

Of course, if he’d asked me how my Scout skill worked, I wouldn’t really have been able to explain either. “Just answer as best you can,” I said. “Our theory is that the key to Enhanced Muscles is mana. What do you think of that?”

“Hmm. It’s weird that Enhanced Muscles makes you two or three times stronger than other people even though you still have the same number of muscle fibers, so the theory that mana is the source of that extra strength... I guess that makes sense.”

Touya leaned forward in excitement. “Right? Do you use mana when you use that skill, Tomi?”

Tomi shook his head. “Honestly, I don’t know. I can’t use magic, so I have no idea what mana is or what it feels like. It’d be a different story if you had a mana bar that you could check on your status display screen, but...”

“Have you ever felt like the strength in your muscles suddenly ran out?” I asked.

“I mean, I don’t have as much strength when I’m tired, but I don’t know if that’s mana depletion or just regular fatigue.”

“You’re not sure?”

“No, sorry, I’m not.”

We all paused to ponder the problem. Normal fatigue would have side effects like lower grip strength that were pretty easy to identify, but if you couldn’t sense your own mana, you wouldn’t have a lot of ways to distinguish between fatigue and mana depletion. To me, fatigue due to mana depletion felt different from physical fatigue, so presumably a spellcaster who was familiar with that

feeling would be able to tell whether the Enhanced Muscles skill was consuming mana. *Is our only choice to have Yuki copy the skill from Tomi? I'm not sure if he knows how to teach her.*

While the rest of us were lost in thought, Tomi suddenly said, "Thinking about it, I also have the Indomitable skill."

"Hm?"

"It's also a pretty weird skill. It's not like my skin becomes super hard or anything, but it still makes me more impervious to physical damage when I use it."

"Do you mean that your Indomitable skill might also be powered by mana?" I asked.

"Yeah. Otherwise it would be impossible for my skin to be impervious to weapons, right? It's still pretty soft..."

*Oh, that sounds like how a dagger won't pierce the skin of a high-level adventurer.* I glanced at the others. We must all have been thinking the same thing since they all nodded in response.

"Tomi, are you aware that your body becomes stronger and impervious to attacks if you slay a lot of monsters?" Haruka asked.

"No, this is the first time I've heard about it. Is it similar to my Indomitable skill?"

"Most likely. We've discussed this phenomenon in terms of 'character levels' for ease of understanding," said Haruka. "The phenomenon itself seems to be common knowledge in this world, but there's no consensus on the cause. It seems that there are some people who think it's the result of mana, however."

"Oh, so my Indomitable skill might work the same way?"

"Possibly, yes."

Tomi's Indomitable and Enhanced Muscles skills only made sense if they were another facet of the same recognized phenomenon. People who were impervious to being stabbed would be incredibly scary if there were no known cause for their abilities, after all. There wasn't anything like television or

YouTube in this world for people with unusual abilities to serve as entertainers, so it seemed like their only option would be to get involved in religion somehow. Best case scenario, you'd get worshiped as a god; worst case, you'd get branded a heretic, which came with the risk of execution.

"Oh, I have an idea! We can probably test out your Indomitable skill, Tomi," said Yuki. "Like, if someone smacks you repeatedly using roughly the same force per blow, then you should start taking damage as soon as your mana runs out, and—"

Tomi looked absolutely shocked when he heard that cruel idea from Yuki. He shook his head vigorously. "Huh?! It'll still hurt a bit even if I don't take any damage, Yuki-san! And if you're right and it eventually uses up my mana, I'll start getting really hurt!"

Yuki smiled. "Don't worry, Haruka can heal you when we're through with you!"

Haruka bonked Yuki on the head lightly. "That doesn't make it any better, Yuki. Sorry about all this, Tomi. Don't worry, we're not going to ask you to do something like that."

Tomi breathed out a sigh of relief. "Oh, phew."

"However..."

Suddenly Tomi had a wary look on his face again.

"Oh, it's not something impossible by any means," said Haruka. "Can you just try to teach Yuki your Enhanced Muscles skill? If possible, teach her your Indomitable skill as well."

"Uh, sure, I don't mind, but how am I supposed to teach her my skills?"

"It's not going to be too difficult, I don't think. Yuki has the Copy skill, after all."

"Huh?! Isn't that a land mine skill?!"

Tomi had an expression of absolute disbelief on his face as he stared at Yuki, but for some reason, Yuki looked quite proud when she saw his reaction.

"That's right, I have a land mine skill! I guess I shouldn't brag. I would have

probably been doomed if Natsuki hadn't been with me!"

"If it's not something to brag about, then why do you look so proud?!" I exclaimed. *Wait, did you bait me into playing the straight man?*

"Oh, I'm not proud of my Copy skill at all. What I'm really proud of is my good friend Natsuki! I love you, Natsuki!"

She immediately grabbed Natsuki in a hug. Natsuki looked quite used to it; she just patted Yuki on the head.

"In any case...it probably won't be too difficult for you to teach Yuki your skills," said Haruka. "Copied skills work fine as long as the copier learns how to use them from the original owner."

"Really? Okay, then," said Tomi. "I can't guarantee that it'll work, though. Is that all right?"

"Of course. Don't worry about it."

We still weren't sure exactly how the teaching phase of the Copy skill worked, so none of us were going to blame him even if he didn't succeed.

"I'm busy with work during the day, though, so I probably won't have much time to teach her."

"Oh, on that point, we have an offer for you, Tomi," said Haruka. "You're planning on moving to The Slumbering Bear, correct?"

"Yeah. I have a bit of spare money now, so I was planning to move soon. Did Touya-kun tell you that?"

"Mm. If we pay your lodging plus breakfast and dinner for a week, would you be willing to teach Yuki your skills in the evening after you're done with work for the day?"

"Um, well, I don't mind teaching her my skills even without being paid. You've helped me out a lot, after all. Also, isn't a week's worth of lodging quite a large sum?"

"We can afford to pay for one extra person if it's just a week. Everyone's agreed to this idea."

Haruka looked at the rest of us and we all nodded. A few gold coins was a small price to pay for Yuki learning the Enhanced Muscles and Indomitable skills. Even if she didn't succeed, it still wouldn't be too much to invest in helping out a friend.

"Is that so? In that case, thank you very much." Tomi looked at each of us in turn and then bowed his head in gratitude.



Tomi moved to The Slumbering Bear the very same day. Apparently Gantz-san would close up shop for the day as soon as it got dark outside, so Tomi arrived at the inn fairly early in the evening. He also explained that his apprenticeship wasn't a live-in job, so he didn't have to do any menial tasks as overtime. His wages weren't very high, but they were enough for him to slowly save up money even after moving to a more expensive inn, so it seemed like his job wasn't something as bad as the ones that Yuki and Natsuki had had back in Sarstedt. The only reason he hadn't changed inns right away was that he'd wanted to save up money to pay us back as soon as possible. He really was a very conscientious person.

Tomi began teaching Yuki shortly after settling down, but I couldn't tell if they were making any headway. The rest of us listened along as he tried to teach Yuki, but all he said were things like "Put some strength into it! You know, like *guuguu* or something!" and "It's like that *ngh* feeling." None of it made any sense. It didn't seem like it would be possible for the rest of us to learn the Enhanced Muscles or Indomitable skills from Tomi's instruction alone. Our last hope was Yuki with her Copy skill, but I wasn't sure if it would be enough. The two skills weren't exactly easy to teach, so it wasn't like we could ask Tomi to teach in a way that was easier to understand. *Is this really going to work out?*

In the end, I was worried for nothing; the Copy skill had proved its worth once again. Yuki managed to learn both the Enhanced Muscles and Indomitable skills during her first evening with Tomi. Tomi himself was extremely shocked when it happened. *Maybe we should stop calling the Copy skill a land mine and treat it with respect? The skill itself is basically as good as a teacher. I still think its effectiveness is way too dependent on your individual circumstances, though.*

In any case, the rest of us joined in; we were ready to learn from our teacher, the Copy skill—or rather, from Yuki, since Tomi unfortunately couldn't participate any further; he had to get up for work tomorrow. He looked like he felt a bit weird about the fact that he'd already accomplished everything we'd asked of him; he returned to his own room and went to bed right away. Work in this different world required people to sleep and rise early, after all.

"So, Yuki, how do the skills feel to you?" Haruka asked. "Are they using up mana?"

"Hmm, well..."

Yuki crossed her arms as she paused in thought for a moment, and then she stood up, walked over to Natsuki, and easily lifted her into a bridal carry. It was surreal watching a girl as petite as Yuki carrying around Natsuki with no obvious strain.

"H-Huh? Wh-What's going on?" Natsuki asked.

"I'm testing things out," Yuki replied.

Yuki ignored Natsuki's confusion and closed her eyes as she stretched her neck back and forth and then performed some simple exercises, all while continuing to carry Natsuki in her arms. It looked like the Enhanced Muscles skill was working.

"Mm, I'm definitely using mana while the skill is active. I'm not releasing it, though. It's more like circulating the mana throughout my body," said Yuki. "It feels like a little bit of mana is escaping, so I'll probably run out of mana if I continue to use the skill, but it most likely won't be a problem as long as I don't use magic at the same time."

Yuki nodded to herself once she was done testing and lowered Natsuki onto one of the beds. Natsuki muttered something that sounded like "Gosh!" and then sighed and adjusted her sitting position. Her face was a bit red.

*Circulating mana, huh? That's easier to understand than what Tomi said. Well, maybe Tomi's advice would've been fine too if he'd said Google instead of guuguu... Actually, what am I even talking about?*

"Yuki, can someone like me circulate mana even without being able to use

magic?” Touya asked.

“Tomi could do it, so I bet you probably can as well. I’m not sure how fast you’ll run out of mana, though.”

“First you need to practice and get a feel for what mana is like, Touya,” I said. “Does the Indomitable skill work the same way, Yuki?”

“Hmm...” Yuki crossed her arms again and looked around the room. “Well, I’ll need somebody to attack me—”

“Leave that to me.” Natsuki immediately jumped up and grabbed the spear that was hanging on the wall. She pointed it at Yuki and grinned. “Prepare yourself.”

“Hold on, stop! Don’t point that thing at me, please! It’s not needed!” Yuki flapped her hands around in a panic and then backed up against the wall behind her.

The spear that Natsuki had picked up was the cheap spear that I’d been using recently, but it would still be enough to impale a boar. In Natsuki’s hands, it was possible that the spear was enough to slay an orc.

“Are you sure about that? You might be able to get your Indomitable skill to Level 2 right away if you’re pushed to your limits,” said Natsuki.

“It’s too risky!” Yuki exclaimed.

“Oh, by the way, my Light Magic reached Level 2 recently,” said Natsuki, “so if you need healing...”

“She’s absolutely determined to stab me?! Somebody help me!”

“Don’t worry, Yuki,” said Haruka. “My Light Magic is Level 3.”

“That’s good to know, but that’s not the kind of help I’m asking for!”

“Relax, I won’t aim for any lethal spots. Here I go!”

Natsuki got in position to thrust the spear into Yuki, and Yuki shook her head in fear.

*Should I stop this...?*

“Please, no!”

Yuki squeezed her eyes shut, but suddenly Natsuki spun her spear around and whacked Yuki's legs with the butt end.

"Eep!"

Yuki lost her balance and fell onto her back. "H-Huh? It doesn't hurt? That was still really scary, though!" She opened her eyes and got back on her feet.

