



story

Itsuki Mizuho

art

Nekobyou Neko

To
Another World...

with

LAND
MINES!

2

A vibrant manga-style illustration featuring several anime characters in a dynamic, floating pose against a bright blue sky with soft clouds. In the center, a blonde girl with cat ears and a purple dress holds a red strawberry. To her right, a girl with grey hair and a black and white uniform also holds a strawberry. Above them, a girl with long white hair and a black outfit is visible. In the upper right, two smaller characters, a girl with brown hair and a girl with orange hair, are floating. The overall scene is energetic and colorful, with floating green leaves and small white sparkles.

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C O N T E N T S

TO ANOTHER WORLD...
WITH LAND MINES!

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Prologue

“Wait, am I hearing you right?” I asked. “Did you really just suggest that we leave this town, Haruka?”

“Wow, what?” said Touya.

We had finally managed to obtain a stable living in this world when Haruka brought up the idea of leaving the town we were in. Touya and I looked at each other when we heard that and spoke at the same time. Haruka had just shot down Touya’s idea earlier when he had said “Can we take on some hunting quests now?” Her reasoning was that it was dangerous, and danger meant no. She would dodge danger as much as possible, and she made sure that we were all careful in our actions. With all of that in mind, it was quite strange to hear that kind of idea from her.

“To be clear, I’m not saying we should go out on a journey or anything.” Haruka stopped herself for a moment before she hesitantly continued. “It’s just that, well, I’d like to search for Natsuki and Yuki if possible...”

“Oh yeah, we haven’t found them yet...”

“Yeah, that’s a bit worrying...”

Touya and I both nodded deeply in agreement when we heard what Haruka said. Yuki Shidou and Natsuki Furumiya were Haruka’s best friends, and both Touya and I were good friends with them as well. We had hung out together multiple times in the past as a group of five. They were definitely our first priority among the classmates who we wanted to help out.

Natsuki was a beautiful girl who had a very graceful and modest appearance. Her eyes would sometimes give off a bit of a scary impression, however, perhaps because she practiced martial arts. Yet her true nature was quite different from what you would expect at first glance. She could be quite unpleasant towards others and hard to get along with. By unpleasant, I mean that she would frankly state the truth to others, which some people might find

unpleasant, although it wasn't like she cursed at others or anything like that. In addition, she would keep her distance from people who she wasn't on good terms with by speaking very formally to them, which only served to strengthen that "hard to get along with" impression. However, she would drop that polite manner completely and unleash some harsh and painful words in certain situations.

On one such occasion, all five of us were hanging out together outside in the city. When Touya and I arrived together at the place where we were supposed to meet up, we saw two guys who looked like shallow flirts hitting on all three of the girls. It wasn't unusual for guys to hit on the three of them, so Touya and I just thought to ourselves that it was the same as usual and were about to step in to help them, but we stopped ourselves when we noticed something strange. On a second look, those two guys were actually on the verge of tears, and after we noticed that, we started to hear what Natsuki was saying. I'll leave out the details, but let's just say that those two guys were in shambles. That was just how sharp and lethal Natsuki's words were. Or rather, I should say that it was complete overkill. Touya and I were very hesitant as we raised our voices to make our presence known, and when they heard us, those two guys looked at us as if we had saved them from hell and then ran away without saying a word. Afterward, Natsuki greeted us with a smile as if nothing had happened at all, which terrified both of us and remained a clear memory in my mind to this day.

Yuki, on the other hand, was a sociable girl who was quite petite and friendly, and she got along well with others. Compared to Natsuki, Yuki seemed way better at getting along with just about anyone. That was just on the surface, however. It was actually much harder to get on good terms with Yuki than with Natsuki. In a way, she was kind of similar to a small, wary animal that would take a long time before trusting someone.

On top of everything else, both of them had high scores in the looks department, so another reason that all five of us hung out together quite often was because Touya and I were expected to help the girls out by using our presence to deter unwanted attention from random guys. Both of us would be subject to some jealous looks from our male classmates as a result, and some of them would ask the two of us things like which of the girls we were dating or

even beg us to hook them up with one of the girls, which was a pretty annoying experience. However, we had no intention of giving up our friendships with the girls because of that, so we would just stop talking with the guys in class who kept pestering us about it.

“I’m worried about them too, but what about our other classmates, Haruka?” I asked. “Weren’t there other girls who we also ate lunch with a couple of times?”

“Uh, well...”

I mentioned earlier that Yuki was the type of person who was wary of others, and Haruka was actually quite similar to her in that regard. Haruka was a very sociable person—she got along decently with most of our classmates—but that didn’t mean she was good friends with all of them. With most people, there was a certain level of friendliness where she drew the line. At the same time, she was also the type of person with an innate disposition to look out for others, so her personality was quite complex and hard to define. She would look out for others to a certain extent, but there were very few people who she would actually look out for with true devotion. There was also a line that she drew between people who she considered friends in public and people who she considered friends in her private time too. Other than Touya and me, the only people she hung out with outside of school were probably just Yuki and Natsuki. *I guess it makes sense that she doesn’t really care about anyone but Yuki and Natsuki among our other classmates...*

“What about you two? Are there any friends either of you would like to look for as well?”

“I mean, this might sound cold, but I don’t really see a good reason to look for them in the circumstances we’re in at the moment,” I said.

“Yeah, I feel the same way,” said Touya. “It’s not worth putting our lives on the line just to search for other classmates to meet up with.”

“Ugh, sorry about suggesting this...”

Haruka had a remorseful tone in her voice, but we hastily shook our heads to reassure her that she didn’t have to feel that way.

“Nah, it’s different in your case compared to ours. We’re worried about Yuki and Natsuki too, and our other friends are guys, so they should be able to handle themselves okay. Right, Touya?”

“Yeah, it’s not like we owe them anything, so we don’t have to help them out. I mean, we’re all in similar circumstances.”

It wasn’t that I wasn’t worried about our other friends just because they were guys, but it was more like there weren’t any classmates who we wanted to go out of our way to help in our current circumstances. *Aside from Touya, the friends who I hung out with on weekends and holidays went to different schools, so yeah.*

“Yuki and Natsuki aren’t in this town, are they?” Touya asked.

“Yeah, probably not,” I replied.

This past month, we had spent whatever free time we had searching for Yuki and Natsuki, but we hadn’t found a single trace of them. Our top priority was to do what we had to in order to survive in this world, so we hadn’t spent that much time looking for them, however. The only way for suspicious strangers like us to get work in this world was via the Adventurers’ Guild, so we had requested Diola-san’s help with looking for Yuki and Natsuki in exchange for dindels. It meant that there was a very low chance that we had somehow missed them. On the other hand, we had encountered some of our other classmates at one point. I’d been quite glad that I’d been hiding my face under the hood of a cloak when walking outside, since I’d overheard them saying things like “I’m gonna buy some slaves and build a harem!” and “Our skills could work on the girls in our class too,” which was very disturbing to hear. On a side note, slavery was outlawed in the country we were in, and it was quite easy to look that information up. It was best to stay away from classmates like that who were detached from reality.

“Even if Yuki and Natsuki didn’t manage to adapt to this world, they’re probably still alive for now, so I want to find them as soon as possible...”

It was technically possible for people to survive on just water for a month, so Haruka’s words made sense. However...

“Nah, they’re much tougher than that, right, Touya?”

“Yeah, and that goes for both of them.”

The reason why Touya and I weren't that worried about them was because we had faith in them that they would be able to take care of themselves just fine. It seemed like Haruka had forgotten about that until we pointed it out, but she still had a worried look on her face.

“W-Well, that's true, but I'm worried about whether the two of them can deal with unforeseeable circumstances alone, you know?”

In this town of Laffan, it was possible to earn enough money via day labor inside of town to survive day by day, even if you didn't take on dangerous work that would require you to go outside of town. However, the type of work that was available for girls inside of town tended to be light work compared to the tough manual labor jobs that guys could take on, which meant that girls would earn less per day. It would be the complete opposite if they took on work in the sex trade, but there was no way Natsuki and Yuki would take on such work, so I just hoped they weren't forced into a situation where they had to.

“For example, they'd be in a tight spot without savings if one of them got sick or something, right? It's different for us, since the two who aren't sick can just support the one who is.”

“Yeah, that makes sense,” I said.

“To be honest, I could probably earn enough to pay for the inn fee myself even if both of you got sick.”

“That's just because you're a male beastman, Touya.”

Touya could perform as much manual labor as two people, but that wouldn't be possible for a regular human.

“That would be enough for the inn fee, yeah. However, even Touya wouldn't be able to earn enough if we needed money for medicine, so that's why I want to find Yuki and Natsuki as soon as possible.”

“I'm not against the idea, of course, but do you have any ideas about where to search?” I asked.

“Yeah. Initially, we were probably transported to an area near two towns—

this town and a town called Sarstedt that's located east of here. The grassy plains where we started out were probably near Sarstedt, since they were to the east of here."

"What's your reasoning behind this? It's possible that they were transported somewhere near Laffan instead, right?"

"Yes, that's true. However, if we consider the different directions around here, then east of Laffan would be the safest place. Assuming that the evil god was a bit kind to us, then—"

"It would be instant death if someone was transported to the south forest, yeah."

We had gotten used to life as adventurers to a certain extent by now, but we still obeyed Diola-san's warning and stayed away from the south forest. I had no idea what the evil god had intended to accomplish by transporting us to this world, but it was highly unlikely that he would have transported someone to an area that would lead to their immediate death. If I followed that train of thought, then Haruka's prediction probably wasn't that far off the mark.

"However, if we can't find them in Sarstedt, I doubt they're still alive..." Haruka lowered her head a bit and sighed after she said that.

What she said made sense, because if someone wasn't in a town more than half a month after our entire class had been transported to this world, then they were either dead or masters at survival out in the wild.

"That means we should start as soon as possible," I said. "We can spend today getting some rest and preparing and then head out tomorrow morning. How does that sound?"

"Sounds good to me," said Touya. "Haruka needs it the most of all of us, since she hasn't gotten any proper rest these past few days, right?"

"That's your fault, Touya," I said. "Look at all this dried meat you made us prepare. What do you plan on doing with all of this?"

I pointed at the corner of our room, where there were a few barrels packed full of dried meat. There were also two big burlap bags that were filled with dried dindels. After drying, they were a fraction of their original weight, but it

was still too much to carry all of it with us. Touya averted his gaze in an awkward manner when he saw where I was pointing, but Haruka backed him up.

“Oh, that’s not a problem. I negotiated things with the innkeeper, and he agreed to lend us some space in the warehouse to store our stuff.”

“Wow! Nice one, Haruka!”

The innkeeper was still as unsociable as ever, but he had sold us barrels that we could use for curing meat, and he would also help cook the meat that we brought to the inn if we requested it, so it felt like we had gotten to know him somewhat better by now. Based on recent events, that was probably why he was willing to lend us some space in the warehouse.