Natsuki was chuckling. "I had no intention of injuring you at all, Yuki. It's a bad idea to close your eyes, though."

"I wouldn't close my eyes when fighting a monster! Well, probably not, I think..."

"Are you sure about that? What if something sharp gets really close to you?"

Yuki didn't seem to be too confident in herself; she wasn't meeting Natsuki's eyes. "Uh, well..." she muttered.

"Relax, Yuki," I said. "So, how did it go?"

To calm Yuki down, I placed my hands on her shoulders, steered her towards a bed, and made her sit. I felt like we would never get back on topic if I didn't intervene.

"I didn't feel any pain, so I think I succeeded in using the Indomitable skill," said Yuki. "I kind of did it out of reflex, but it felt like my mana was covering the whole outside of my body."

The way Yuki had described it made it sound like there was an external coating of mana.

"Hmm. That sounds a bit different from the name of the skill itself, though," said Natsuki.

Haruka nodded in response to Natsuki's comment, so it seemed like the two of them had come to the same conclusion.

However, Yuki looked a bit confused; she didn't seem to understand what Natsuki had meant by that. "How so?"

"Well, you tripped easily and fell to the ground despite using the Indomitable skill," said Haruka. "Sure, you didn't take any damage, but a frontline tank who



gets tripped easily isn't acceptable."

"Mm, it would be easy to bypass someone like that," said Natsuki.

"Oh, that makes sense!"

The role of a frontline tank was to protect their fellow party members. Of course, part of the problem was that Yuki wasn't heavy at all, and she hadn't been in the right stance to withstand a leg sweep, but it was reasonable to conclude that the Indomitable skill only made you somewhat tankier; it didn't make you truly unbeatable, as you might infer from the name.

"If I were going to use the Indomitable skill, then I'd probably have to combine it with the Enhanced Muscles skill and train my hips and core to be able to keep my feet planted firmly on the ground," said Touya.

"Yeah. The rest of us should just use the Indomitable skill to reduce the damage we take in combat," I said.

"Mm, it would be a good idea for all of us to try to learn the Indomitable skill," said Haruka. "Let's all do our best to practice and teach each other. Maybe we'll discover other ways to use it too."

Nothing could be more important than increasing our odds at survival, so we all took Haruka's words seriously and nodded in agreement.

We wanted to resume our orc hunting the day after we experimented with the Indomitable skill, but we quickly ran into a problem: the small groups of orcs that had been easy pickings for us were getting rarer and rarer. For some reason, we were starting to encounter orcs in groups of ten; maybe it was because we'd already slain about fifty orcs total, and they were getting wary of us. Initially, we'd encountered one orc or at most two orcs at a time, so the fact that they were moving around in larger groups now meant that they were cunning enough to think strategically—and that there was a larger population than we'd suspected. Based on the information we'd gotten from scouting out that orc nest in the forest, the local orc population was probably close to a hundred individuals. If that was true, there was most likely an orc leader at the nest, and possibly an orc captain as well. As long as we didn't blunder into a nest, our odds of running into stronger forms of orc were low, but it was possible that they would wander out of the nest. With that in mind, it would

probably be a good idea to remain on guard while exploring the east forest.

After we had spent a while searching the forest for orcs, Yuki suddenly stopped to look around and then said, “We’ve slain and gutted an awful lot of orcs, right?”

“Hm? Yeah,” I said. “What about it?”

“Well, we left behind parts that weren’t worth money, but I haven’t seen any of those parts lying around even though we’re hunting in the same areas,” said Yuki. “Did something dispose of the remains?”

“In these woods, apparently night wolves and insects take care of such things,” said Natsuki.

“Wolves? Are there wolves in this forest?” Yuki asked. “We’ve never run into any so far.”

“Based on what I know, yes, there are some. It’s highly unlikely that we’ll ever encounter them, since they’re nocturnal animals, but they play an essential role in cleaning up animal remains,” said Natsuki. “It’s thanks to them that we don’t see any decomposing carcasses littering the forest.”

*Oh yeah, I think there was some information about these night wolves in the booklet that I read the other day in the reference room at the Adventurers’ Guild.* The only trace of our gutting work that remained if we came back to the same spot on the next day would be blood on the forest floor. The booklet also mentioned that night wolves wouldn’t attack groups of people unless the wolves were absolutely starving, so they were basically harmless most of the time. With that in mind, night wolves were beneficial animals as far as we were concerned.

“Night wolves clean up this forest, huh?” I said. “So if we somehow die here, then...”

“Mm, they’ll clean up our bodies,” said Natsuki.

*“I don’t like the sound of that...” I’m demoting them from beneficial animals back to regular animals.*

“Personally speaking, I wouldn’t mind having wolves clean up my body if I

happened to die here,” said Natsuki. “It’s better than my decomposing body lying out in the open for other people to see.”

“I guess that’s one way of thinking about it,” I said.

The idea of other people seeing my decomposing body made me feel a bit uncomfortable as well, so it was probably even worse for a girl. It kind of made sense to me that some people would prefer to have their bodies completely disappear after they died even if that meant getting torn up by wolves.

“Well, the ideal scenario would be to receive a proper burial,” said Natsuki. “Or rather, it’s best not to get killed in the first place.”

“Stop with the ominous talk,” said Haruka. “I plan on living a long life and dying in bed. I’ll be at your bedside when the time comes, Natsuki.”

“You mean when I die of old age? I have a hard time thinking that far ahead. You’re an elf, Haruka, so it’s true that you’ll probably live longer than me. I guess I do feel reassured knowing I’ll have a friend at my side when I’m on my deathbed.”

“Hold on, if I recall correctly, the life span of the average elf is roughly double that of the average human in this world,” said Yuki. “And speaking of life span, Natsuki, you and I might actually live longer than most humans thanks to the bonus we got from that classmate who tried to use the Plunder skill on us.”

Natsuki clapped her hands together. “Oh yes, I remember! We got a freebie!”

She wasn’t exactly wrong that the Plunder skill was basically a life span freebie for the victim, but that didn’t change the fact that people with that skill used it with malicious intentions. Plunder was only harmless because the “evil” god had designed it as a land mine skill. There was a chance that some of our classmates had gotten Plunder planning that they’d only use it against evil people, but that didn’t really matter to us. As for the person who had tried to use the Plunder skill on Yuki and Natsuki, I had no qualms about calling him a freebie.

“Mm, if the person who used the Plunder skill on you was an elf, then there’s a chance you’ll actually live longer than us, Natsuki, since you got his life span in addition to your own,” said Haruka. “If that does happen, then I’m counting on

you to be at my bedside. If you live that long as a human, you'll probably stand out in a bad way, however."

"Oh, right, that is something to worry about," said Natsuki. "It would probably get us a lot of unwanted attention."

"Well, I don't think it'll really be an issue since it's not like there's a detailed family register system in this world," said Yuki. "It should be fine as long as we move around from time to time. Anyway, it's not something we have to worry about until much later in the future."

Natsuki looked troubled, but Yuki's more optimistic take was probably the right one. If we were back in Japan, the girls might have to deal with questions from scientists who wanted to discover the secrets of longevity or even celebrations officiated by the prime minister, but in this world, our ages were whatever we said they were. Adventurers weren't bound to the land, so we had the choice of moving from town to town in order to erase our backgrounds. In that respect, this world was probably more comfortable for wanderers and loners than Earth was.

"That method of concealing our ages would make marriage hard, though," said Yuki. "You can't get divorced over and over in a short span of time, after all."

"Mm, we need to figure out a better solution," said Natsuki. "Also, with respect to the differences between races—"

"Well, we have some options," said Haruka. "However—"

Whatever debate the girls were about to get into, Touya cut them short. "Hey, we're in the middle of hunting right now! Keep your heads in the game." He'd been quiet until now, apparently because he'd been on guard.

"Oh, come on, we haven't run into a single orc yet," said Yuki. "Right, Nao?"

"Yeah, I haven't detected any orcs at all on my end." I had been using my Scout skill the entire time, and the only creatures I'd detected were boars and goblins. "Should we get closer to the orc nest?"

"If we do that, we'll find orcs in groups of ten or more, right?" Yuki asked.

The largest group of orcs that we had encountered so far was a group of six. We'd slain two of them at long range and slain the remaining four in close combat. Based on how that battle had gone, we could probably handle up to seven or eight orcs at a time, but ten might be pushing it.

"I think we might be able to take on ten orcs at a time since we're in the woods," said Natsuki. "It's hard to get outflanked here."

"Hmm, I guess the conditions are more favorable for us than they are for the orcs," I said.

Orcs were over three meters tall, while all of us were under two meters, so we had mobility on our side. They were much wider than us too, so they wouldn't be able to pass through the gaps between trees as easily as we could. There weren't that many open spaces where they could swing their clubs freely either. Of course, those space restrictions were also an issue for us, but whereas their clubs needed a long windup for centrifugal force, we had stabbing weapons like spears.

"I'd like to destroy the orc nest if possible," I said.

"I don't think that's possible for us," said Haruka. "There are over thirty orcs at that nest, right? The terrain would have to be extremely favorable in order for us to stand a chance."

If there was an overhang where we could snipe the orcs without them reaching us, then that would work, but this area was mostly level ground. Haruka could snipe orcs from atop a tree, but she'd be in grave danger if they managed to surround the base of the tree.

"Why don't we try to lure a group of ten orcs away from the nest and fight them while retreating?" Touya asked. "So far we've always let them come to us, but..."

Our current MO was to creep up on a group of orcs that I'd detected with my Scout skill and lay an ambush. Haruka, Yuki, and I would launch our spells and arrows as soon as the orcs got within range, and then we'd take on the survivors in close combat. Touya and Natsuki were capable of handling two orcs each, while Yuki and I were only capable of fighting orcs one-on-one. So far, this strategy had enabled us to bring down small groups of orcs without anyone in

our party getting seriously injured. If we wanted to deviate from that strategy, that meant taking on more risks.

“By fighting while retreating, do you mean we should try to whittle down their numbers at long range?” I asked.

“Yeah,” said Touya. “We need to keep our distance while we’re picking them off. If we fight them too close to the nest, there’s the risk of reinforcements showing up.”

“Mm, that’s true,” said Haruka. “I think Touya’s idea might work, but we’ll have to be careful. What do the rest of you think?”

None of us voted strongly in favor, but it wasn’t like the rest of us had any ideas of our own, so we all came to the conclusion that we should give Touya’s plan a shot.

“All right, let’s do this! I’m counting on your Scout skill, Nao!” Touya exclaimed.

“Okay. Everyone, be cautious since we’re going to get near the orc nest.”

We all stopped talking and slowly walked in silence towards the orc nest. As soon as we came within three hundred meters, my Scout skill detected about eleven signals. One signal was a bit different from the others.

“There are eleven orcs ahead, but one of them seems to be stronger than the others,” I said.

“Is it an orc leader? Or is it an even stronger form of orc?” Touya asked.

“If I recall correctly from what I’ve read, an orc captain is sixteen times stronger than a regular orc, but this signal doesn’t seem to be quite that strong.”

“An orc leader, then? Should we avoid combat?” Touya asked.

Based on the signal alone, this orc seemed to be slightly less than four times as strong as a regular orc. However, I wasn’t absolutely sure since I didn’t have enough experience. My Scout skill could only give me a rough feeling of how strong a foe was.