“All that’s left is to tell Diola-san that we’ll be gone for a while, I think?” said Haruka.

“In that case, how about we spend the rest of today sightseeing so you can take it easy, Haruka?”

“I’m down for that idea!” Touya exclaimed. “After all, up to this point, we’ve only gone outside to work and to search for Yuki and Natsuki!”

“Sure, that sounds fine. We do happen to have some spare money, so I guess it wouldn’t hurt to do some shopping.”

Haruka responded to my idea with a smile, and I felt like she had finally managed to relax. There was a saying that went along the lines of “No money, no life,” but our livelihood was stable at the moment, and it wouldn’t be shaken even if we indulged in some spending at the moment. *It’d be fine to refresh our mental health by having fun for a day, right? Right. Okay, all clear.*

“All right, let’s have some fun!” I said. “It’s time to go sightseeing in this different world!”

Chapter 1—Encounter! A Wild Land Mine Appeared!

At Haruka's request, the first place we decided to visit on our sightseeing tour was the only bookstore in town. It was a bit dark and cramped inside, but it extended back between the surrounding buildings; it felt similar to the type of used bookstore that you would usually find in an alley. However, the layout of the store was quite different from the type of used bookstores that I had been in before, since the bookshelves were all the way at the very back of the store. They were blocked off by a counter table so customers wouldn't be able to reach the books. The closest comparison that came to mind was to a resale store. Technically speaking, there were some books that were piled up on top of a table in front of the counter, but they were very damaged and looked like they would be thrown away at any moment. The purpose of those books was probably to indicate that customers were free to read them, but books in good condition weren't going to be free.

"So what are we here for, Haruka?" I asked. "Is it the grimoires you mentioned before that we can use as textbooks?"

"Yeah. We'll need to learn the proper foundations of magic and level up our magic skills at some point, right?"

"That makes sense. My Fire Magic skill is still Level 1, after all..."

"Why now, though, Haruka? We're about to head out on a long journey tomorrow, right? Won't this luggage weigh us down?"

Touya was completely right about that, because the books that were lined up on the shelves behind the counter all seemed very thick and heavy. They would probably weigh a few kilos each if we measured them, so they definitely weren't anywhere near as light as normal paperback books back on Earth.

"Are we still going to buy some, Haruka...?" Touya asked.

After a moment's thought, Haruka said, "Let's just say we're here to research the market price for these kinds of books. Yeah, let's put it like that."

“Man, luggage really is a problem in real life compared to games...” I said.

Luggage would weigh us down no matter what it was, since we didn’t have some sort of magical inventory we could store things in. At the same time, that also meant that if we could manage to craft a magic bag, it wouldn’t be a problem at all.

“Excuse me, we’re looking for some grimoires. Would you happen to have any in stock?”

Haruka was speaking to an old man who was sitting in a chair behind the counter reading a book. He glanced at her briefly when he heard her.

“What kinds of grimoires?”

“We’re looking for books on the basics of magic, along with specific books about Water, Wind, Light, Fire, and Time Magic. Also, would you happen to have any alchemist encyclopedias in stock as well?”

“Hmm, give me a bit.”

He set down the book he was reading and stood up to take a few books off of the shelves that he then lined up on the counter.

“It’ll be thirty thousand Rea for the grimoire on Water Magic, thirty-six thousand Rea for the grimoire on Light Magic, and twenty-five thousand Rea for the grimoire on Fire Magic. As for alchemist encyclopedias, we’re out of them right now.”

Holy crap, they’re way more expensive than I thought they would be! I can’t believe a book is worth the equivalent of a few hundred thousand yen!

“There are two books on the basics of magic in stock. They have the same contents, but their covers are different. The cheaper one is fifteen thousand Rea, while the other one is twenty thousand Rea.”

I took a look at the two different grimoires. The cheaper one definitely looked like it was more worn out; it also had a less sturdy cover than the other one. It wasn’t like we were planning on buying a fancy display piece, so the only logical choice would be to buy the cheaper one; we didn’t care as long as the contents were the same.

“As for Wind and Time Magic, we do stock books on Wind Magic from time to time, but there’s essentially no supply of books on Time Magic.”

“I see.”

Grimoires that nobody could use wouldn’t sell at all, of course, so there was no reason for anyone to keep them in stock. There also weren’t publishing companies or wholesalers or anything like that in this world, so it seemed like it would be very difficult to obtain a book on Time Magic. Most of the books that did exist were used copies that mages or nobles had discarded, so both new books and new manuscripts were very hard to come by. There were stores that dealt in manuscripts, but to start a store like that, you would need the ability to read and write along with money and connections to obtain original copies of books. On top of that, there wasn’t much demand for books in this world in the first place, which meant that there were few such stores in existence. *Well, that was what the old man told us, at least.*

“Um, what about the books on this table here?” Haruka asked.

“Oh, they’re clearance goods. The price for each one is two thousand Rea, but we don’t do refunds here, even if there are pages missing.”

“Whoa, they’re quite cheap...”

Actually, wait, no, the equivalent of twenty thousand yen isn’t cheap at all for books that might have missing pages. I’d almost gotten the wrong idea because normal books were ridiculously expensive, but these used books did interest me even so. There weren’t any books that looked like they would fall apart when I picked them up, of course, but there were books that had loose or missing pages or had no covers. At the same time, that also meant it was possible there might be some interesting bargains among them, so—

“Nao, we’ll come back another time to buy books, okay?” said Haruka.

“Okay...”

I wanted to look for some good bargains here, but unfortunately, we didn’t have the luxury of taking more luggage with us at the moment. Haruka pulled me by the hand as I reluctantly turned away from the table with the clearance goods, and each of us gave the old man a shallow bow in turn.

“Thank you very much for the help. We’ll come back at another time to buy some books.”

“Hmph, sure! I’ll still be here, but I won’t count on ever seeing you again.”

Despite what he had said, the old man looked a bit happy, and we thanked him again before we left the store. The next place we headed towards was a clothing store, also at Haruka’s request.

“Don’t we have enough clothes for now...?”

Back on Earth, I would alternate between my usual clothes and pajamas—it just felt right to me—but it didn’t really matter in this world; we didn’t have to do laundry thanks to Haruka’s Purification spell. Honestly, it was so easy to keep our clothes clean that I would have been perfectly fine with just a single pair of clothes if it came down to that.

“All the clothes we’ve bought so far are cheap and sturdy, remember? Wouldn’t it be nice to upgrade our clothes to ones that feel nice to wear and look good? Food, shelter, and clothing are all important parts of life, right?”

I had an idea of what Haruka was trying to get at, but it didn’t feel like we really needed new clothes at the moment. We would wear some leather armor on top of our usual clothes when we were out for adventurer work, and if we wore our hooded cloaks on top of that, then no one would even see whether our clothes looked good. Pajamas were just pajamas. We were the only ones who would see each other’s pajamas, so it wasn’t even important that they look good.

I told Haruka I thought it was a waste of money, of course.

“Oh, new pajamas sound good as well.”

Were you even listening to what I said? It was a pain in the ass to try to change a girl’s mind when it came to clothes. That was something both Touya and I had learned in the past. I wished I could obtain a skill that would allow me to reduce the amount of time a girl would spend shopping for clothes. *Should I actually try and see if I can? If such a skill exists, I’d have to put it to practice and level it up.*

I glanced at Touya and he nodded back to indicate that I should go for it.

“Um, Haruka—”

We ended up spending about two hours at the clothing store. In the end, Haruka didn't buy any new clothes, of course. The usual. *I, Naofumi Kamiya, humbly accept my complete and utter defeat.*

At Touya's request, the next place we headed towards was the weapon shop. We had bought a decent weapon for Touya the other day, but Haruka and I still had low-quality weapons, so we listened to Touya when he suggested that it was about time we got new weapons as well.

“Yo, Gantz-san,” said Touya. “We're here again.”

“Yo, so it's you guys. Have you come to buy better weapons?”

The person who greeted us was Gantz-san; he was the one who had sold us the weapons we'd bought on our first day in this world. In the beginning, he wouldn't greet us at all, but over time, after we had continued to visit the store to buy weapons and discuss things with him, we had gotten friendly enough with each other that he would give us advice if we asked.

“Nah, I already bought a weapon for myself, remember? We're here to find some weapons for Haruka and Nao today.”

Gantz-san snorted in response. “Yeah, all you bought was a sword. I see your armor is still garbage, and you haven't bought a shield yet either, right?”

Garbage...? We spent quite a decent amount of money on Touya's armor, so surely it's not garbage. I mean, it was much cheaper than the other armor that was on sale, but still.

“We don't have that much spare money, but we didn't want to buy something low quality,” said Touya. “Besides, you'll give us a discount, right, Gantz-san?”

“Right, sure! You're delusional. Selling stuff here is how I make a living, so there's no way I'm gonna easily give you cheaper prices! But, well, I might think about it if you buy multiple things at once.”

What's with that weird phrasing at the end, Gantz-san? Have you finally warmed up to us?! Well, he had already given us some discounts before, so

perhaps finally wasn't the right word.

"Besides, there's no point in saving up money while you're young. Money can't be used as a weapon or as armor against monsters," said Gantz-san. "On the other hand, if you buy a good weapon with that money, you'll be able to protect yourself, and you can also sell it when you need to, you know?"

"What about using money to protect yourself against other humans?" Touya asked.

"It's nothing but bait. Rookies who let on that they have money on them are just asking for trouble."

He snorted again after he'd finished his sentence and then grimaced in frustration. We looked at each other after we'd heard what he'd said. Honestly speaking, we were also uneasy about carrying around a large amount of money. We had just been regular high school students before we'd gotten transported here, so even having just a hundred thousand yen in our purses would make us uneasy about whether we would drop or lose it all somehow. And yet we were carrying around the equivalent of about one hundred times that amount of money, and we were also in a place that was way more dangerous than Japan. There was no way we wouldn't feel uneasy about it, and we would have wanted to place our money in a bank or something if possible. However, there was no such system in this world and no place where an individual could easily deposit money and then withdraw it later. *I wish it were possible to deposit and store money in our guild card, like how it is in a typical light novel story set in a fantasy world like this!*

"I'll be frank: you guys would be easy marks if you were in a different town. You all look like obvious rookies, but rookies with money on them. Be thankful that this town is safer than others."

We were easy marks, apparently. *Should we check our backs to see if there's some kind of sign that indicates we have money up for grabs?*

"What should we do, Haruka?" I whispered.

"Gantz-san does make a good point," Haruka whispered back. "I also feel a bit uneasy about carrying around a lot of money in our purse."

“How about we leave about one hundred thousand Rea on us and spend the rest?” Touya suggested as he joined in our whisper chat.

“Wait, no! We need money to buy some grimoires!” I said.