“No, we should attempt to defeat it,” said Natsuki. She was gripping her spear

firmly.

Haruka looked at Natsuki in surprise. “I didn’t expect that coming from you, Natsuki.”

Our party consisted of one reckless person, two neutral people, one slightly cautious person and one very cautious person. The reckless person was Touya, the neutral people were Yuki and I, the slightly cautious person was Natsuki, and the very cautious person was Haruka. Thus, I was also quite surprised to hear Natsuki suggest that we take on a strong foe along with a greater number of foes than we’d ever fought at the same time. However, she must have had a good reason for insisting.

“If we don’t slay these orcs, then we probably won’t be able to hunt orcs for quite a while,” said Natsuki. “It’s highly unlikely that they’ll move in smaller groups than this.”





“You’re probably right,” said Haruka. “We’ve slain a huge number of orcs, after all. They know not to travel alone now.”

“Leave the orc leader to me,” said Natsuki. “There’s a chance that I might get injured, but you can heal bone fractures easily, can’t you, Haruka?”

“Yeah. It should be fine as long as you don’t lose any limbs.”

Up until now, we had all adhered to Haruka’s policy of avoiding combat against strong foes, so the worst injuries that we had suffered were bruises and scars. We’d only gotten cut gathering herbs, ironically. With all of that in mind, we probably needed to experience what actual injuries were like eventually. *I’m only okay with getting injured as long as there’s no risk of dying, though. I wonder if there’s anyone out there who I could practice taking blows from—someone who knows how to hold back from dealing serious damage.*

“I’m not against the idea of taking on the orcs, but I’d like to prepare as much as we can beforehand,” I said.

“Mm, and we should still try to avoid injuries, obviously,” said Yuki.

“In that case, let’s set up some traps,” said Natsuki. “Orcs are much larger than us, so it should be fairly easy.”

The best traps we could make on short notice were pits in the ground; Yuki’s Earth Magic was very useful for that purpose. Orcs weren’t very smart, so they probably wouldn’t notice the pits as long as we concealed them with branches and leaves. As a precaution against falling into our own traps, we dug the pits in gaps between the trees that were wide enough for orcs to pass through. That way, we’d be fine as long as we moved between gaps that were too small for orcs. We also made some protrusions in the ground.

Having laid our traps, we began creeping closer to the orcs. Suddenly, my Scout skill indicated that they’d turned towards us.

“They’ve noticed us,” I said.

“All right, let’s get just a bit closer and then lure them into the traps,” said Haruka.

We found a good spot for an ambush, and we let off our long-range attacks as

soon as the orcs got close enough. My first Fire Arrow blasted an orc's head clean off; I had adjusted the potency of the attack to be higher than usual. Yuki was still practicing her Fire Arrow and would usually fail to nail her target about half of the time, but it looked like she'd succeeded this time, so that was another orc down. Haruka's arrow struck a different orc on the head, and it doubled over in pain. We had discussed our highest-priority targets in advance, so none of us had aimed at the same target.

After our first salvo, we would usually wait for the orcs to come closer, but this time our battle plan was to retreat. It looked like the slain orcs were acting as obstacles to the survivors, so we hastily retreated while they maneuvered around the fallen bodies.

"They split into two groups to chase us!" Touya exclaimed.

I looked behind me when I heard Touya's voice. The heavy footsteps of orcs were approaching us from both left and right. There was one orc at the very back of the pack that was larger than the rest—probably the orc leader. Despite the distance between it and me, I could feel its intimidating presence like physical pressure. *Are you really going to take that thing on, Natsuki?!* I definitely needed to pick off a few more orcs before they caught up to us so that there would be more room for the rest of us to back up Natsuki if necessary.

We continued to run for a while and stopped just beyond the area where we had set up our traps, and then we turned around to attack the orcs on both sides from long range. I managed to slay another orc in one hit, but Yuki failed to do so, so Haruka fired more arrows at Yuki's target.

"Should we retreat farther, Haruka?!" I asked.

"No, let's meet them here!"

We all obeyed Haruka's order and held our weapons at the ready. It would have been ideal if the orcs had spread out into a single file formation as they chased us, but unfortunately that wasn't the case. Instead, they were standing side by side, spread from left to right, so there was a chance that some of them could get behind us and pose a threat to Haruka, the one member of our party who wasn't capable of close combat.

“One more shot! *Fire Arrow!*” I aimed at one of the orcs that was farther out in front, but my arrow grazed the orc’s head and blasted off its left arm. “Damn it!”

“Calm down, Nao-kun.” Natsuki sounded very self-possessed as she said that. She didn’t even bat an eye as she stabbed her spear into the head of an orc that had fallen into one of the pit traps.

*Oh yeah, she’s more or less expressionless most of the time during combat...*

“I’ll handle the orc leader. You take care of the other orcs for me.”

“You got it!” I exclaimed.

Natsuki stepped on top of the orc that she had slain and leaped over the pit to attack the leg of the orc leader. Meanwhile, Touya was bashing his sword into the orc that had lost its left arm to my Fire Arrow. When he felled that orc, he advanced on the two behind it.

“I’ll back up Natsuki!” Haruka exclaimed. “Yuki, Nao, can you handle the remaining two orcs?”

“Yeah, we should be fine!” Yuki yelled. She gripped her iron baton in her hands, but I felt a bit uneasy about her odds. She was positioned to my right—as were the two remaining orcs.

I stabbed my spear into the head of the orc with no left arm—it was almost dead already—and then hurried over to where Yuki was. The orc she was facing had two arrows sticking out of its body; her Fire Arrow had burned off half of its face. She was holding it off for the time being, but her height was less than half of the orc’s, so I was a bit worried about the possibility of her getting squashed. However, the real threat was the other orc, which hadn’t taken any damage yet.

“Ugh, *Fire Arrow!*”

I had prioritized speed over power when I shot another Fire Arrow at the remaining orc, and as a result, one hit wasn’t enough to kill it; it blocked the spell with its arm. However, it was enough to slow it down.

“Are you okay, Yuki?!”

“Yeah, I’m fine for now, Nao! I’d like some help as soon as possible, though!”

Before the words were out of Yuki’s mouth, I slid into the space between her and the orc that I had just attacked. She was successfully dodging the orc’s blows or parrying them with her baton, but it didn’t look easy for her by any means. She probably couldn’t finish off the orc with her baton or get enough of a break to cast a spell. Even when Touya had been the one using the iron baton, it hadn’t been enough to inflict serious damage on a wipe bear, so there was no way Yuki could take down an orc this way, especially given that she wasn’t as strong as Touya.

“Keep holding it back!” I exclaimed.

I held up my spear and glared at the remaining orc, the one that had barely taken any damage. *Come on, I can do this. I just have to believe in my Weapon Proficiency: Spears and Level 2 Spearmanship skills.* The orc seemed to realize that I was the one who had blasted it with the Fire Arrow earlier; it looked a bit wary and gripped its club securely with both hands. *Damn it, I can’t best it in a contest of strength even if I deal more damage to its arm and it ends up having to swing its club with just one hand—and I can’t really dodge either since Yuki’s behind me.*

“I’m going to attack first!”

I swiftly moved around to the orc’s left flank and stabbed it with my spear. However, as soon as the tip of my spear pierced the orc’s skin, it shifted its club to its left hand and swung down at me with its right arm.

“Ugh!”

The orc’s elbow smashed into my spear, and the shaft broke in half with a cracking sound. The orc swung its club at me, and I twisted my body out of reflex to block the attack with my left arm. The blow sent me flying, but not before I heard a nasty sound, this time from my arm rather than my spear.

As I sailed through the air, I held back a scream by force of will. A tree branch swung into view, and I grabbed it and pulled myself atop of it. Those were some pretty acrobatic moves, but I’d somehow pulled them off without falling to the ground in front of the orc. *I’m so glad that I have an elf’s sense of balance! Otherwise I would have been defenseless.* The orc looked like it hadn’t expected

me to pull it off either; it froze in place for a moment with its club in the air. And it just so happened that its head was in the perfect position.

I extended my right hand. *“Fire Arrow!”*

My Fire arrow blasted the orc’s head off, and it slowly collapsed to the ground. I hastily looked in Yuki’s direction to see how she was doing and saw a surprising sight. She still hadn’t done much damage to the orc, but despite the difference in size between them, she was still fending off its attacks with no trouble. The force of the blow from an orc’s club had been enough to send me flying high in the air, so I was shocked that she was still holding her ground. I had no idea how she was dodging and parrying the orc’s attacks so easily; it was swinging its club overhead, so if anything, it was probably hitting her harder than the other orc had hit me. Whenever they clashed, her attacks made a pretty big noise too—*wait, that’s not important right now!*

I snapped back to my senses and yelled, “Yuki, dodge! *Fire Arrow!*”

Since I had an unobstructed vantage from atop this branch, my Fire Arrow flew in a straight line and landed on the orc at the same time that Yuki dodged backwards. The spell took a chunk out of the orc’s neck; a fountain of blood spurted into the air.

“Thanks for the help, Nao! You drenched me in blood, though!”

Usually blood wasn’t an issue when I blasted an orc’s head off, since it would topple over backward. However, I hadn’t gotten a clean headshot this time, so it had taken longer for the orc to collapse, and blood had been spraying out of its neck wound the whole time.

*“I’m so sorry!” But actually, I’m in a worse situation than you are, Yuki! The blood makes me uncomfortable too, but on top of that, I’m exhausted from using too much mana and my arm hurts like hell. Ugh, to avoid another situation like this, I need to practice keeping my cool and discipline myself so that I only use the minimum amount of mana necessary to cast spells.*

I looked around the battlefield and saw that Touya had already slain one orc and was in the middle of combat with another. He seemed to be doing just fine on his own. On the other hand, Natsuki and Haruka’s battle against the orc leader didn’t seem to be going so well. I had thought the orc leader would

struggle to fight in the dense trees due to its size, but apparently I was wrong. It had a larger club than any of the regular orcs, but it was swinging it with ease; the force of the blows was enough to snap the branches and small trees in its way.

It looked like Natsuki had inflicted a significant amount of damage to the orc leader's legs, but it clearly wasn't lethal damage, and the broken branches that were now scattered all over the forest floor limited her mobility. As for Haruka, she was dealing with an orc that had sneaked up on her from behind. It was the same orc that she had targeted when we launched our ambush, and by this point its body was full of arrows, but the trees seemed to be preventing her from getting a clear shot at its head. Haruka wasn't capable of close combat, she could probably get a good shot if she retreated a bit. The trouble with that strategy was that the orc might instead head in Natsuki's direction.

"Yuki!" I pointed at the orc that Haruka was fighting as a sign to Yuki to go back her up while I went for the orc leader.

The orc leader was a bit more nimble than regular orcs, but it wasn't a huge difference in speed. However, based on the attacks it was raining down on Natsuki, it seemed to fight with more finesse than regular orcs, which had nothing but violent instinct.

"Okay, same potency, but with more speed..."

The key to magic was a mage's mental image when casting a spell, so I took a moment to focus and then launched my Fire Arrow at the orc leader's head while it was turned away from me. My Fire Arrow looked like it was flying through the air about one and a half times faster than usual, but the orc leader managed to block it in time with its left arm.

"Damn it!"

My Fire Arrow blasted off about half of the orc leader's arm, but its head wasn't damaged at all.

"GRAAAHHH!"

The orc leader roared in pain and looked in my direction with anger in its eyes. By that point, Touya had finished off the orc he'd been fighting, so he

slashed at the orc leader from behind, but the orc leader ignored it and advanced towards me. *Yikes, what should I do? I can't hop down from this tree with a broken left arm, and there's no good place for me to land either. Should I just step on the dead orc near the base of the tree?*

"Nao! Match our timing!" Yuki exclaimed.

When I heard Yuki's voice, I raised my head and saw that Haruka had defeated the orc that she'd been fighting and was now aiming at the orc leader. Yuki was looking at me, but she had one hand stretched out towards the orc leader.

"Got it!"

We'd planned beforehand that we'd launch our attacks three seconds after the last person sounded off. *I'm so glad Haruka carefully planned out how to synchronize our timing in all sorts of different situations.* Yuki and I each shot a Fire Arrow at the same time that Haruka shot an arrow from her bow, and Natsuki dashed forward immediately afterwards. Touya joined in as well by attacking the orc leader from behind once again to distract it while it tried to protect its head with its right arm. Natsuki took advantage of that opportunity to stab her spear into the orc leader's throat. She twisted the spear and pulled it out at an angle, then retreated. Blood gushed out of the wound. The orc leader tried to lift its club despite that injury, but it slowly collapsed forward. Despite the fact that the orc leader was out of commission, Haruka hadn't let down her guard yet; she was looking every which way for more enemies.

Eventually, Haruka looked up at the branch where I was sitting. "Any reinforcements on the way, Nao?" she asked.

"None that my Scout skill can detect."

Haruka breathed a sigh of relief. "Okay, we can relax for now, but let's go retrieve materials from the orcs that we slew in the beginning and then come back and gut the orcs here. Prioritize speed above all else." There probably weren't any monsters in the woods that would snatch our quarry out from under our noses, but it would be bad if other orcs noticed us.

I knew why Haruka wanted us to be quick, but... "Um, before all of that, can you heal me, Haruka? My arm kind of hurts," I said. "I don't think I can gut orcs

with this injured arm.” I whimpered a bit as I extended my broken left arm to show her what it looked like.

The girls all looked shocked.

“A-Are you okay, Nao-kun?!” Natsuki exclaimed.

“Yeah, I’m fine. It hurts a lot, though.”

My arm hadn’t hurt much during combat, probably thanks to adrenaline, but the pain started in earnest now that we had a moment to breathe. I had suffered bone fractures before, but this was the first time that my arm had been *bent* so badly that it broke.

“Get down here right away!” Haruka exclaimed. “I can’t heal you up there!”

*“I mean, I know, but...” How am I supposed to get down? Should I just jump off of this branch? My left arm could end up hurting a lot worse depending on how I land. I’m too high up to climb down using only my good arm.*

“Use my shoulder, Nao,” said Touya.

“Oh, thanks.”

Touya walked under the branch, so I carefully used his shoulders as a step down. I sighed in relief once I was on the forest floor again, but although I’d been careful, the exertion had still made my left arm hurt a little worse.

Touya looked a bit curious as he observed my broken arm. “So this is how a completely broken arm looks, huh?”

*I mean, yeah, man, it’s not something you see every day, but...*

“Touya, don’t just stare—set the bones,” said Haruka. As she was speaking, she cast the Purification spell to cleanse me of orc blood.

Touya seemed confused. “Huh, me? I don’t know much about that kind of stuff. Can’t you just heal him?”

“It’ll be faster if you adjust the bones first. Touch your own arm for reference while doing it.”

Touya listened to Haruka’s instructions and touched the bones of his own arm before he tentatively touched my left arm.



*Wait, is he going to pull on my arm to adjust the position of the bones? Just how bad is this going to hurt?* “Uh, Haruka, are there any spells you can use that have painkiller effects?” I asked.

Haruka had a stern look on her face. “I don’t know any. You’ll just have to endure the pain even if it makes you cry out.”

“I mean, yeah, I’ll try, but...”

Back on Earth, I’d once had to get a bone fracture fixed without any anesthesia, and the pain had been so bad that my mind had gone totally blank. It sounded like this process was going to be even more painful, so there was a good chance that I would pass out.

“Um, can I be the one in charge of adjusting the bones in Nao-kun’s arm?” Natsuki asked. “I’m fairly sure that I know more about skeletal anatomy than Touya-kun.”

“Oh, really? Sure, go ahead.” Touya seemed happy to agree.

I was happy too; I would rather have someone more knowledgeable and confident in charge. “I’m counting on you, Natsuki,” I said.

“Mm. Don’t hold back tears if it hurts, okay?”

Natsuki had a playful smile on her face, but as a guy, I had my pride to think about.

“Nah, I’ll do my best to hold back.” I clenched my teeth to prepare myself.

“Hmm, if you say so. Are you ready, Haruka?”

Haruka nodded. “Whenever you are.”

Natsuki placed her hands on my left arm. A second later, I felt a surge of pain shoot up my arm. It was so intense that my eyes started twitching before the tears even began to flow. I managed to restrain myself from screaming, but I couldn’t hold back the sweat running down my body.

But then the pain faded just as quickly as it had come. My left arm had been a nasty mix of red and black, but now it was back to its original color. More importantly, it was *straight*.

“Are you okay, Nao-kun?” Natsuki asked.

“Y-Yeah, I’m fine. But boy, I have to say, you weren’t going easy on me, were you?”

“If I’d taken my time, it would have just prolonged your suffering, so there was no reason for me to be gentle. It’s better to suffer more intense pain for a shorter period of time, right?”

“Yeah, I guess so...”

What she said made sense. The whole process had probably been hard on her too; there were very few people out there who could do what she’d done with so little hesitation.

“That was amazing, Natsuki!” Yuki exclaimed. “I would never have been able to do that.”

“Mm, it really was amazing,” said Haruka. “Nao’s arm healed quite rapidly without me having to use much mana, so you must have set the bones in an instant.”

“Well, I did practice martial arts back on Earth, so I know a little about things like this,” said Natsuki.

Yuki looked very surprised, while Haruka simply looked relieved. As for Natsuki, she was clearly embarrassed about all this praise. Haruka explained that she now could heal most injuries apart from severed limbs with her Light Magic as long as she had enough mana. However, there was a limit to what Light Magic could do for broken bones, so users of Light Magic who weren’t very good might fail to heal the break completely. In that case, the bones would remain in a bent position and would have to be broken again before a more experienced mage could heal them. *I’m glad that didn’t happen to me...*

“I guess we don’t have to worry too much about bone fractures with Natsuki around!” Touya exclaimed. “Although it might be a problem if Natsuki’s the one who breaks a bone, actually...”

Natsuki paused in thought for a moment before looking at Yuki and Haruka with a scary smile. “Haruka, Yuki, I’m going to need one of you to learn how to set bones—and you better do your best to learn too! Neither of you would

want my hands to 'slip' in the future, right?"

"Y-Yeah, I'm down to learn! You can teach us when we have some free time!" Yuki exclaimed. "I'll do my absolute best to remember every word you say!"

Haruka nodded slowly. "Mm, it would be a good idea for me to learn as well. Natsuki and I are the only ones who can use Light Magic, after all."

Both girls were smart, so it most likely wouldn't take too long for them to learn from Natsuki. It probably wouldn't be a good idea for Touya and me to participate in the lessons, though; even if they weren't completely off-limits to boys, it would probably still be embarrassing for us to learn about girl skeletons.

"Now then, it doesn't look like anyone else has suffered an injury as bad as Nao's, so let's get to gutting the orcs right away," said Haruka.

"Yeah, if at all possible, I'd prefer to avoid fighting any more orcs right now," I said. "Should we split into two groups? Haruka, Natsuki, and I can work on the orcs over there, and Touya and Yuki can work on the orcs over here."

"That sounds fair since both groups need someone who can scout for orcs," said Touya. "Do your best to hustle, okay, Nao?"

"Yeah, our group has way more orcs to deal with," said Yuki.

"Mm, let's all do the best we can," said Haruka.

Haruka, Natsuki, and I walked over to the two orcs that were lying farther away from the others and began to dress them. Due to the difference in skill level between us, Haruka handled one orc on her own while Natsuki and I tackled the other together. We had already gutted double-digit numbers of orcs, so the process went much faster than it had the very first time. We were already used to it, both psychologically and in terms of technique. However, that didn't change the fact that orcs were huge; there was no way we could finish just in a few minutes.

"In times like this, I wish we had magic bags that could fit an entire orc," I said. "We wouldn't need to gut them in a hurry or in a dangerous place."

Haruka gave me a look of disbelief. "To fit multiple orcs, we'd need bulk bags like the kind that are moved by crane back on Earth, wouldn't we?" she asked.

“We have yet to make a backpack-sized magic bag that’s completely satisfactory. Where did you get that idea?”

I had all kinds of ideas, though. “All I mean is that I want a bag that we can use for carrying dead orcs to a safe spot. We just need a shallow bag with a wide enough opening to fit a whole orc. We can solve the space and weight issues with the Light Weight and Spatial Expansion spells. I think it could work!”

“You think so? Well, let’s give it a try. We’ll have to sew the bag ourselves, though.”

Stores in this world probably didn’t sell special bags like the one I’d described, so that made sense.

“If we’re gonna make one, then we should probably make it out of leather,” I said. “Like, there are a lot of branches on the forest floor, right? We’d probably have to set the bag on the ground and roll an orc into it, so it’d be bad if the bag was made of material that could tear easily.”

There was also the option of covering an orc with the bag from above. Either way, once we stuffed an orc inside, we’d probably have a hard time carrying the bags in our hands.

“Hmm, working with leather sounds difficult, but I’ll keep that in mind,” said Haruka.

“I’ll help out as well,” said Natsuki. “I learned the Sewing skill recently, after all.”

“You were already good at sewing back on Earth, so it makes sense that you learned the skill so easily,” said Haruka. “All right, I’m done gutting this orc. What about the two of you?”

“We’re about done as well,” I replied.

We had stacked the orc meat on top of their fur and skin; I threw the meat into our magic bag and discarded the inedible organs and bones on the ground. I then rolled up the fur along with the skin and stuffed it all into the magic bag as well. When we had first begun hunting, the gutting process had really grossed me out, but these days, I was able to think of it as a way to get delicious meat, so it wouldn’t take long for me to finish. It was just a matter of getting

used to things. However, I still hadn't reached the point where I would think of delicious meat whenever I saw a live orc.

"Okay, let's hurry and group up with Touya and Yuki. Any hostile signals nearby, Nao?"

"None at the moment. There don't seem to be any other monsters or hostile animals either."

Our battle with the orcs had been quite loud, but so far no other orcs had wandered over to check things out. That was good news for us, obviously. *I wonder if it's because they didn't hear the sounds of battle or if they just didn't see a need to send reinforcements. Are orcs even smart enough to understand the concept of reinforcements?*

Once we joined up with Touya and Yuki again, we saw that they were almost done gutting their two orcs. There were still six orcs and an orc leader remaining, so we divided up the work once again and set to it.

We all had the Disassemble skill by now, but Haruka's skill was Level 2, so she was the fastest at gutting orcs. The rest of us worked at more or less the same speed as each other, although Touya was slightly faster since he had the most physical strength to bring for the task.