“Okay then, how about we keep somewhere between two hundred and three hundred thousand Rea on us and spend the rest on weapons and armor?” Haruka asked

That would be enough for a backup fund in case we had to take days off work because one of us got sick or something. Touya and I nodded in agreement with Haruka’s suggestion.

“Are you guys done discussing?” Gantz-san asked.

“Yeah,” Haruka replied. “By the way, Gantz-san, can you tell us what exactly makes us look like easy marks?”

“The three of you look all neat and tidy, but your armor and weapons are cheap except for the one expensive-looking sword... It makes you guys look like the children of some noble family who sneaked off with a sword that belonged to their house, I guess?”

After we heard the things he’d pointed out to us, we looked at each other. *It’s nowhere near the truth, but I guess it’s technically possible that we give that kind of impression?*

“There’s a certain number of stupid people out there who judge others based on just how they look. If you don’t want trouble to come your way, you’ll have to change your whole look.”

“Thank you very much for the advice. Well, would you happen to have any good bows and spears in stock?”

“Sure, no problem. Give me a minute.”

Gantz-san went to the backyard and brought back two bows and two spears. He lined them up on the counter and presented them to us.

“Take a look at this bow first. It was made with wood from a monster called an Elder Treant, and the bowstring was made with silk produced by a monster called a Magi Spider. The string itself was also enhanced through a special

processing method using mithril. The perk of this bow is that it lets its wielder create arrows from their own mana, so you don't have to worry about restocking on arrows!"

Damn, that's amazing! Now this is what I would call a magical weapon! Arrows were consumables that would both cost a lot of money and take up a lot of luggage space, so it would be very convenient if we didn't have to restock them all the time. Perhaps this was a really good weapon.

"Hmm, I see. However, wouldn't it be better to just straight up use magic instead of using mana to create arrows for this bow?" Haruka asked.

Gantz-san thought for a moment and then said, "That might be the case for you, but this bow can even be used by humans who can't use magic, and you can create and release the arrows quite fast."

If it's a matter of speed, my Fire Arrow's basically instant. Wouldn't this bow be slower, since you would have to pull on the bowstring? With that in mind, this is a decent weapon for humans, but it's not that attractive for elves...

"How much does it cost?" Haruka asked.

"It's not that strong a bow, so it's actually fairly cheap. It'll cost seven million eight hundred thousand Rea."

That was way too expensive. We could use magic, so this bow wouldn't be worth it to us, even if the price was one-tenth of what it was now.

"No thanks. Well, it's more like it's not worth anything to us."

"Damn it. I guess that makes sense, since you're an elf. How about this one, then? It was made from a Treant branch. It doesn't have any special effects, but it's a well-made bow."

Gantz-san clicked his tongue in response when Haruka said no to the first bow right away, but he probably hadn't expected it to sell in the first place. He handed over the other bow that he had brought with him, and Haruka picked it up to get a feel for it. She pulled the bowstring a few times to test it out. The bow definitely looked like it was of good quality, but that was just as far as I could tell from looking at it. I had no idea how much it was actually worth.

“How much does this bow cost?”

“It’s just a normal bow, so it’ll be eighty thousand Rea.”

“That’s a huge drop in price compared to the first one.”



“I was just joking about that first bow earlier. I didn’t really think you would buy it.”

“I thought so. Please hold on to this bow for us and show us the spears first.”

“Sure. I recommend this one. The tip was made of yellow iron and the shaft was made from a hardwood tree called ironwood. It’s a bit heavier than your usual spear, but it’s also much sharper and sturdier!”

The ironwood shaft looked like iron at first glance, but it felt like wood to the touch, so it was quite interesting and strange. I held the spear and lightly swung it around to test it out. It did feel a bit heavy, but it wasn’t anything I couldn’t handle.

“Ironwood is a bit different from your usual tree. It’s hard by nature, but there’s a special processing method that can make it even harder than it was in its original state. Ironwood won’t suffer a single scratch even when it’s pitted against real iron, as long as the other weapon isn’t of high quality. At the same time, it’s very flexible, which makes it the ideal kind of wood for the shaft of a spear.”

Damn, it can be better than iron? That’s amazing! There was a material back on Earth that was made by applying a special processing method to cellulose extracted from trees, which would result in a material that was lighter and harder than iron, but it looked nothing like its original wooden form.

“As for the other spear, it’s a bit special compared to the first one. It can serve as a spear, but also as a magic rod. The potency of your magic will slightly increase when you cast spells while wielding this spear. As for the spearhead, it was made by processing the fangs of a serpent monster. It isn’t as hard as yellow iron, but it’s still harder than your average iron. The biggest benefit to this spear is that it won’t rust that easily, even if you don’t take constant care of it.”

I held the spear to compare it with the ironwood one, and it was definitely easier to swing around. He’d said that the head of this spear wasn’t as hard as yellow iron, but this spear would increase the potency of my magic, which was a huge bonus. I looked at the serpent-fang spearhead, and it looked like a well-polished piece of ceramic, completely white and fragile. *Let’s take a closer—*

“Whoa, hold on, don’t carelessly touch the head of this spear. You’ll get poisoned if it pierces your skin.”

“Yikes!” I hastily stopped myself from flicking the tip of the spear and pulled back my finger. “Poison?”

“Yeah, poison applied via a magical processing method. It’s not physically smeared with poison, so you don’t have to worry about it when polishing the spear. The price of the yellow iron spear is fourteen thousand Rea. As for the other one, there aren’t many people who use both a spear and magic, so I’m willing to part with it for about sixteen thousand Rea.”

The tip of the spear would be poisonous even if I didn’t smear poison on it, which was a nice thing to have, but it wasn’t an option for us since we wouldn’t be able to use it for hunting. I wouldn’t be willing to eat poisoned meat, obviously, so that left the yellow iron spear as my only choice.

“By the way, Gantz-san, what exactly are things like blue iron and yellow iron?” I asked. “They’re not normal iron, right?”

The spear I wanted was made of yellow iron, and Touya’s sword happened to be made of blue iron. There were also other weapons displayed in the store that were made of black iron and red iron. The only visible difference was that the colored iron would give off a shine that had a bit of an unusual hue, but it wasn’t like a blinding flash of blue or yellow light.

“What, have you guys never heard of them before? They’re iron mixed with other things to change their nature. Alchemists are the ones that make these kinds of iron, which blacksmiths then purchase to craft things. So, what will it be?”

“I’ll take the yellow iron spear. It would be very inconvenient to poison boars when we’re hunting.”

“Oh come on, really? It’s just a magical poison, so it’s not like actual poison—it’ll go away after a bit, you know?”

“Um, nah, I’ll still go with the yellow iron spear. I prefer how the shaft feels in my hands compared to the other one.”

I’d been a bit tempted when he’d told me that the poison would disappear

over time, but in the end, I decided to go with the spear that felt like it fit better in my hands. The fact that the other spear would increase the potency of my magic would've been great, but oh well.

“Well, that makes sense. You shouldn't use a weapon that doesn't feel right to you. So, are these two weapons all you'll be buying today?”

“Actually, we might as well get a new shield for Touya along with new armor for Nao and myself,” said Haruka. “Would you happen to have anything good in stock?”

“By all means, buy as much as you can! The more you buy, the more I profit!”

He laughed happily when he heard that we would be buying more things today. His words were a bit too frank, but coming from him, they didn't seem rude at all, since they were completely in character. He'd been quite unsociable at first, so maybe he was just slow to make new friends.

Touya discussed things with Gantz-san as he looked at the goods available. He ended up choosing a small shield for himself that was meant to be wielded on the arm. As for armor, we prioritized ease of movement and chose to get chain mail for all of us. Touya also decided to get a metal breastplate that he could wear on top of his mail, along with gauntlets and pieces of armor to protect his joints, while I decided to get some soft leather armor. Our final shopping cart ended up being quite large, so it was only natural that the sum would be quite hefty.

“That'll be a total of five hundred and sixty thousand Rea, but I'll give you a discount and make it five hundred and fifty thousand Rea instead. I'll also throw some aketons in for free.”

“Whew, thanks, Gantz-san! You're quite generous!”

“Please, I'm only giving you guys some freebies since I'm robbing you blind here! Also, how did you guys pile up this much money?! You should have spent it all here before you accumulated so much! Your lives are worth much more than your money!”

Normal clothes in this world were expensive by default, so aketons—sturdy cloth that you could wear under armor—were even more expensive. The fact

that he was providing us such cloth as a freebie meant that he was worried about us despite the uncouth way he phrased his words, so he really was a good person. However, he was definitely right that we should have upgraded our armor long before now. It just hadn't crossed our minds due to how busy we'd been; besides, we'd only really felt like we were in danger during that one battle against a wipe bear. Afterward, we had squeezed as much money as we could out of our savings to buy a new weapon for Touya, so it wasn't like we hadn't been thinking about our equipment at all, but still.

"I'll finish the adjustments to the chain mail by tomorrow morning. Also, one last thing. If you don't want to stand out, then wear something on top of the chain mail. It doesn't matter what you wear. Even the cloaks you guys are wearing right now would do. But otherwise, the chain mail will reflect light and make you stand out a lot."

"Thank you very much for the advice."

"I just don't want good-paying customers to die. After all, it would be a shame to lose a source of profit! All right, if that's all, then leave. I'm going to be busy making adjustments to your armor!"

Gantz-san sent us off with his usual banter, and we left the store. The next place we headed towards was the general goods store, which happened to be at Haruka's request again. The store sold accessories aimed at the average citizen along with all sorts of general goods and necessities. A real independent man would have gone out of his way to buy an accessory as a present for Haruka here, but she was the one who was in control of our wallet. Touya and I would have to burn through the allowances that she gave us if we wanted anything for ourselves, sadly. Well, I hadn't spent any of the allowance she'd given us so far, so I still had about ten thousand Rea left on me for personal spending, which would be enough for an accessory. *Hmm, all right. I've been quite reliant on Haruka so far, so it would be a good idea to give her a present to express my thanks.* I looked at what Haruka was doing, and she was busy looking around at goods by herself. After I noticed that, I stealthily headed towards Touya.

"Hey, Touya, I'm thinking of buying an accessory to give as a present to Haruka," I whispered. "After all, she's helped us out a lot this whole time,

right?”

His eyes went wide in astonishment when he heard what I whispered to him. “Damn, that’s a pretty good idea coming from you,” he whispered back.

“Is it really that surprising?”

“I mean, have you ever given Haruka a present aside from on her birthday?”

“Well, you’re right, but isn’t that normal?”

“Considering how much she’s helped you out, you should probably give her presents from time to time as thanks. Oh well, I’ll help fund this present, but I’ll leave it to you to choose what to get.”

“Huh? You aren’t going to help me out?”

“Nah, you have better taste when it comes to things like this. Good luck!”