Haruka finished gutting two orcs in the same amount of time that it took the rest of us to finish gutting one orc each. Only the orc leader was left. It was much larger than a regular orc, but it was still an orc, so I figured it couldn't be that much more complex. However, once we got started on it, I was quickly proven wrong.

"Hmm. We really need a huge knife for this. You know, like the ones used to cut tuna," said Haruka.

The orc was hard to slice through due to its size, besides which the blades of our knives were quite short.

"Wanna use my sword?"

Touya held his sword out to Haruka, but she shook her head. "Your sword isn't sharp at all, Touya."

Touya's sword was designed for smashing rather than slashing, so it wasn't suited for gutting monsters. If he swung it at full force, he could probably tear a chunk off of an orc, but that was different from slicing up meat. A Japanese sword would do the job just fine, but on the other hand, it wouldn't really be as effective a weapon in this world. After all, a Japanese swordsman wouldn't be able to parry attacks from the heavier swords that were typical in this world; he would have to dodge rather than risk damaging his own blade. He would also have to avoid breaking his sword on the hardest parts of a monster's body, which would limit him to using the sword primarily for slashing or stabbing. It would have been a different story back in ancient Japan; if you broke your sword on the battlefield, there would always be the option of picking up a fallen enemy's sword to replace it, but obviously that wasn't true here. For another thing, it wasn't always easy to find the time to maintain your weapons in this world, so using a Japanese sword as your primary weapon would be difficult unless it was enchanted and didn't require routine sharpening.

"It might be a good idea to buy some longer knives now that we have magic bags to carry them in," I said. "For the time being, though, we'll have to make do with what we have on us."

"Mm, yeah," said Haruka. "These knives keep getting hung up in the gristle."

The meat itself was pretty tough too; we had to pull out and reinsert our knives repeatedly. Even the orc leader's arms were too massive for any one of us to carry in both hands.

"Hmm, I wonder if it's possible to use Wind Magic as a cutting tool," said Haruka.

"You're the only one of us who can use Wind Magic, so you'd have to try it yourself," said Natsuki.

"What about the Water Cutter spell?" Touya asked.

"Haruka's also the only one of us who can use Water Magic right now," said Yuki. "I do have the aptitude skill for Water Magic, though."

"The Water Cutter spell can carve through hard materials, yeah, but as I recall, it's more like it erodes them away," I said. "I don't think it's suited for cleanly slicing through thick limbs."

Back in Japan, industrial jet cutters used a high-pressure stream of water, sometimes mixed with an abrasive substance, to erode away materials like glass, stone, and even metal. One advantage of water jet cutters was that there weren't any blades involved that would get worn down from constant use; another was that the process didn't produce any heat. Air resistance imposed some limits on their effectiveness, however. Also, the power of the jet dropped off rapidly with distance from the emitter, so the same was probably true of the Water Cutter spell. It would be a different story if the magic could keep the jet under constant acceleration and keep the water concentrated in a narrow stream, however.

"In any case, I think it's a good idea to carry around all sorts of different knives for gutting," I said. "Like I just said, we have magic bags now, so more knives won't take up too much space."

"Mm, we should have bought some more knives before now," said Haruka. "Even regular orcs have been kind of a pain to cut up with these knives, after all."

The length of our gutting knives was also a problem when we used them to gut regular orcs, but nobody had complained since up until this point our party had only ever needed to gut a maximum of one orc each. This time, however, Haruka had already gutted three orcs herself, and there was still the large orc leader left, so it was only natural that she would agree with my idea.

"Well, we're almost done, so let's keep at it," said Touya.

"Mm, you're right."

Even as we were talking, we kept our hands and our knives in motion. It didn't take long for the five of us to finish gutting the orc leader. We threw all of the meat, fur, and skin into our magic bags. The orc leader's skin and fur looked sturdier than the skin and fur of regular orcs, but there were some scars around the leg area where Natsuki had stabbed it. I wasn't sure how those scars were going to affect the assessment at the Adventurers' Guild, but it didn't really matter. Ultimately, safety was more important than trying to slay a foe without inflicting any cosmetic damage just to make a little bit more money.

"Okay, let's move as fast as we can," said Haruka. "The sooner we're out of

orc territory, the better.”

Although this was our first time battling a large group of orcs, I was the only one among us who had suffered a serious injury. At the same time, we were all exhausted from fighting a new and powerful foe in the form of the orc leader, so everyone agreed to Haruka’s suggestion, and we quickly left the area.



We hurried towards the outskirts of the forest without halting, but once we’d made it to safety, we all agreed that we should rest for a while; the fatigue from the battle was catching up with us. Everyone had traces of concern in their eyes whenever they looked at me, so perhaps the biggest reason that they’d agreed to take a rest was that I had suffered a serious injury.

Once we had arrived at an area a bit outside of the forest, Touya looked over his shoulder and then sat down on the ground. “Whew. We survived, but that was a really tough foe.”

“Mm. I think it’s a bit difficult to fight an orc leader one-on-one inside of the forest,” said Natsuki.

“Oh yeah, you seemed to have mobility issues back then,” said Yuki.

When the orc leader was swinging its club, it had mostly stood in place, while Natsuki had had to dodge those blows and find openings to counterattack. The forest terrain hadn’t really helped us as much as we’d expected; at least, it definitely hadn’t helped Natsuki.

“Also, Nao suffered a serious injury,” said Touya. “At least the rest of us didn’t suffer any injuries.”

“Come on!” The way Touya had phrased it made it sound like I was the only one who hadn’t performed well, but I had my complaints too. “You know, in this battle, I was number one in terms of kills. I slew three orcs for sure and got two more pretty close to death. You’re the one who didn’t contribute as much, Touya! You only took out two orcs!”

“Uh, well, I guess that’s true...”

The battle as a whole would have gone better if Touya had taken on three



orcs. Also, if he had been faster finishing off the two orcs that he'd been assigned at the beginning of the battle, then he would have been able to back up Natsuki sooner.

"I had some similar thoughts," said Haruka. "I think you could have performed a bit better considering your proficiency at combat, Touya."

"Yeah, it was mostly because I had to take on two orcs at the same time," said Touya. "I'm not used to taking on multiple opponents at the same time, so it took me longer than it should have."

"Mm, that's another factor," said Yuki. "Well, we've bought a plot of land now, so how about we practice sparring against multiple opponents in the yard? There's enough space!"

"That sounds like a good idea," I said. "We can use that yard whenever and however we want, after all."

Unlike the cramped yard at The Slumbering Bear, our own yard would offer enough space that we could try out different and more complex fighting styles when sparring. Looking ahead towards future challenges, we definitely needed to practice against multiple opponents at the same time, so Yuki's suggestion was a good one.

"Oh yeah, how exactly did you get injured, Nao?" Haruka asked. "I didn't see how your fight played out."

"Uh, I'd say the biggest reason was that the spear I was using got broken in half."

"Ah, that would explain why you don't have your spear on you," said Haruka.

"I-I'm very sorry, Nao-kun! It's all because I was using your expensive spear!" Natsuki had a look of regret on her face; she lowered her head, but I hastily shook my own head in response.

"Nah, it's not your fault at all, Natsuki. Besides, you would probably have ended up in an even more dangerous situation if you'd been using the cheap spear."

The cheap spear that Natsuki had originally been using was barely strong

enough to stab into a regular orc, so she would probably have been unable to deal any damage to the orc leader.

“Also, it’s partly my own fault, I didn’t make the best tactical decisions after I broke my spear. In any case, I definitely need to buy a better spear. I think it would be a good idea for all of us to carry around spare weapons, actually.”

“I should probably practice with another weapon in addition to the bow,” said Haruka. “Relying on my bow got me into a troublesome situation this time.”

Haruka had been forced to use her bow at close range to distract an orc, but she’d only pulled it off because she was so nimble—and because she had such finesse with a bow. It didn’t look safe at all. To keep our entire party safe, we probably needed one more person to serve as a frontline fighter alongside Touya. *Wait, am I the only candidate? I’m all for gender equality, but I can’t exactly ask Haruka or Yuki to fill the frontline role. I’m not as small as Tomi by any means, but for whatever reason, the image of an elf as a frontline fighter doesn’t sit right with me either.*

“As for you, Natsuki, I don’t really have any comments,” said Haruka. “You did quite well.”

“Are you sure about that? I wouldn’t have been able to slay the orc leader without help from everyone else...”

“The terrain held you back a lot, Natsuki,” I said. “It’s impressive enough that you took on the orc leader despite being unable to maneuver behind it.”

In fact, I was really impressed that she’d been brave enough to confront that huge orc leader head-on. She’d had to stand directly in front of it and dodge powerful swings from its club while waiting for openings to counterattack with her spear. In that situation, even a glancing blow from the orc leader’s club would have been enough to inflict a serious injury on her, but she’d braved the danger with perfect poise.

“Oh yeah, Yuki,” I said, “I noticed that you were fending off some pretty powerful attacks just fine.”

“Well, that was kind of thanks to the Enhanced Muscles skill,” said Yuki. “It let me parry attacks that I wouldn’t have been able to normally. I didn’t need to

use the Indomitable skill, but it seems like using mana to enhance your physical abilities is really effective.”

“Do you think I could have avoided breaking my arm if I’d been able to use the Indomitable skill?”

“Uh, I’m not sure about that. It was a clean break, right? Like, the orc broke it really easily. I don’t think Level 1 Indomitable would be enough.”

*Is that so? I’m still gonna do my best to learn the Indomitable skill, though. That broken arm was really painful.*

“In any case, injuries are extremely dangerous. In a game, they represent nothing more than a loss of hit points, but if, for example, I’d gotten my arm broken instead of Nao, I wouldn’t have been able to draw my bow,” said Haruka. “And if an enemy had pressed its attack while I was flinching from an injury, there’s a good chance I would have died. I’m really impressed that you managed to survive, Nao.”

I sighed in relief as I recalled the danger I’d narrowly escaped. “Yeah, I was really lucky.” I would have probably been screwed if I hadn’t been lucky enough to grab hold of a tree branch with my good arm when the orc’s club sent me flying.

“So, in conclusion, we need to practice and do more training before we can safely take on groups of ten orcs, right?” Yuki asked.

“I think it’ll be fine as long as it’s just a group of regular orcs,” said Haruka. “The orc leader was what caused us the most trouble this time.”

“I’m really sorry, Nao-kun. It was my idea to take on the group of orcs, but it resulted in you suffering a serious injury...”

Natsuki looked a bit dejected—she’d lowered her head again—so to cheer her up, I hastily interjected, “Like I said earlier, it’s not your fault! I knew there was a risk that I’d get injured; I was prepared. I think what Haruka meant was just that we shouldn’t have any issue taking on groups of ten regular orcs.”

“Mm. And more to the point, you could have avoided getting injured if you’d performed better, right, Nao?” Haruka asked.

“I mean, yeah, you’re right...” I had only used the Fire Arrow spell due to how convenient it was, but things might have turned out differently if I’d used my magic more strategically.

“Hmm. I think it’s amazing that your Fire Arrow can basically kill orcs in one hit, Nao, but the problem is dealing with a lot of enemies at the same time,” said Yuki. “Can’t you shoot two Fire Arrows at the same time?”

“You’re asking for a lot, Yuki! I already had to put in a lot of effort to increase the potency of my Fire Arrow to what it is now!” When we’d first arrived in this world, my Fire Arrow had been quite weak.