Taste in presents is one of the last things you should expect from me, Touya. I have no confidence at all in myself, you know? Despite how I felt about my ability to choose presents, Touya just gave me a thumbs up and swiftly moved somewhere else in the store. Haruka would probably notice if I chased after him now to argue about it, so I sighed to myself and started to look around to see what accessories there were. The accessories in this store were aimed at ordinary citizens, so they were things that one could wear daily and that weren’t very expensive. The cheapest ones were about a few hundred Rea, and even the most expensive ones were only a few thousand Rea. It was perfectly affordable for me with my allowance money.

Now then, what should I get? A ring might be awkward, so that’s a no. What about earrings? Oh, these look good. The pair of earrings I found had what looked like blueish stones, and the shade of blue was similar to the color of Haruka’s eyes in this new world. They were also fairly small, so they probably wouldn’t be a physical burden in any way. *All right, let’s go with this!*

“Hey, what do you think of these earrings, Haruka? I think they would look good on you.”

She looked like her mood had immediately soured when she noticed the earrings I was showing her. *Huh? Did I somehow mess up?*

“Aren’t these piercings? I’ve never had my ears pierced. You know that, right, Nao?” Her look implied that there was no way I shouldn’t know this.

I paused in thought for a moment, but the only word I could come up with was “Yeah.” *I completely forgot!*

After that realization, I noticed that Touya was standing behind her, and he was facepalming at my mistake. *You should’ve told me beforehand if you noticed, Touya! I mean, I’m at fault for not discussing things with you after I chose these earrings, but still!*

“Well, in any case, we’re in different bodies now, so it’s not relevant. What, are you going to buy this as a present for me?” She sighed to herself at first, but then she looked at me with a teasing expression.

“I mean, well, it’s my way of saying thanks for all the help, so yeah.”

Ugh, I shouldn’t have forced myself to do something I’m not used to! This feels a bit embarrassing for some reason!

“Besides, To—”

I was about to mention that Touya had been in on this plan as well, but I noticed Touya was telling me to shut up with his eyes, so I stopped myself midsentence.

“To?”

“Today is the last day we’ll be in a town for a while, so I thought it would be fine to spend some money and buy you an accessory before we leave, you know?”

After I rephrased what I was about to say, Touya gave me a look that seemed to indicate that I’d done a good job. *Bro, I’m the one who messed up the choice of present, but you also agreed to this idea, so what gives?*

“Is that so? I guess I’ll leave it to you to choose something for me, then. I’d prefer something I could wear on a daily basis, such as a necklace.”

“What about something like a hair clip?”

Haruka’s hair had turned into a beautiful blonde color after she’d become an elf, but she would usually tie her hair up in a braid with a leather strap, since

otherwise it would get in the way during combat. I brought up the idea of a hair clip because I was thinking about a more fashionable alternative.

“Hmm, it’ll probably get in the way during adventurer work, I think. I wouldn’t want a rare present from you to get damaged during combat, so I’m not too sure. Would you be willing to buy one for me once our lives are stable enough that we can consistently take days off work?”

“Yeah, sure, if we ever get the chance.”

My response was a bit ambiguous, but she still sounded happy to hear it.

“Well, I’m looking forward to it then. How about this time we go with something that won’t get in the way of combat? Can I choose what to get myself?”

“Sure, go ahead. I’m counting on your keen eye for things like this.”

If it wasn’t possible to smoothly hand over a present as a surprise, then the next best option was to just buy something that Haruka chose. I couldn’t possibly mess up that way. I listened to Haruka’s opinion and ended up buying a pendant that had the same type of stone attached to it as the earrings that I’d found earlier. As for Touya, he discreetly handed me half of what the pendant cost after I’d paid for it. I asked him if I really didn’t need to mention that the present was technically from both of us, but he told me not to say any more than I had to, so I didn’t tell Haruka about it.

The last place we decided to visit was a café. That was my request—or rather, we all wanted to visit this café. Diola-san had told us about it when we’d asked her if she knew any good places to eat and drink. She’d told us that the prices were a bit more expensive than at other places nearby, but this café had sweets on its menu, which was quite rare in this town, so we had wanted to visit as soon as we got the chance. As for how the café looked, it was pretty stylish all around, and there were tables available both inside the café and outside in a garden area. It wasn’t a fancy garden by any means, but it would definitely be a different experience to dine here. However, that also meant the prices were higher, matching the atmosphere of the place, and that included both the sweets and regular dishes. It was way more expensive than the meals that we usually had back at The Slumbering Bear. *Well, this place has a different*

customer base, so there's no real point in comparing them, yeah.

"The things here taste better than I expected," said Haruka.

"Yeah, but it's a bit expensive," said Touya.

"Nah, the prices are right if we include a premium for the location and the fancy decor," I said. "I wouldn't want to come here every day, though."

The taste of the food provided here matched the higher price, so this place was more like a restaurant that you would only visit from time to time, while The Slumbering Bear was like a diner that you would visit for meals every day. However, we were still going to enjoy our time here to the fullest extent since we'd paid for it, so we relaxed and took our time as we ordered some extra sweets to eat. Sweets like these would be dirt cheap back on Earth, but they were a rare delicacy here in this world. We took our time and slowly chewed on the sweets as we drank some tea to go along with them. The fact that we could take our time like this without being chased out was probably included in the price as well. This was the first time in a long while that we'd been able to relax without being worried about anything. However, all good things had to come to an end, and we were interrupted by someone yelling at us.

"Hey, you're Nagai, right?! Does that mean the elves beside you are Kamiya and Azuma?!"

Hints of trouble had found us. When I looked in the direction of the voice, I saw a human girl. Based on the fact that she was cleaning up dishes, she must have been a waitress here. She was quite pretty and her face looked rather familiar, but there were visible traces of fatigue all over it.

"Uhm, would you happen to be Umezono-san...?" I asked.

"Yeah."

Oh right, there was someone by that name in my class. I barely interacted with her at all, so I only faintly remember how she looked, but I think she was a bit different...

I turned around in my seat. "Hello. It's been a while, Umezono-san. Are you working here?"

“Y-Yeah, although I’m just a part-time day laborer...”

When I asked her how she was doing, she stared at me, but then she replied to me without meeting my eyes. I took a glance over my shoulder and noticed that Touya and Haruka were holding a whispered conversation. They nodded at each other for some reason.

“Does that mean you’re managing to get by in this world?”

“Barely! This world is messed up! Aren’t wages in this world way too low?!”

“I mean, jobs without any risk don’t pay much, so yeah.”

“Right?! I can’t believe things are like this! Just what is the government doing?!”

Well, a government that isn’t a democracy probably doesn’t care about the average citizen, so yeah. If international affairs were peaceful and the ruler of this country was actually good at their job, then that might be different, but I had no idea what things were like for this country. In this world, there wasn’t anything like the internet that we could conveniently use to look things up, so all we could do was ask questions of people we knew. We had no idea about the specifics of what was happening out there in this world.

“M-More importantly, what skills did you guys decide to get? Tell me.”

“Our skills...?”

Among the skills that the god had made available to our class, there were a lot of gimmicky skills that were basically land mines, so I understood why she was asking me. *However, would you normally just go up to someone and ask them directly about it? I guess she’s a bit bold, or rather...*

“C-Come on, you can tell me! We’re classmates! We might be able to help each other out in some way!”

I had no idea what to say. There was no sense of composure in her words, and the same went for the expression on her face. Everything about her screamed that she was suspicious.

“Well, we don’t mind telling you about our skills, but what are your skills, Umezono-san?” asked Haruka.

Huh? We're actually going to tell her? I looked at Haruka because I was surprised by what I heard, but she gave me a look that told me to shut up and play along with it.

"I took skills like Blacksmithing and Appraisal because I planned on crafting things to sell for a living, but I couldn't even get a place to start crafting things..."

She sighed as she said that and shrugged her shoulders in an exaggerated manner. It resembled the gestures you would see from the kind of foreigners who would overreact to everything. *I never knew her that well before, but was she always this type of person?*

"I see. My skills are—"

Haruka told Umezono-san what her skills were, and once she was done, she told Touya and me to list our skills as well. *Well, Haruka probably has some sort of plan in mind, so I'll go along with it.* I listed my skills, and then Touya listed his.

As soon as we were done, Umezono-san smirked at us. "Aha ha ha! I can't believe you guys were so stupid and careless!" She threw the tray in her hands at a nearby table as she cackled at us. "What kind of idiot would teach other people their skills that easily in this world? Well, thanks to your stupidity, I won't have to force myself to do work like this, so I appreciate it, you fools!"

As soon as she finished speaking, she dashed out of the café. I was completely taken aback by that sudden change in her personality, and Haruka sighed as if she was speechless.

"What the hell was that?" I asked.

"In a way, she acted about how I expected her to, but it's like, at least finish your shift before disappearing," said Haruka.

"Uh, I don't really know Umezono that well, but was she always that type of person?" Touya asked.

"Well, she always had a selfish side to her, but..."

Haruka didn't spell it out, but the way she cut off her words indicated that she

hadn't thought Umezono's selfishness was as extreme as what we had just experienced. That made sense, since that kind of attitude would make you a social misfit back in Japan.

"Wait, she ran away from us as soon she was done hearing about our skills, so does that mean...?"

"Yeah, she had the Copy skill."

"Actually, the Copy skill was the only skill she had," said Touya. "Or that was the only skill Haruka could see, anyway."

"Oh, I get it now."

Basically, what it meant was that she had no more business with us once she was done copying our skills. *Did she really have to gloat about it before running away, though? I wonder if she got deceived by someone...*

"Why the Copy skill, though? Plunder would suit that personality better, wouldn't it...?"

I had no idea how knowledgeable she was about games, but based on the initial description text alone, Plunder looked like it was much better than Copy. After all, you wouldn't be able to use the Copy skill if you didn't know what your target's skills were, but Plunder had no such restrictions.

"This is just a guess, but she probably thought that Plunder had a catch to it after she compared the number of points required for Copy versus Plunder, along with the fact that Plunder has no restrictions. After all, Plunder looks way too overpowered at first glance."

"I guess that's a very real possibility," I said. "The only people who would choose the Copy skill over Plunder are people who would feel guilty about stealing from other people."

"I dunno if that's what Umezono thought, but I highly doubt it based on the way she acted," said Touya.

"Well, maybe she had other skills that I couldn't see."

"Yeah, there are still a lot of things we don't know about skills, including the Third Eye skill."

I would've loved to have gotten my hands on something like a game manual that would explain everything about skills, but such a thing did not exist in reality, sadly.

"Wait, if you don't learn how to use the skills from the person you copied them from, then the skills will be sealed, right, Haruka?"

"Yeah."

"So that means she won't be able to learn any of the skills that we have," I said.

"Damn, you're really cruel, Haruka..."

"Oh, please! She was the one who asked us to tell her about our skills. I was just being kind by obliging her request. What happens to her afterwards is none of my business, however."

Haruka had a very "charming" smile on her face as she said that. Well, Umezono was probably going to have a very hard time from now on, since she wouldn't be able to learn any of the skills we had. The magic skills weren't relevant to her, since her race was human, but she wouldn't be able to learn skills related to the most commonly used weapons in this world. She had found out about our skills in exchange, but I guess it wasn't really a problem. In most games, you would be able to strategize around the meta game and counter other players' skill builds with specific gear or other skill builds, but there was no way she could do that here in this world. There was no point in worrying about it.

"Well, she can still get by somehow if she commits to doing some honest work," said Haruka. "I'm not too sure if she has that kind of mentality, though, given that she abandoned her job here in the middle of the work day."

"Yeah, she's probably going to get a penalty, since it's most likely the guild that referred her to this job."

Trust was a cornerstone of business for the Adventurers' Guild, so the guild probably wouldn't provide referrals to people who didn't take work seriously.

"Still, what was with that attitude?" I asked. "She could've just discussed things and asked us for help normally, right?"

“Yeah, I don’t get what she was thinking, being so aggressive for no reason,” said Touya. “Did she get a weird confidence boost after getting transported to this world?”

Touya and I looked at each other as we both pondered how strange Umezono’s actions were. A while after we started speculating, Haruka tilted her head in thought and hesitantly jumped into the discussion. “It might actually be my fault. There was a time back in Japan when she made some sarcastic comments to me...”

She didn’t go into detail about what exactly Umezono’s words had been, but there was a high chance that they had just been the result of jealousy. Haruka had the reputation of being someone who was cute, smart, and had a good personality—on top of being popular. I couldn’t really comment on that reputation, but there were definitely grounds for jealousy to build.

“So was that attitude the result of the idea that in this different world, she would be able to ‘one-up’ Haruka or something like that?” I asked.

“Her face has become much prettier than before, so maybe...”

“Wait, did the other girls actually secretly hate you, Haruka?” Touya asked. “I thought you got along with everyone just fine.”

“Uh, she was the only one who would make sarcastic comments about me, so I want to say that there wasn’t anyone else like that, but I have no idea if the other girls truly considered me a friend.”

After those initial words, she added that she was “only interested in helping out Yuki and Natsuki” to indicate they were the only ones she truly considered her friends among the other girls in our class.

“I mean, I feel the same way as you, since I can’t imagine life going well if we teamed up with our other classmates,” I said.

It would have been difficult to live together with our other classmates even back in Japan, and it was even harder here given the circumstances we were in. We didn’t exactly have that much of a buffer in terms of the stability of our lives, so we would have to put ourselves at risk if we wanted to help others out.

“I’m willing to help you two out without weighing the pros and cons, but I

can't say the same for our other classmates," said Haruka. "For example, there's no way they would trust me with their money, right?"

"Yeah, that makes sense," said Touya. "I wouldn't trust my money with anyone but you either, Haruka."

We had spent most of the money we had earned up till now on improving Touya's gear. It was the best choice for us as a group and had helped us protect ourselves to this day. However, we probably wouldn't have been able to do that if we had been in a group with our other classmates. We felt the same way our other classmates probably would: neither Touya nor I would agree to let one of them manage all of our money, and we would never agree to pool our money towards improving a single classmate's gear either. We didn't know our classmates well enough to put our full trust in them given the circumstances we were in.

"What if Umezono bears a grudge against you for this, Haruka?" I asked. "Wouldn't that be a bit troublesome?"

"Do you really think she would be able to gather the information she'd need to act on a grudge? You know, she would have to come to us and ask something like 'I can't use the skills that I copied from you guys—why is that?'"

"I definitely wouldn't be able to do something like that if I was her!" Touya said. "That would be so shameless!"

"Right? It might be a different story if there was someone else who was able and willing to teach her about the existence of gimmicky skills, but do you think there's anyone like that in this town aside from us?"

"It would have to be someone with the Help Guide skill, someone who had the spare time and money to help others out, and someone who Umezono could talk to with a normal attitude," I said. "Hmm..."

So far, based on our own research, we had managed to find traces of information about what seemed to be some of our other classmates, but there was no guarantee that they would remain in this town forever. We'd also found traces of some troublemakers among them. The chance of bumping into another classmate was low in the first place, so it would be even more improbable for Umezono to get lucky and bump into someone who fit those

three criteria I'd just brought up.

"She's doomed. How pitiful..." I placed my hands together to pray for her safety on the road ahead of her. *I hope from the bottom of my heart that you will manage to find success in the future.*

"Do you really think that?" Haruka asked.

"Nah, not really. Her attitude earlier pissed me off a bit, honestly. Oh yeah, you didn't mention the Help Guide earlier, right, Haruka?"

I'd noticed that she hadn't mentioned it, so I'd kept quiet about it as well.

"Yeah. There was no point in giving her unnecessary information, right? Besides, it's not like she can copy skills that don't have a level."

Cunning as always, Haruka.

"Well, the main reason why I agreed to tell her about most of our skills was because it was a chance to weaken someone who could become our enemy."

"Huh?"

"I mean, she planned on deceiving us from the very beginning, right? That being the case, she's definitely our enemy. She has a lot of skills that are sealed now, so now she won't be a threat to us unless she works really hard for it, right?"

Yep, that was truly the merciless and masterfully cunning Haruka I knew. She didn't hold back at all. Umezono had strong feelings of jealousy towards Haruka, so with that in mind, it was better to be safe than sorry. Even if Umezono didn't become our enemy, it would still be annoying to be pestered by her in some way or another.

"Let's return to the inn as soon as possible," said Haruka.

"Agreed." Touya and I both expressed that we were down with that idea.

We finished the remainder of our tea and left the café as soon as possible in case Umezono actually returned.



The next day, we told the inn owner that we would be leaving before we

headed to pick up our armor from Gantz-san's shop, and then we left town right afterwards. It was warm inside the armor due to how thick it was, but it was much better ventilated than our thick leather clothes, so Haruka looked like she was bouncing for joy at this improvement. *Looks like Gantz-san did a good job, since the price for this was equivalent to the price of a brand-new car.*

"So, Haruka, will we reach Sarstedt if we keep walking along the highway?" I asked.

"Yeah. If we walk straight down this road, then we'll probably arrive around noon, I think?"

The average person would take about an entire day to walk that distance, while it would take half a day for adventurers who had much more stamina and were more fit. We wouldn't encounter any dangers if we just stuck to the road, so it was technically quite a relaxing journey.

"Oh, are we not going to test out the new weapons that the two of you bought?" Touya asked.

"Well, this already feels much better and easier to use compared to my last spear, so I'm not sure if that's needed," I replied.

I hadn't actually practiced with my new spear yet, but I had swung it around during self-training, and the flexibility and hardness of the ironwood shaft were great; they made it quite easy to use. I felt like I could trust my life with this spear way more than I had with the one I'd been using before. Gantz-san had definitely been right to call this the ideal wood for a spear.

"I feel the same way about my weapon. Is there a reason you brought up the subject, Touya?"

Haruka and I had shaken our heads to indicate we were fine with our weapons, but Touya didn't seem like he was satisfied with our answers, so Haruka asked him to explain his reasoning.

"Well, how does this sound—should we gather some dindels while you two get used to your new weapons? We don't know what kind of situation Yuki and Natsuki are in, but there's a high chance that they haven't been able to eat anything delicious, right?"

“That’s a good point. Dried dindels are delicious, but it’s not like they have to be dried to taste good. You okay with this idea as well, Nao?”

“Yeah, sounds good. We can also hunt for some meat while we’re at it.”

We didn’t have a reason to reject Touya’s idea—he was coming from the right place—so we strayed a bit off the road and headed towards where the dindel trees were located. We wasted no time hunting boars and harvesting dindels, which we hadn’t done in quite a while now. Once we were done, we started to head back to the highway via a game trail, but our trip back went quite differently this time.

“Hm? What’s this?”

We were about to exit the forest when Touya suddenly stopped in his tracks and tilted his head. He was in the front, so he would be the first one among us to see things in our path.

“Huh—kyaa!”

When Haruka saw what Touya was looking at, she let out a scream in a strangely cute voice. *So she does have a typical girly side after all—wait, no, that’s not important right now.* Touya was looking at a person collapsed on the ground, a person wearing cheap clothes.

“Is this a dead body? Given the small stature, is it a kid?” I asked.

“No, it’s probably a dwarf,” Haruka replied after an initial pause. “If you take a closer look, you’ll notice that the body is quite sturdy for someone so small.”

While Haruka pointed out what she’d noticed, she was hiding behind me and hesitantly peeking out at the body. *So this is a dwarf? It’s my first time seeing one in this world.*

“Uh, what are we supposed to do in cases like this? Are we supposed to leave the body alone, or are we supposed to bury it?”

“If the body has an identification card on it, it’s recommended to take that card to the Adventurers’ Guild or someplace like that. There aren’t any rewards for doing that—it’s just proper manners. Also, the person who discovered the dead body should help bury it if they can.”

“I see...”

This was actually the first time that I had encountered a dead body in this world. Death was a closer neighbor in this world than it was back on Earth, but I was still reluctant to touch the dead body of someone I didn't know. I decided to check the condition of the body first, so I flipped the legs over before moving to check the other parts. After all, I would have to mentally prepare myself in many ways if the body was already rotting.

“Ugh...”

“Did you say something, Nao?” Haruka asked.

“No, nothing.”

“It wasn't me either, Haruka. Hold on, is this actually a dead body? I can't really tell how the face looks due to how thick the beard is.”

I took another look at the “dead” body after I heard what Touya said. It looked like a typical dwarf with a thick beard. The body didn't look like it had decomposed yet, and as for the face, I couldn't really tell if it was the face of a dead person or not. I didn't really want to do it, but I had no choice, so I extended my hands and placed them on the neck to check the pulse.

“Hmm, I do feel something that seems like a weak pulse. I'm not too sure, though.”

“So is this person actually alive?” Haruka asked. “We should technically save them, then.”

As she checked the body for any external injuries, she added that as a general rule, this was only necessary if we had the luxury of doing so. There didn't seem to be any injuries at all.

“Hmm, this dwarf's gotten quite dirty. I'll cast Purification and Light Cure to see what happens.”

The dwarf became a bit cleaner thanks to Haruka's magic, but he still didn't react in any visible way. It would be a problem if the dwarf couldn't move. *Hold on, this dwarf's mouth looks rather dry.* I poured a small amount of water into the dwarf's open mouth, and his throat made a sound as he swallowed.

Suddenly, he opened his eyes.

“I-I’m hungry...”



“Thank you very much for the help. I haven’t had any proper food to eat for the past few days...”