“Weren’t you able to cast *three* different spells at once while we were making magic bags? With that in mind, it shouldn’t be too hard for you to cast the same spell twice at the same time, right?”

“I mean, when you put it like that, it does sound easy, but...”

Fire Arrow consumed mana based on its potency and speed. In theory, it wouldn’t be an issue for me to prepare a second Fire Arrow with the same potency and speed as the first; the real problem would be accuracy. I stood up, walked about ten meters away from everyone else, and made two marks on the ground about two meters apart.

“Okay, here goes! *Fire Arrow!*”

I didn’t have any trouble casting two Fire Arrows at the same time, but both of them landed a bit off the marks that I had drawn. In fact, one of them landed between the two marks and blasted a hole in the ground.

“Whoa, that’s amazing, Nao!” Yuki exclaimed. “You succeeded on your first try!”

“Yeah, it was worth a shot,” said Touya. “I didn’t expect you to succeed right away, though.”

Yuki and Touya were both applauding, but Natsuki and Haruka had some criticism for me.

“Both of the Fire Arrows landed a bit off target, though,” said Natsuki.

“It looks like it took you a bit longer to cast them as well, and the potency

seems to be a bit weaker,” said Haruka. “Cast the spell again and try to aim for the centers of those marks, Nao.”

“Right. *Fire Arrow!*” I conjured the same image in my mind, but this time both arrows landed directly on the marks and blasted two holes in the ground.

Haruka went over to examine the holes. After comparing them, she shook her head. “The potency of each Fire Arrow seems to be around seventy to eighty percent of a single one of your regular Fire Arrows.”

“Can you increase the potency a bit more, Nao?” Yuki asked.

“I probably can, but it’ll make the casting time longer.”

The speed and potency of a spell were directly proportionate to the time it took to prepare the spell for casting. A spell would take longer to cast if you increased its potency; it also took more time to cast a faster-moving spell. With constant practice, it was possible to improve all three variables, but the Fire Arrows that I used against orcs were designed to charge up to maximum potency within three seconds.

“What about three Fire Arrows at the same time, Nao?”

“Are you serious, Touya? Well, I guess I’ll give it a shot. *Fire Arrow!*”

I actually did succeed at casting three Fire Arrows at the same time, but they all went way off target. I had aimed at the two marks on the ground that I had made earlier and at the hole in between them, but none of my three Fire Arrows came anywhere close to any of those targets. The closest one landed about twenty centimeters off target; the furthest one landed a full fifty centimeters away.

Haruka once again went over to check the holes that my Fire Arrows had made. She shrugged after she verified the results. “It looks like when you cast three Fire Arrows at the same time, each one has about half the potency of one of your regular arrows. I guess you could use this attack against a pack of foes who were all bunched up together...or as a diversion.”

It would definitely be too dangerous to use three Fire Arrows at the same time during combat if all three of them were going to be weak, so Haruka’s assessment made sense to me. If my accuracy was this bad outside of combat, I

might accidentally hit a party member if I got nervous during combat.

“I guess I’ll practice my accuracy until I can shoot two Fire Arrows at the same time without either one missing,” I said.

If I mastered this trick, it would be a big help in combat against groups of ten orcs or more. Two Fire Arrows per volley would allow me to slay four orcs before a group got close to us—as long as I didn’t miss.

“Putting aside Nao’s magic, we all need to do more training with our weapons and magic,” said Haruka. “Should we buy some more grimoires? We have enough savings that we can afford some even after we pay for the construction of our house.”

We didn’t yet have the six hundred gold coins for the second installment to the builders, but we had plenty of orc materials saved up in our magic bags. That meant that we could afford to spend a few hundred thousand Rea.

“I kinda want to buy a new weapon as well,” said Yuki. “This baton is sturdy and all, but it wasn’t really capable of damaging an orc. It doesn’t go well with my appearance either.”

“Huh? Your looks shouldn’t matter at all when it comes to weapons, right?” I asked. She had looked like she was doing just fine in combat earlier, so I felt like the iron baton was actually quite well suited to her.

“Nah, looks do matter. I’m quite petite, so I think a weapon like a dagger would suit me better. You know, like a thief in a fantasy setting.”

“I mean, yeah, you’re right, but I think Natsuki would be more equipped for the thief role with the skills that she has.” She had skills like Lock Picking and Traps and Snares 101, after all.

“Well, it’s fine if you want to buy a new weapon, Yuki. You don’t really have a proper weapon at the moment,” said Haruka. “However, I’m not too sure whether a dagger would work for you...”

“So are you against the idea, Haruka?”

“It’s more like none of us can teach you how to use daggers. Do you plan on trying to use a new weapon without any relevant skills?”

“Oh, yeah, I forgot about that factor!”

The rest of us had skills related to the specific weapons we used, and they were all between Level 2 and 4. The only reason that Yuki had managed to obtain Level 1 Staff Fighting so easily was because she had copied it from Touya. None of us had weapon skills related to daggers, so Yuki would have to start from zero by herself or find someone who could teach her.

“It was quite easy for me to learn the Staff Fighting skill, though,” said Touya. “Also, I’m not sure if the Swordsmanship skill is related to daggers, but Yuki could copy that. It’s worth a shot.”

“Mm, that does sound like a good idea. It might help Yuki figure out daggers to some extent,” said Haruka. “The ideal solution would be to find someone who can teach her, though.”

“I personally don’t see a reason for you to use daggers over other weapons, Yuki,” I said. “You have the Enhanced Muscles skill, so I think weapons like axes, war hammers, or flails would work as well.”

“Oh, come on, those weapons aren’t cute at all!”

“If you say so...”

I certainly wouldn’t describe axes or hammers as cute looking, but daggers and knives didn’t seem cute to me either; they brought to mind assassins who would kill stealthily.

“If she wants to try out some daggers, we can just let her,” said Natsuki. “I have some experience with weapons similar to daggers, so there might be some things that I can teach her.”

According to Natsuki, she’d learned about daggerlike weapons as part of the self-defense course she’d taken at the same dojo where she’d learned to use a naginata. She made it sound like she didn’t know much, but it was still pretty impressive to me, since I had no idea how to use those kinds of weapons.

“I’m really impressed by the range of talents that you have, Natsuki,” said Touya.

“Thanks for the praise, Touya-kun.” Natsuki smiled in a cute way, but the

topic at hand was far from cute.

“Okay, that’s enough self-reflection for now,” said Haruka. “Let’s head back to town—unless there’s anyone who wants to return to the forest for more combat.”

None of us were bloodthirsty fighters, so we all shook our heads.

“Yeah, let’s get back to town as soon as possible!” Yuki exclaimed. “We might still make it in time for the lunch special!” Yuki was the first one among us to leap up and head towards the highway, and the rest of us followed her example.

“I highly doubt there’s any of the lunch special left by now...” said Haruka.

“Whatever meal is on offer will taste better than anything we can prepare for ourselves out here, so I’m still looking forward to it,” said Natsuki.

“I’m down for the idea of eating at The Slumbering Bear if that’s an option,” said Touya. “They have larger portions.”

I lagged behind everyone else, listening to them chat about what they were going to have for lunch today. I paused for a moment to look back at the forest. I was a bit curious about whether or not there were stronger forms of orc than orc leaders lurking deeper in the forest. A regular orc had done me some serious damage today, so I would probably die if I attempted to take on a stronger form of orc alone. With that in mind, this battle had been a valuable learning experience.

“Mm, I need to get much stronger for my own sake—and to protect Haruka.” *She shouldn’t have to worry about me.*

“Nao? Something wrong?” Haruka asked, looking back at me over her shoulder.

“Nah, it’s nothing.” I shook my head and silently reaffirmed my resolve to become stronger. Then I dashed after everyone else.





# Side Story—My Adventures Have Just Begun!

I was surprised when some kid appeared floating in the air in front of me, but my surprise didn't last long. This was an opportunity of a lifetime.

“Hell yeah, this is going to be like easy mode!”

The skills that I decided to get were absolutely perfect. When you got transported to another world, your initial choice of skills was the most important factor in how your life would play out. A good set of skills would allow you to live an easy life, while the wrong skills would doom you forever. I had read plenty of light novels where characters got transported to different worlds, so I knew exactly what kind of skills to get.

Only an amateur would prioritize overpowered strength in combat. *True strength isn't about defeating enemies yourself; rather, it's about getting others to defeat enemies for you. The definition of a truly strong person is someone who doesn't have to go out of his way to fight. By that, I mean that true strength is money. Money is a universal source of power across time and space.* That's why my top priority was to get skills that would make me rich.

## Wealth (5 Points)

Multiply your monetary assets by five.

## Super Wealth (10 Points)

Multiply your monetary assets by twenty.

Only an idiot would waste points on the Wealth skill. Anyone with a brain would go for *Super Wealth*. The Super Wealth skill cost more points, but it would definitely be worth it.



Shortly after I'd selected my skills, the evil god transported me to a different world. I seemed to be in an alley. I hadn't stuck close to any of my classmates during the transportation process, so there was nobody I knew nearby, but that

didn't matter at all.

"Heh heh, *Open Status!*"

Name: Masaru

Race: Human (Age: 17)

Condition: Healthy

Skills: Magic Aptitude: Water, Healthiness, Longevity

Youth, Level 2 Spearmanship, Level 3 Robust

Disease Resistance, Poison Resistance, Level 2 Water Magic

It should be fairly obvious why I'd decided to get skills related to health: a life in the lap of luxury would definitely take a toll on my body. With that in mind, it was a pretty good deal to be able to exchange points for physical health. As for everything else I'd need in this world...that's what the money was for.

*Wait, hold on, where's my Super Wealth skill?! I don't see it at all! Is this display window bugging out?* I closed the window and blinked repeatedly to make sure my eyes hadn't gone bad. I was probably too young for that to be the case, but I also massaged my eyes for a bit just in case.

"One more time! *Open Status!*"

I yelled as loud as I could, but when the status screen appeared, it looked no different than it had before. *Why?! Is it really just straight up bugged?! Where's the customer support button?! Can I get a refund...?*

I tried stretching and doing a handstand, but my status screen remained unchanged. However, the handstand did help me calm down and collect my thoughts about my current situation. The description of the Super Wealth skill had said it would multiply my money, but I realized that it might be a passive skill that only worked once; that is, it would multiply the amount of money you had when you obtained the skill. *I hope that's not the case. I probably don't have any currency from this world on me.*

I searched through my clothes just to make sure, and my questing fingertips eventually came in contact with something hard in my pockets. Honestly, I was

surprised to find anything. I hastily extracted the object from my pocket and discovered that it was a brace of twenty coins.

“These are gold coins, I think. They look a bit dull, though.”

Based on the fact that I had twenty gold coins, the rest of my classmates had probably started with just one gold coin each. I was lucky that I hadn’t started with no money at all. Zero multiplied by anything is still zero.

“Damn it, that skill was a waste of points!”

*Hold on, now that I think about it, maybe there were skills that increased your starting money. If I had decided to get Wealth and stacked the Super Wealth skill on top of it, then maybe I could have started with a huge amount of money...*

“I guess I messed up with my choice of skills. Good thing I took some combat-related skills too.”

I’d figured that having money would increase the odds that people would try to rob me. I could have solved that problem by hiring bodyguards, but I had decided to get the Spearmanship skill just in case. Now it might be my lifeline.

“Okay, calm down. It’s too soon to panic.”

I’d already failed to achieve my first objective of enjoying a luxurious life without having to work at all, but I still had an advantage over people in this world: the knowledge I had in my head from the far more advanced civilization back on Earth. Light novels had taught me plenty of guaranteed ways of making money: inventing mayonnaise, inventing board games like reversi... However, I had to hurry if I wanted to be the first person to invent both; at least thirty of my classmates had been transported to this world with the same knowledge.

I dashed through the streets of the town visiting one store after another, but the same thing happened in each one: I got shown the door or thrown out on my butt. The clerk at one especially large and fancy store told me that there was no reason for him to introduce a total stranger to the owner; then, at a humble general goods store, the clerk said he didn’t think a game would sell at all. They all but slammed the door in my face. *Damn it, how did it turn out like this?! Everything always goes smoothly in light novels! They’re missing out on a*

*chance to make some fat stacks of cash!*

However, after I had calmed down a bit and given it some more thought, I came to the conclusion that it was only natural for those clerks to be skeptical. If somebody appeared out of nowhere and told you he had a scheme to get rich quick, you'd assume he was a con artist. I happened not to be a con, but there was no way the clerks could know that, and it was unfair of me to expect that of them. There was a chance that things would have gone differently if I'd had a sample board game to bring with me, but I didn't know any artisans in this world who could help me make one, and besides, there was also a good chance one store or another would just copy my sample and rip me off. Reversi was a simple game to understand and play, and patents probably didn't exist in this world, after all.

"Okay, calm down. It's too soon to panic. Probably."

If a game wasn't going to sell, then my next option was food. *People need to eat in order to live, right?* There was no way I wouldn't make money on food.

"There's still the risk of getting ripped off, though. Do I have no choice but to sell the recipe for mayonnaise...?"

If I negotiated a good deal in advance, there was a chance that I could get a fixed percentage of sales. I wasn't too confident in my negotiation skills, but it would probably work out fine. After all, mayonnaise was really popular in light novels for some reason. With that in mind, I visited a few different dining halls that looked promising, but once again, nobody took me seriously. When I explained that I wasn't exactly a cook, they actually yelled at me. A few times, I ended up having to book it for the door unceremoniously. *Damn it, I should have known that nobody would take cooking advice from a guy who can't cook!*

"Okay, calm down. It's still too soon to panic. I'm sure of it!"

It seemed like you needed a convincing backstory and good acting skills to pull off this kind of scam—*well, no, this isn't exactly a scam. I'm not lying at all.* In an effort to come up with a backstory, I walked around town and visited the kitchen of another diner to gather information, but I got kicked out *again*. I didn't actually know how to make mayonnaise, so I should have expected this outcome. All I knew was that you had to mix eggs with oil and vinegar, and

when I explained that to a chef, the result didn't look anything like mayonnaise. Then, when I told him that you could eat mayonnaise without cooking it, he started yelling that anyone who knew anything about cooking knew that eating raw eggs was dangerous. I couldn't exactly reply "Well, that's how we always did it back on my home planet," so I tried to talk around the problem, but the cook just glared at me. He said he'd be merciful and wouldn't turn me into the authorities, but he heavily implied that he'd reconsider if I kept trying to sell the recipe around town.

In the end, both of my money-making schemes had failed. On top of that, I had to pay the cook three large silver coins to make up for the ingredients that he'd wasted following my instructions.

"Okay, calm down. It's too soon to pan—actually, maybe I should start panicking now..."

It had started to get dark outside, so I went to an inn to get a room for the night. When I got to my room, I started counting the gold coins that I had left. By the time I was done counting, I felt pretty nervous. I'd been so certain that I could succeed with the knowledge I'd brought with me from my old life, but my experiences today had crushed that confidence. I'd learned that if you appeared in town seemingly out of nowhere, no one would trust you just because you had some special knowledge, especially if that knowledge was maybe kind of a little bit incomplete.

"I can't believe entertainment and food, the two great pillars of the economy, failed! Those are, like, the two areas where a knowledge edge counts the most!"

The only other idea I had was to invent something like a hand pump for wells, but the inn where I was staying appeared to have some kind of magical device attached to the well. The toilets weren't exactly like the average flush toilet back on Earth, but they did seem to have some magical flushing action, so that was out too.

"Ugh, my plan to get rich and live a good life off of passive income hasn't gone well at all!"

But honestly, in the back of my mind, I'd always kind of known that this was

the kind of plan only a loser would come up with. During the character creation process, I hadn't put any thought into earning money because I'd been so sure that the Super Wealth skill would solve that problem for me. It was only natural that I wasn't equipped to act on any of my ideas for earning money. Like, I hadn't purchased any skills related to cooking, so of course I couldn't come up with a recipe for mayonnaise that I could then sell.

"If I want to survive in this world, I guess I have no choice but to lead the life of an ordinary adventurer. I didn't think I would end up having to rely on the weapon skills and magic skills that I got as a last resort..."

It was all because the description of the Super Wealth skill had tricked me. *Damn it, I should have known better than to trust an evil god! He got me good!*



"I take it back. The Super Wealth skill was actually really useful..."

The next day, it wasn't long before I came to realize that the Super Wealth skill had actually saved my life. If anything, it was more than worth its cost in points. When I went to a weapon shop, I discovered that arms and armor for adventurers were more expensive than I'd thought they would be. Twenty gold coins would barely be enough for a decent set of equipment. With that in mind, the Super Wealth skill was probably an absolute must if you planned on becoming an adventurer. You would probably die if you had to start with the kind of equipment you could afford with only one gold coin.

*Yeah, I guess the 10 Points that I used for the Super Wealth skill were worth it.* Or rather, even if I didn't take the cost of equipment into account, I probably wouldn't have been able to stay at a decent inn if I had started with just one gold coin.

Since all of my ideas for getting rich quickly had been a bust, I searched for a cheaper inn to stay at in the future so I could save up money. At the first inn I checked out, I saw two muscular men walk out together. They seemed to be pretty friendly with each other, and when they saw me, they gave me some weirdly passionate winks too, so I immediately turned tail and fled. *My tail was definitely in danger just now. I need to get a job as soon as possible so I can stay at a safe inn—and that includes staying safe from those kinds of guys!*



“All right, time to give it a shot...”

Later the same day, I arrived in front of the Adventurers’ Guild; I had asked people for directions. My heart was beating fast, but due to uneasiness rather than excitement. My experiences so far had been the opposite of what I’d expected from typical light novels with similar settings, so I hoped that it would be the same for the Adventurers’ Guild. I didn’t want to go through the typical turn of events where some adventurer would pick a fight with the rookie protagonist and get his ass handed to him. In real life, that wasn’t the kind of fight I could win; my combat skills weren’t overpowered at all.

I slowly opened the doors of the Adventurers’ Guild and entered, doing my best to avoid standing out. There were a decent number of people inside who seemed to be adventurers. I was surprised to discover that they all looked rather...normal. A lot of them were quite well-built, but none of them looked anything like scary criminals. In addition, as far as I could tell, there didn’t seem to be any female adventurers. There were some adventurers whose gender was hard to categorize, though.

“I guess the first thing I need to do is register.”

I had dreamed about being in a party of adventurers with some beautiful girls, but reality was a cruel mistress. However, all hope was not lost. There was a receptionist behind one of the counter tables who looked quite cute, so I made a beeline for her.

“Um, can I register as a new adventurer here?”

“Of course. The registration fee is three large silver coins, and...” I handed her the fee and she handed me a form in exchange. “Very good. Now then, please fill out this form. Just to make sure, can you fill this by yourself? Help with writing is available if you need it.”

“Oh, I can fill it out just fine.”

It looked like I had to write my name, race, and a simple self-introduction. Race was simple enough, since I was a regular human, but I wasn’t sure what to write for my name. My name was Masaru Yamai, but my status screen had



displayed it as just Masaru. That would probably work here, but I kind of wanted to use a different name. *Maybe I can just rearrange the syllables in my real name. Would Marusa work? Actually, no, that's slang for the National Tax Agency's investigative division back in Japan. Saru sounds kind of lame, so that's a no as well. Saiya sounds strong since it's close to Saiyan, but looking at it objectively, that doesn't really fit me. Saya and Maya both sound too girlish, so I think something like Masa or Sai would be better. Hmm, let's just go with Sai since it sounds kind of cool. As for my introduction, I should probably just write that I'm decent with a spear and can use Water Magic. It'd be weird to write that I'm resistant to poison and diseases, after all.*

"All right, I'm done filling out the form."

"All right, thank you very much. Sai-san, correct? I see you wrote that you can use Water Magic. Do you wish to register as a normal adventurer?"

"Hm? Well, yes, I do." *Is there another category of adventurers? I don't know anything about this, so I guess I'll just nod and go along with "normal."*

"Very well. Oh, there happens to be a veteran party of adventurers who are looking to recruit new members right now. Would you be interested? I can introduce you to that party."

"Um, what kind of party is it?"

The receptionist explained that there was a party of Rank 4 adventurers who had just lost their Water Magic caster, so they were looking for a replacement. I had just registered as a new adventurer, so my Rank was 0. The receptionist lady told me that unlike Rank 1 or 2, Rank 4 was hard to reach unless an adventurer had earned the guild's trust, so that meant Rank 4 adventurers were fairly trustworthy. It would probably be safer and easier to earn money as a new adventurer if I joined this party instead of trying to fend for myself. I didn't really mind the idea of going solo as an adventurer, but it would definitely be more practical to learn the ropes from some veterans instead. I had learned my lesson yesterday: my only knowledge of different worlds consisted of the stuff that I had read in light novels, but that wasn't the same as having common sense about life in this world. Both of my attempts to earn money with my "knowledge" edge had failed, after all.

“Okay, I’m interested. Can you introduce me to that party?”

*There’s a chance that I might get to join a party full of beautiful girls!*



The receptionist lady, whose name was Kate-san, had told me to come back to the guild tomorrow in the morning once I ate breakfast. I headed to the guild a bit early to make sure I wasn’t late, and once I arrived, Kate-san introduced me to a party of four men who were sitting around a table. All of them were muscular guys in their twenties, although one of them was on the slim side of muscular. Regardless, they all looked much stronger than me. There wasn’t a single girl in evidence, but I’d had a hunch that that was what reality had in store for me.

“Sai-san, these are the members of the party known as the Dungeon Seekers. Gentlemen, this adventurer here is Sai-san. I’ll leave the rest to you.” Kate-san returned to her counter table.

*That’s it for the introduction you promised? Really?* I was perplexed, but the party of adventures didn’t seem to mind; they all smiled at me in a manly way and extended their hands towards me.

“Yo, nice to meet you! My name’s Adonix, and I’m the leader of this party. These two guys are Marcos and Tezas, and the slim guy here is Lucas.”

“Oh, it’s nice to meet you as well! My name is Sai!” I hastily replied and shook hands with all four men. “Um, is there...would there happen to be anyone else in this party?”

I still had a tiny shred of hope left when I asked, but the reply I got back was not what I’d hoped for.

“Nah, we’re just a party of four right now,” said Adonix. “We lost a member recently, so that’s why we asked the guild if there was someone that they could introduce to us, but...”

“What? Did you sign up in the hopes of getting intimate with a female adventurer?” Lucas asked.