“D-Don’t worry about it. It’s only natural to help others out,” I said.

The dwarf had devoured three of the high-quality dindel fruits that we’d harvested before he finally calmed down, and he politely bowed to us as he expressed his gratitude. I kind of wished that he hadn’t eaten a whopping three dindels, but it wasn’t really like I could tell him to pay up, since he had at least thanked us for them. Those three dindels would fetch quite a sum on the market, but it wouldn’t be that much trouble for us to go harvest three more dindels to make up for them.

“So, what happened to you? What are you doing here in those kinds of clothes?” I asked him about his clothes because he was way too lightly equipped to enter the forest, but he didn’t answer my question. Instead, he stared at our faces one after another and then hesitantly opened his mouth to ask us a question.

“Uhm, would you happen to be Kamiya-kun? And would you two happen to be Azuma-san and Nagai-kun?”

“Hm? Wait, if you’re asking us that, does that mean you’re one of our classmates?!”

“Yeah, I am! I’m Wakabayashi! Yutaka Wakabayashi! Do you guys not recognize me?!”

“Huh?! Wakabayashi?! *That* Wakabayashi?!”

There was definitely someone in my class with that surname. However, the Wakabayashi I knew was someone of small stature who looked feeble and gave off a timid aura. He was a reserved type of person who didn’t stand out at all, but some girls in our class were quite fond of him. However, he didn’t resemble the dwarf in front of us at all. The small part hadn’t changed, but this dwarf was

sturdy and muscular, and his voice was much deeper than it had been before.

“There’s no way we could have recognized you!” Touya exclaimed. “What happened to you?! Why do you look like that?!”

I strongly agreed with the words Touya shouted. The way Wakabayashi talked was the same as I remembered, but the huge difference in his appearance and the pitch of his voice made things feel really weird.

“Why did you choose this kind of appearance...?” I asked.

“Well, we were going to be transported to this different world, so I figured I would go for a change. I mean, it’s basically a fresh start, right? It’s not like I had any complaints about my previous body, but there was a part of me that always looked up to this type of cool, manly adult.”

“Huh, I see. Cool, you say...?”

I wouldn’t use the word cool to describe a dwarf. The excessive beard is manly in a way, yes, but cool doesn’t fit. I mean, if you’re happy about it, then I’m not going to say anything, but yeah.

“You guys look quite different as well, Kamiya-kun. Nagai-kun looks more or less the same as before aside from being a beastman now, and Azuma-san is an elf now, just like you. Well, Azuma-san already looked pretty before becoming an elf, so I guess she doesn’t look that much different from before either.”

Hold on, are you implying something about my previous face? It’d annoy me if you said yes, so I won’t ask the question, but dude!

“So yeah, what are you doing here of all places, Wakabayashi?”

“Well, I was suddenly transported to the middle of this forest, and I wandered around for a few days before I collapsed. Like, was something like a hard mode option toggled on for us? I can’t believe we were thrown out into this world with nothing but clothes!”

Wakabayashi spread his arms for emphasis as he complained about our circumstances with a strong, condemning tone. We all agreed completely with what he had said. It was better than being thrown into this world completely naked, but it was definitely not an easy start.

“Yeah, I feel exactly the same way,” I said. “We ourselves might’ve been screwed if Haruka hadn’t been with us.”

“Yep, Haruka absolutely saved us,” said Touya.

“Right, Azuma-san’s that kind of person—responsible and reliable. Based on the way you look, are you all adventurers?”

“We all registered at the Adventurers’ Guild, so I guess we technically are,” I said.

We had barely looked like typical adventurers until a few days ago, but the new equipment and armor that we had just bought earlier today would make us look like proper adventurers in the eyes of most people now. Well, we’d had weapons on us from the very beginning, but common sense in this world dictated that people like that might be ordinary citizens who went to the guild to take on work such as gathering firewood.

“I can’t really say the work we’ve been doing is what you would expect an adventurer to do, but we’ve somehow been able to sustain a livelihood,” said Haruka.

“I see. On the other hand, I haven’t even been able to reach a town. I have some money in my pockets, but I don’t even know how much it’s worth...”

He sighed as he took some coins out of his pockets and showed them to us. They looked exactly the same as the large silver coins we’d had in the beginning.

“Oh, that’s ten large silver coins. They’ll be enough to pay for the entry toll to a town, the registration fee at the Adventurers’ Guild, one night at an inn, and for a few general goods,” said Touya. “That’s it, though.”

“Really?! That’s all?! So I was right about our start in this world being difficult!”

Wakabayashi roared in frustration again after he heard Touya’s explanation. *Yeah, it would be extremely difficult to make it on your own in this world if you didn’t know how to get things done.*

I understood the emotions behind his yelling, but Haruka grimaced at the loud

volume of his voice. “Wakabayashi-kun, can you tone down your voice? This place isn’t exactly safe.”

“O-Oh, yes, I’m sorry.”

He sounded a bit dejected as he lowered his head in apology. Haruka waved her hands lightly to indicate that she accepted his apology before she continued. “Well, you should be fine now, since you’ve made it all the way here. Were you thrown out here by yourself, Wakabayashi-kun? The three of us managed to get transported close together, luckily.”

“Whoa, I’m amazed that you guys were able to find each other in that situation we were in initially. I couldn’t tell anyone apart, so I just clung to the souls that were nearest to me.”

Oh, that was exactly the same thing I did. I hadn’t had to look around or move at all, since Haruka and Touya had found me first, which had been a big relief. *What separates the people who could and couldn’t tell each other apart as souls? I’d be very depressed if the difference was how close people felt to each other deep down in their hearts...*

“Didn’t you get transported together with those people?” I asked.

“No, we did manage to get transported together. I got transported together with Tanaka-kun and Takahashi-kun, but they weren’t people I knew very well, so...”

“So you guys split up?”

“I’m not sure if split up would be the right phrase for it...”

He looked down and fell silent for a few moments before he hesitantly resumed telling us what had happened to him. “Uhm, this might sound like an excuse, but I couldn’t really do anything, since I don’t have any combat-related skills, so—well, no, you see...” He once again stopped midsentence for a few moments to gather his thoughts before he continued. “The three of us did group up in the beginning while we explored this forest and camped out. We were lucky in that we didn’t get attacked by anything, and my Appraisal skill let me know what food was edible, so we were able to survive without starving—barely.”

Oh, so that's how he managed to survive. It had been about half a month since we had gotten transported to this world, so I'd been wondering how he'd managed to survive up until now.

"We managed to reach the highway by our fourth day here. When we got there, we saw a horse-drawn carriage that was being attacked. As soon as we saw it, Tanaka-kun went, 'Hell yeah, a typical fantasy trope!' and dashed ahead, and then Takahashi-kun went, 'Hmm, this'll do just fine to test my magic on,' and joined him. Like I said earlier, I didn't get any combat-related skills, and I didn't have a weapon on me either, so I hid in the forest and watched them, and..."

Yikes. I don't really want to borrow Tanaka's words, but that was definitely all too typical in a way.

"Uh, did Tanaka-kun have a weapon on him?" Haruka asked.

"Well, he had a wooden branch that he'd picked up in the forest."

"It sounds like he was way stupider than I could have ever imagined..." After saying that, Haruka shrugged her shoulders to sarcastically indicate amazement. Her words were quite blunt, but I completely agreed with how she felt.

"So, how did things turn out?"

"Tanaka-kun managed to smack someone who looked like a bandit from the back when he jumped into the fray. However, he immediately got surrounded by three other bandits, and then all of them stabbed him. Takahashi-kun seemed to panic at the sight of that, since the spell he was about to cast suddenly exploded on everyone around him. When I saw that, I panicked too and ran for my life, so I don't know what happened afterwards..."

"Okay, yeah, I have no other words to say except stupid."

"I-I'm very sorry!"

Wakabayashi apologized reflexively when he heard what Haruka declared.

"Oh no, I'm not talking about you, Wakabayashi-kun. I'm talking about Takahashi-kun and Tanaka-kun. Nao, Touya, what do you two think about this?"

"It was a typical fantasy trope situation, but the result was pretty realistic!"

said Touya.

“No, not the situation itself. I’m talking about our classmates,” said Haruka.

“Well, I think Tanaka probably had the Heroic Aptitude skill, right? I don’t think you would normally encounter a typical fantasy trope situation like that so easily,” I said. “As for Takahashi, he probably lost control of his spell because of the Mana Capacity: Ultimate skill, I guess?”

The highway we were near was relatively safe, and the chances of being attacked by bandits or monsters here was quite low. Despite that, Tanaka and the other two had just so happened to encounter a carriage that was being attacked. *Like, what are the chances of that happening normally?*

“Yeah, that’s probably it. Also, they were foolish to attempt combat right away in the first place.”

Yep. There’s no way you could handle combat smoothly right away, even if you had skills. I wasn’t sure if they had actually been lucky or not, given that they hadn’t gotten attacked by any goblins or animals up until that point. Tanaka’s reckless action—jumping into combat against multiple enemies—was unrelated to luck, but perhaps he’d thought that he was the hero of a story or something. *Maybe he actually thought that things would go as they typically would in a fantasy scenario. Did he really think he would somehow manage to defeat the bandits and get thanked by the merchants in the carriage?*

“Uhm, what are you guys talking about?”

Touya and I saw what Haruka was getting at—we all knew the catch behind the gimmicky skills that the god had offered us—but Wakabayashi seemed to be confused, since he had no idea about that. *Yeah, if you don’t have the Help Guide, then there’s no way you would know that skills which were supposed to be an advantage could actually be the opposite and put you in a bad situation.*

“Oh, well—”

“Hold on.”

Haruka cut me off as I was about to explain things to Wakabayashi. She looked at him and asked him to confirm some details about himself first. “Before we explain, can you tell us what your skill build is, Wakabayashi-kun?”

You don't have to tell us if you don't want to, however."

"Uh, sure, I don't mind. It's not really something worth hiding from the three of you, Azuma-san."



Craft Aptitude: Blacksmithing, Level 3 Blacksmithing,
Level 3 Robust, Level 2 Enhanced Muscles

Level 2 Indomitable, Level 2 Appraisal, Drunkard

Wakabayashi seemed a bit confused at first, but when he saw that Haruka was serious, he told us his skills without hesitation. His skill build looked like a standard one for someone in a crafting profession. This wasn't actually a game, however, so it was kind of bad that he didn't have any skills he could use in combat to actively deal damage. The level of his Blacksmithing skill was quite high, but he wouldn't be able to put it to use without a workshop, so there was a high chance it would become a dead and useless skill, just like Touya's Blacksmithing skill.

"Okay, your skills sound typical for a dwarf blacksmith," said Haruka. "There are no land mines among your skills, so you're all good. Wait—actually, doesn't the Drunkard skill have a hidden downside?"

"Oh yeah, it does," I replied.