“Well, uh, that’s...part of the reason...”

I answered honestly and the four of them all sighed in response.

“You idiot, there are no female adventurers out there waiting for you! None!” Marcos exclaimed. “Well, there are some who are okay as *friends*, but as for girls who are attractive enough to marry...”

“Yeah, they’re very rare,” said Tezas. “Besides, women who are beautiful, good-natured, and good at cooking don’t *need* to become adventurers in the first place.”

“Oh, I kind of figured that was the case,” I said. “I had some hopes, but oh well...” I hadn’t been expecting much when I asked, so the truth wasn’t too disappointing. *Oh, my eyeballs are dripping sweat for some reason...* “Just to make sure, your party is looking for someone who can use Water Magic, right?” I asked.

“Yeah, the guy we lost the other day was a Water Magic caster,” Adonix replied. “You can use Water Magic, right?”

“Yeah. I’m not really capable of using advanced or difficult spells, though.”

My Water Magic was only Level 2, so there weren’t really any spells available to me that were capable of inflicting massive damage, but it should be enough for creating water and avoiding rain. As far as I was concerned, Water Magic basically only seemed useful for trivial stuff like that.

“Well, for adventuring, it doesn’t matter as long as you can create water,” said Adonix.

“Yeah, exactly,” said Marcos. “Water’s quite heavy, so it’s a pain to carry around, and out in the wild, it’s hard to find water that’s safe to drink. Producing it on the spot with Water Magic is the best option for most parties.”

“Safe drinking water is an absolute must for long expeditions,” said Tezas. “You *can* create water, right?”

“Yeah, I’m capable of that much,” I said. “By the way, may I ask why the previous mage left this party?”

It would be great to team up with veteran adventurers who I could depend on, but I didn’t want to join a party that would force me to accept bad working

conditions. The reason why the previous mage had left this party was going to be a key factor in whether I decided to join them. I didn't really want to join them if they weren't willing to explain why he'd left.

The four of them exchanged some awkward glances and then grimaced almost in unison. They replied in unison too, sounding like they were in pain.

"We got betrayed...!"

"H-Huh? What do you mean...?" *Oh no, is the reason more yikes than I thought?* I felt a bit scared as I urged them to continue, and they started to vent their frustrations.

"That guy, he...he got together with a woman and didn't say anything about it before he left the party!" Adonix exclaimed.

"We all vowed to become adventurers and to keep at it until we were capable of taking on dungeons, but he *betrayed our oath!*" Marcos exclaimed.

"On top of that, the wife that he got was *really cute!*" Tezas exclaimed.  
"Treacherous bastard!"

"I bet he got too big for his britches just because he can use magic, that son of a bitch!" Lucas exclaimed.

According to what the four of them told me, they had started as a group of five people. They had sworn to work together as adventurers until they made a lot of money from clearing dungeons, hence the name Dungeon Seekers. They had worked hard towards that goal, and they had managed to attain a decently high rank due to their efforts. True, they hadn't actually ventured into a dungeon yet, but they were getting close. Then, the other day, right as they were about to tackle their first dungeon, their mage had suddenly decided to quit the party. He was the only one who could use Water Magic, and having someone like that was crucial when exploring dungeons, so their plans had been ruined as a result.

"He chickened out! He said he wasn't willing to take on dangerous work since he's expecting a kid now!" Lucas exclaimed.

According to the Dungeon Seekers, a mage who could use Water Magic wouldn't have any trouble making a living as long as he could create ice.

Reading between the lines, it had basically been a shotgun marriage, and he'd decided to prioritize a stable life over his dreams of becoming an adventurer.

"Just to make sure, what would you have done if you'd been in his position, Lucas?" Adonix asked.

"What do you think?!" Lucas raised his fists to the heavens and then smashed them down on the table. "I would have left the party with zero hesitation if there was a cute girl like that waiting for me! Even if she wasn't pregnant! If I had an easy way to earn money, there's no way I would say no to a lovely life with a cute wife!"

*Huh? Weren't you angry about that dude betraying you, Lucas-san?*

Adonix glared at him. "You bastard, have you forgotten the first oath that we swore together?!"

"Of course not! It was to conquer some dungeons and get rich!"

"And then get married to some cute girls!" they all exclaimed together.

It sounded like the life of an adventurer was quite rough for a guy. Or rather, it sounded like most people who chose to become adventurers were the kind of people who didn't stand to inherit a family business, so they would gamble their lives on the low chance of success as an adventurer. However, most of them failed and died out in the wilderness.

"There's no way a guy can get married as an adventurer!" Lucas exclaimed. "If you happen to get the rare chance to walk away from the life of an adventurer, then it would be foolish not to take it!"

"Yeah, definitely," said Tezas. "Adventurers can die at any moment and don't have any savings, so I wouldn't want to get married to one if I were a woman."

"Before you even think of marriage as an adventurer, you have to save up at least enough money for your wife and kids to live off if you die," said Marcos. "It's hard to earn money if you're not a mage, though. Adventurers who only know how to use swords can't even get hired as guards unless they're very lucky."

According to the Dungeon Seekers, it was very hard for retired adventurers to

find stable work too. The only option for most of them was day labor.

“Um, do adventurers ever get married to each other?” I asked.

“Well, there are cases like that, but they’re quite rare,” said Adonix.

“Like we said, there are barely any female adventurers to begin with,” said Marcos. “Let’s put it this way: would you be willing to get married to a girl who looks pretty much exactly like us? Are you the type of guy who’s satisfied as long as there’s a hole for you to stick your meat in?”

“Uh, well, no, I’d like to get married to a normal cute girl...”

A beautiful girl would probably be asking for too much, but I wanted to at least get married to a normal girl who was soft to the touch. Buff girls weren’t exactly my type.

“Right? Oh yeah, to be clear, I’m not judging anybody else’s tastes or anything,” said Adonix. “I know that there are guys who prefer powerful and reliable women, and there are also women out there who like delicate and frail men. However, that’s not how we’re built! Say it with me, guys!”

“We want to get married to some cute girls!” they all exclaimed.

The Dungeon Seekers were pretty loud, so I expected to get cold stares from the other adventurers nearby, but there were actually a decent number of people who were nodding in agreement. *So is that a pretty common goal for adventurers?*

“So is that a goal you can actually accomplish by conquering dungeons?” I asked.

“The goal of getting a cute wife? Yeah, of course. It doesn’t really matter whether or not you have good looks as long as you have a decent income and a house,” said Adonix. “Well, unless you have any really bad flaws like a messed-up personality or hobbies.”

“There’s a limit to the number of men out there who own farmland or a family business, after all,” said Marcos. “There are women out there who will even consider guys like us as potential husbands if we fulfill those two conditions that Adonix just mentioned.”

It sounded like the ability to provide for a family mattered more than your looks. Maybe there was some hope for me in this world. Anyone could fulfill those conditions if he worked hard enough—although, come to think of it, that was only true if you accepted the fact that life in this world was unfair from birth; under old-fashioned laws of inheritance, a family's eldest son would have a large advantage over his younger siblings. That wasn't relevant to me, though, since I didn't have any family members in this world.

"So yeah, that's the goal that our party is working hard to achieve," said Tezas.

"What do you think?" Lucas asked. "Do you agree with our party's principles?"

"Of course!" I exclaimed. "I'd love to get a cute wife as well!"

My initial plan of getting rich quickly had been too optimistic. The Dungeon Seekers' principles and goals were very relatable to me, so I was down to join them. It would probably be more satisfying to accomplish something with my own talents rather than a pile of gold, so this was an exciting prospect for me.

"Glad to hear that! From today on, we're soul mates!" Adonix exclaimed.

"Let's work together until each of us gets a cute wife!" Marcos exclaimed.

"I'm sure we'll succeed!" Tezas exclaimed.

"Let's get wives that are cuter than the one that traitor got!" Lucas exclaimed.

"Yeah!" I exclaimed. "We're going to become winners in life!"

We clicked with each other right away and spent the entire evening drinking together. The next day, we all set out for a town with a dungeon nearby—all for the sake of getting closer to the goal of getting a cute wife. That was how my adventures in a new world began.

## Afterword

Hello, it's been a while. I'm Itsuki Mizuho, and I wanted to thank you all for your continued support of my works. There may be some people who only began reading my work the other day, though. By that, I mean that volumes one and two of *Management of Novice Alchemist* are now available for purchase from Fujimi Fantasia Bunko! At least, I think and hope that's the case; volume two hasn't been released yet as of the writing of this afterword. The cute art for this series is by Fuumi-san, so please check it out!

All right, that should be enough blatant self-promotion for now. Let's get started with the contents of this volume. In one scene, when assigning colors to different spells, Nao's party describes the three primary colors as red, yellow, and blue. Actually, the exact colors I had in mind were cyan, magenta, and yellow. Cyan's closer to a light greenish-blue, and magenta's closer to a bright purplish-red. However, it would be kind of weird to go into that much detail in a normal conversation, so I wrote them talking about red, yellow, and blue for simplicity's sake. On a sidenote, the primary colors of light are red, green and blue, and that's what RGB usually stands for.

Another thing I wanted to mention in regard to this volume is the character of Sai-kun, who shows up in the last side story, the chapter right before this afterword. He's a character who doesn't show up in the web novel version of this series. Well, I had planned out his character and what his actions were going to be when he first arrived in the other world, but I didn't plan to write them out at all. My plan was for him to show up much later in the web novel. However, I was granted enough extra pages for this volume that I decided to go ahead and have him appear here. I plan to write more about him as he makes some small mistakes here and there while exploring the world with fellow adventurers who he gets along with quite well. The next step in his story is going to a dungeon city with his party and becoming more experienced and stronger as an adventurer in his own right. In a way, it's kind of a standard narrative, but his party is all male, so it probably wouldn't fly as the main plot of



a light novel. Their party would crumble in no time if a girl approached them, after all!

In addition, the manga version of *To Another World... with Land Mines!* (with beautiful art by Relucy-san) is now being published by *Shonen Ace Plus*. Haruka's very cute in the manga, so please check it out as well! Last but not least, I'd like to thank Nekobyou Neko-san for the hard work on things like the design of Yuki and Natsuki's clothes. I really appreciate your gorgeous art.

Now then, I'll end it here and hope that we can all meet again in the next volume. Until then!

Itsuki Mizuho



**“D-Don’t force dried  
dindels on me!**

**U-Ugh, they taste  
really sweet...”**


**Natsuki: I’m not a big eater  
like you are, Yuki!**

**“Come on, eat some!  
You know you  
love them!”**









I went off on my own down the road that supposedly led to a town called Laffan. I had no idea if I could actually grow enough as a person to be of use to Haruka-san's party in the future, but I was going to try my best. My first goal would be to earn money to pay them back for the loan.

## Tomi's Aspirations and Journey

To Another World...

with **LAND MINES!**  
**3**



story

Itsuki Mizuho

art

Nekobyou Neko

To  
Another World...

with

LAND  
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3







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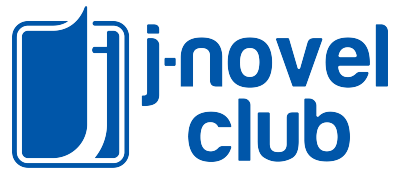
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To Another World... with Land Mines! Volume 3

by Itsuki Mizuho

Translated by Yen-Po Tseng Edited by Shakuzan

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