Drunkard was one of the additional skills, after all. The gimmick wasn't that bad of a demerit, however, so things could have been worse for him.

"Huh? What do you mean by a downside? Also, what do you mean by land mines...?"

"Umm, if I recall correctly, you won't get drunk even if you drink a lot of alcohol, but it doesn't make your body resistant to the effects of alcohol or anything. You'll still suffer from alcohol poisoning if you drink too much."

"Wait, what?! That's completely different from what I had in mind for a dwarf character! It didn't say anything about that in the skill description!"

Wakabayashi had sounded very uneasy when he'd asked for an explanation, and when he heard the details from Haruka, his eyes went wide in shock. He placed his head in his hands; he seemed very frustrated. *Based on how he reacted just now, was that skill his request?*

“Yeah, it’s a land mine skill with a gimmick behind it. There was a skill called the Help Guide, right? If you decided to get that skill, then it would insert additional information about every skill. It explained the gimmick in that section.”

“Ugh, so that guy *was* an evil god! We got absolutely scammed!”

“Yeah, I know exactly how you feel,” I said. “Well, the skills that were available from the beginning don’t have any gimmicks to them. That does mean that the skills which got added later and seemed like overpowered cheats were all land mines with some sort of negative gimmick to them, however. Drunkard’s actually not that bad compared to the other choices that were out there.”

“Besides, the ale in this world doesn’t taste very good—in fact, it tastes disgusting,” said Touya. “I wouldn’t want to drink ale even if I was offered some for free.”

Haruka and I nodded in agreement. That ale had been absolutely horrible. Wakabayashi sighed when he saw that we were nodding along with what Touya had said. His head and shoulders drooped in disappointment.

“Oh, I decided to get the Drunkard skill since it fit my image of what a dwarf should be, but I guess I didn’t take into account the possibility that there weren’t any drinks that tasted good in this world...”

We were minors, so it wasn’t like we knew what a good alcoholic beverage actually tasted like, but we definitely knew that the ale we’d tasted was disgusting.

“So, did Tanaka-kun and Takahashi-kun have land mine skills as well?”

“Yeah, most likely. Based on what you told us, Tanaka-kun probably had the Heroic Aptitude skill, which attracts trouble for its owner,” said Haruka. “As for Takahashi-kun, he probably had the Mana Capacity: Ultimate skill, which grants you a lot of mana but also makes it hard for you to control magic.”

Those two skills sounded like they could actually be useful if you somehow managed to master them, but that would probably require someone to be even more careful than Haruka was. Careful was probably not the word to describe

the kind of people who would snatch those kinds of skills, however. *I can't imagine someone with a careful mentality being willing to take on those skills.*

“Umm, is that also why you asked me about my skills?”

“Yeah. We would have to rethink our future interactions if you had some really dangerous land mine skills.”

“Can you tell me exactly what counts as dangerous...?”

Haruka had nonchalantly implied that she would have ditched Wakabayashi, and he seemed to squirm a bit at the thought.

“The first one that comes to mind is the Plunder skill. People with that skill might die the moment they use it, so it's best not to associate with such people.”

“Die?!”

“Yeah, since you have to spend your own life span to use the Plunder skill,” I said. “If someone used it on us, they would probably die right on the spot. There have already been some incidents in this town that seemed to be the result of people using Plunder.”

We had no way to confirm, but that was most likely the cause of the deaths that had happened around the time we first arrived in this world.

“There's also the Charm skill,” said Haruka. “I don't know if it'll work on us, but it's bound to attract unwanted attention and trouble, so it would also be best to stay away from people with that skill. The same reasoning applies to staying away from people with the Heroic or Heroine Aptitude skills.”

Once he'd heard our explanation, Wakabayashi nodded emphatically to indicate that he understood. “I see. That makes sense. I definitely wouldn't want to get near those kinds of people considering the threat they pose to my personal safety. I would probably have died if I'd tagged along with Tanaka-kun and Takahashi-kun back then. What about the other skills, though? Weren't there a lot of other skills that seemed like overpowered cheats, like Copy and 2x EXP?”

“Oh, those kinds of skills just apply a huge restriction to your personal growth,

but there's no harm to them aside from that," I said. "I wouldn't want to team up with people who had skills like that, though."

"Mm, yeah. I'd be willing to interact with people that have such skills as long as they didn't take any hostile actions towards us," said Haruka.

"Really? Skills like the 2x EXP one sound like they'd boost the speed of your personal growth, don't they?"

"That's what you'd normally think, yeah. A lot of people probably decided to get the 2x EXP skill because of that, but in exchange for your experience gain being doubled, it actually increases the amount of experience points you need to level up by ten times the base amount."

"Huh?"

When he heard what Haruka said, Wakabayashi slightly tilted his head and looked at us open-mouthed. It seemed like he couldn't believe what he had just heard. *That kind of expression did fit you quite well back on Earth, but it definitely doesn't fit you at all now with your beardy face, Wakabayashi. I hope you can somehow fix this as soon as possible.*

"Basically, what it means is that if you decided to get the 2x EXP skill, your rate of personal growth will be reduced to the equivalent of one fifth of what it would have been otherwise."

"That's horrible..."

"As for the Copy skill, it depends on how you use it. The skills you copy will become Level 1, and you won't be able to use those skills unless you learn how to use them directly from the person that you copied them from. Copy can be a useful skill if the person you copied from is willing to help and teach you, but it's possible that you'll end up being unable to learn a lot of skills if you randomly copy from strangers."

"Uh, what's the difference between learning skills normally and learning them that way?"

"It's much easier to learn skills via the Copy skill, I guess? I'm not sure if it's worth the 100-Point cost, though. The evil god did tell us that there weren't any cheat skills available among the ones offered, after all."

Wakabayashi sighed deeply once he had heard everything that Haruka had to say about the different kinds of gimmicky land mine skills. “Ugh, it’s like that tale about the sparrow with the slit tongue. By that, I mean for the people who ignored the warnings of a god.”

“Yeah, in that you’ll suffer a terrible fate if you choose the larger basket. Well, even if you had no points at all, you’d still have your own body and the ability to communicate, so it balances out even if you have some gimmicky skills as long as they aren’t too bad. Besides, just the fact that we’re alive again is a big bonus, right?”

Haruka was definitely right in that regard; we’d basically lucked out in that we had been brought back to life after dying. On top of that, while there were some extremely bad land mine skills like Plunder scattered throughout the list of skills that the evil god had offered us, there were also skills like Copy, which could be useful depending on how you used it. *Hmm, with that in mind, I guess our fates so far haven’t been that terrible. All of us did receive a concrete benefit from that evil god.*

“Now then, are you able to walk, Wakabayashi-kun? I did heal you with my magic earlier, but I want to make sure.”

“Yeah, somehow. Thank you very much.”

“All right, let’s get going, then. The highway’s just over there.”

The way he stood up and walked wasn’t exactly energetic or steady, but we were basically right next to the outskirts of the forest, so we arrived at the highway after just a few minutes. Once we arrived, Haruka turned around and looked at Wakabayashi to continue the conversation.

“You’ll reach a town called Laffan if you go down the road in this direction. Based on your skill build, I would recommend looking for manual labor at the Adventurers’ Guild. You’re highly unlikely to encounter any danger as long as you stick to the road, but do take care of yourself.”

“Uhm, where are you guys going, Azuma-san?”

“We’re going in the other direction, since we have business to deal with in a town called Sarstedt.”

Wakabayashi looked back and forth between the direction Haruka was pointing and the direction at his back. He stopped for a moment to gather resolve and then raised his voice. “Uhm! Would you guys be willing to let me team up with you? W-We’re classmates, so...”

He hesitantly glanced up at us as he said that. *That doesn’t fit you at all, dude! If you’d done this in your previous body, you might have managed to activate some motherly instincts in girls who had a certain type of taste, but I can’t say the same for you now. You look like some middle-aged dude with a thick beard now, after all...*

Haruka wasn’t affected at all by that look of his, of course. “I can’t really say yes to that, especially not now. I’ll be honest with you, Wakabayashi-kun. You’re dead weight to us at the moment, and we want to go look for Yuki and Natsuki right now. It’s a choice between our best friends and a mere classmate, so you should know the answer as to who’s more important, right?”

“Ugh...”

“Besides, you say that you want to team up with us, but right now, you can’t perform adventurer work that involves combat at all, right? That means we would have to pay for your living expenses until then. We might be classmates, but all I know about you is your name, Wakabayashi-kun. Do we really have an obligation to take care of and look after you and your well-being?”

Those were some harsh and cold words, but she was completely right. Wakabayashi looked at Touya and me for help, but all we did was respond with a shrug.

“It’s not like we have that much leeway right now, so yeah,” said Touya. “I mean, I probably wouldn’t have tried to help out my classmates if any of them became homeless on the streets near the train station or something. I would call an ambulance for them if they looked like they were dying, but that’s all.”

“Mm, that’s the most I would do as well, but it would be a different story if that homeless person was Nao or Touya. I would provide shelter for them and force them to fit back into society by making them find a job, no matter what it took.”

“Please, there’s no way I would become a homeless person, Haruka!” Touya

objected to Haruka's example, but Haruka just chuckled before she continued what she was saying.

"It's just an example, Touya. There's nothing to get mad about. Back to what I was saying: we also have a strong emotional bond with each other built on trust, and we've put in a lot of time and effort over the years to maintain this friendship between the three of us. That's why we're willing to do our best to help each other even under the circumstances we're in now. On the other hand, you're conveniently asking us for help even though we've never really interacted with each other. What do you expect me to say, Wakabayashi-kun? If you want our help, then you'll have to appeal to reason instead of emotion."

Wakabayashi fell completely silent after he had heard those words from Haruka.

"What kind of benefits would we get from helping you out? Are you actually a good investment for the money that we worked so hard to earn?"

"W-Well, uh, I-I can perform blacksmithing!"

He seemed like he had used up all of his brainpower to squeeze out that idea, but Haruka shook her head and shot it down. "That's not really useful to us, since we could just go to a weapons shop for that. Blacksmithing is a potential path in life for you, but you would have to slowly perform tasks over time to build trust and connections as some blacksmith's apprentice. It'll take quite a long time, but you have no other choice."

"Blacksmithing isn't going to be easy either, you know?" said Touya. "You'd probably be better off thinking of a way to make use of your Enhanced Muscles skill."

"This guy right here happens to have the Blacksmithing skill as well."

"Yep, and I got slapped by reality! This skill has ended up being completely useless as of now, damn it!"

In response to my comment, Touya yelled in mild frustration, but then he laughed about it. *Well, the skill itself has been useful for maintaining and polishing the knives that we use for gutting the game we hunt down, but I'm not sure if that actually counts as blacksmithing.*

“You’ll have to work hard at first to fit into a town’s community. If you manage to do that and take on related work, then you might be able to become a blacksmith, since you have a high level for the Blacksmithing skill along with the aptitude skill for it.”

“Is there any way you guys would be able to help me out...?” Wakabayashi hesitantly asked us again.

Haruka shook her head once more. “No. We need to make our own way up in the world as adventurers; otherwise, we won’t be able to obtain a stable livelihood. On the other hand, your life will become stable if you stay in town and get a firm footing via blacksmith work, so our paths in life are completely different.”

“Well, yeah, you’re right, but...”

He had a look on his face that indicated discontentment. I sighed when I saw that, and I decided to throw in my own input. “What would you do about our income if we spent time helping you out? Would you pay for our expenses? There’s no way you can afford that, right? The world we’re in is one where you won’t be able to even stay at an inn if you have no income.”

“If you end up in a situation like you were in earlier where you would’ve died if we’d left you alone, then we don’t mind helping you out a bit,” said Haruka. “However, you can get by in life if you head to town and take on work. With that in mind, asking for our help now is a bit spoiled, isn’t it?”

“You sure are a harsher person than I thought you were, Haruka-san. All this time, I thought you were a kind person, but now...”

Wakabayashi had a bit of a pouting tone in his voice as he said that, but a wide smile appeared on Haruka’s face when she heard those words. *That smile is actually the kind of smile Haruka has when she’s a bit annoyed, Wakabayashi. Watch out, dude.*

“You’re saying I’m unkind? I, who helped you out when you were on the verge of death earlier? I won’t deny that I’m harsh, but unkind?”

“As a heads-up, Haruka doesn’t hold back against enemies, Wakabayashi,” I said. “She’ll do the equivalent of smacking a dog that fell in the river—and the

equivalent of kicking a dog into a river when it's on the verge of falling down."

I'd given him an indirect warning that implied it would not be a good idea to get on Haruka's bad side. Haruka just shrugged when she heard what I said.

"There's no reason to hold back against our enemies, right? It's not like I'm a character in some shonen manga, so I don't believe in the idea that an enemy will become an ally later."

Oh yeah, that's a typical turn of events in a shonen manga. Characters who first appear as enemies show up later in the story as allies to help out when the protagonist is facing an even stronger foe, but they're not honest about the fact that they've acknowledged the protagonist as an equal by that point. I don't really mind that kind of trope, personally.

"Eliminate threats while you can. That's my motto!"

Wakabayashi looked a bit taken aback at how confidently Haruka declared that, but Touya and I just responded with wry smiles. It was a fact that showing mercy for no good reason was worse than nothing in this world. Common sense here dictated that bandits should be killed on sight if possible, after all.

"I take care of my allies quite well. As for my enemies and betrayers, they'll get *this* from me." She made a throat-cutting gesture with her thumb as she said that. "You're not either of those, right, Wakabayashi-kun?"

"O-Of course not, sir!"

He bobbed his head like an akabeko cow toy to declare his innocence as Haruka smiled at him. The fact that her face looked pretty only served to make her words sound scarier than they normally would.

"All right, I'll do my best to get by in this world. Do you have any advice for me?"

He finally seemed to have accepted the idea that we weren't going to change our minds. He nodded to indicate that he had reaffirmed his resolve to survive in this world.

"With your stamina and muscles, you'll earn more than enough if you just take work seriously and work hard," said Haruka. "Also, watch out and be

careful of our other classmates. Do either of you two have anything to add?"

"Uh, your name would be one, I guess? We're not using our surnames, since they would stand out, and I also changed my own name a bit to Touya."

"Oh, so that's why they were referring to you as Touya, Nagai-kun."

Wakabayashi nodded in agreement with the idea, and he looked down in thought for a while before he came up with something. "Uhm, how about Tomi as a new name? That's another way to read my first name in Japanese, after all."

"Yeah, that sounds fine," said Haruka.

"Okay, I'll use that name when registering at the guild, then."

As he nodded in response, I pondered to myself for a bit. *Do I have any advice to give on my end? Haruka helped us out a lot with all sorts of things, so—oh, right, he doesn't have someone like Haruka with him. Okay, I guess I'll just explain in simple terms what we discussed as a course of action in the beginning.*

"As for me, I'd suggest being humble and careful. Never be overconfident. Also, when you decide on a course of action, it would be a good idea to think about how you would do things—not as the new Tomi but as Yutaka Wakabayashi back on Earth."

"What I would do as Yutaka Wakabayashi...?"

He seemed to be a bit confused by my words. *Was I not clear enough?*

"For example, let's say you've been working in town for a bit and have managed to save up enough money to obtain a steel sword."

"Uh-huh."

"Now then, say that after you obtained that steel sword, someone told you about how it would be very profitable to hunt boars. Thinking about this situation as Yutaka Wakabayashi, would you seek out boars to hunt down?"

"Uh, no, I wouldn't," he said after pausing for a moment in thought.

"That's right. Yutaka Wakabayashi isn't a veteran at the hunt like some strong

old farmer. You'll most likely die if you try to hunt down a boar without a second thought. The reality of this world is nothing like easy mode in a game. In fact, as you decide on what actions to take, it would be a good idea to consider the difficulty of life in this world as more like a hell mode or nightmare mode."

"Ha ha, so it's tiers of difficulty above, like, super hard?"

He laughed dryly as he replied to me, but that would definitely be the right mentality to have if you cared about your own safety in this world. It would be foolish to be deceived by the fact that we could see our own skills and fall into an easygoing mindset.

"There's no such thing as extra lives or new game plus in this world, after all. We've had skills and the aptitude for weapons like spears and swords bestowed on us, but we ourselves still have to spend a few hours every day practicing to get better. If you want to be able to take on combat alone, then you'll probably have to put in more work and effort than us."

"Okay, I'll keep that in mind."

"With all that information about this world in mind, I would suggest that you think carefully about what you want to do in the future," said Haruka. "You can still provide for yourself as a blacksmith even when you get older, whereas adventurers can't take on quests once they reach a certain age. Take that into consideration as well before making a choice." She took thirty large silver coins out of her pockets after she said that and handed them over to Tomi. "Take this as a loan. It would be hard to get by on your first day with just ten large silver coins, after all. Things will get better for you after your second day if you don't waste money on unnecessary things."

"Are you sure about this?" Touya asked.

Touya sounded very surprised when he asked Haruka for confirmation, given how cold she had been towards Tomi up until now, but Haruka just nodded in response. "Yeah, I'm sure. It'll rest easier on our consciences, right?"

"Thank you very much!"

"Take care of yourself!" I said.

"Good luck," said Haruka.

Tomi bowed to us to express his thanks, and we were about to head our way once we saw that, but he had a few last words for us.

“Uhm!” He glanced up at us with a serious look on his face before he continued. “If I manage to grow as a person to the point where I’ll be of use to you guys, would you then be willing to let me join your party?”

“You probably wouldn’t need our help by then, but if that does happen, then we’ll think about it.”

Haruka smiled a bit after she said that and waved her hand as she turned away from him. Touya and I followed suit, and then we went our separate ways.

Chapter 2—Trials and Tribulations in a Different World, Once Again

“I didn’t think we’d part with Tomi in the end,” said Touya. “I thought you’d invite him to join our party, Haruka.”

“Oh, did you want him to join our party, Touya? I would have been willing to give it some thought if you’d brought it up earlier.”

We had parted ways with Tomi and started towards Sarstedt again, this time at a faster pace. Our Tomi rescue mission had taken up some time, but Haruka’s estimate was that we would be able to reach Sarstedt by evening if we kept up our current pace.

“Well, I felt like you would’ve said no in the end even if you did give it more thought,” said Touya.

“All I can say for now is that I can’t say yes given how things are at the moment. He didn’t have any weapons, armor, or combat-related skills. Sure, he was a bit sturdy, but that’s all he had to offer. Do you two really think we’re strong enough to protect someone like that during combat? We don’t even know what we’ll encounter on the way to Sarstedt.”

“Yeah, we’d probably be fine in most cases, but I couldn’t say the same if we were to run into something like a wipe bear, for instance,” I said.

That experience had actually been kind of traumatic for us. I had no way to accurately measure the actual amount of mana I had, but I definitely hadn’t been left with enough to take on another battle after we defeated the wipe bear that time. If we took things like arrow consumption and depleted stamina into account, then we would only be able to take on two wipe bears max, even though we had gotten much more used to combat by now. We definitely wouldn’t be able to sustain that if we had some dead weight with us. It was obvious what the result would be.

“Even if that wasn’t the case, it’s not like we know him well enough to

prioritize helping him over Yuki and Natsuki. Yuki and Natsuki are more important to me. Isn't it the same for you two?"

"Yeah, it's the same for us."

Tomi wasn't a bad person by any means, but Yuki and Natsuki were way more important to us than he was. Besides, he had the Enhanced Muscles skill, so he would probably be able to perform day labor just fine and earn enough money to get by. In fact, he was better suited for such work than either Haruka or me.

Touya agreed with what I said, and he nodded. "Mm, Yuki and Natsuki are the only classmates who I'd be willing to take on risks to help out."

Haruka looked a bit worried after she heard our words. "Did you two actually not have that many friends among the boys in our class? You two would hang out with the three of us girls quite often, right?"

"Well, it depends on what level of friendship we're talking about, but I guess I'm inclined to agree with that statement," Touya replied.

"So you're saying you didn't have many friends?"

"Nah, I did have friends. It's just that their friendship levels were low as far as I was concerned."

By friendship levels, Touya probably meant an indicator of how close you felt to others. I had no idea what factors he was using to assign those levels, but my friendships with my classmates were limited to just my time in school. I would sometimes hang out with some of them after class to play games at the arcade, but that was it. It wasn't like I would actively avoid hanging out with them, but I simply didn't have the time for it. I would spend time on other things, like hanging out with Haruka and her friends, hanging out with Touya, and gaming by myself at home, so I had no spare time.

"Well, you guys did help us girls a lot by hanging out with us, so I can't really complain."

"Yeah, you girls would get into all sorts of troublesome situations quite often," I said.

It wasn't their fault by any means, but trouble would find them for some

reason—or rather, the reason was quite obvious. Their good looks would often attract unwanted attention and situations. Because of that, Touya and I would do our best to find time to hang out with them, since our purpose was basically to act as bug spray, repelling things that would “bug” them. Again, it was all a result of the fact that they were cute, but the way all of them summarized it was “There’s nothing good about getting unwanted attention from guys who are weird and stupid!” That would be the natural reaction to what they had to go through, of course.

“Maybe the three of you girls actually had something like the Heroine Aptitude skill even back on Earth!” Touya exclaimed.

“There’s no way that’s true—although actually, I can’t say that for sure now, given the circumstances we’re in at the moment.” Haruka shrugged and sighed after she said that, and we both nodded back in agreement. Now that we knew about the existence of that evil god, we couldn’t really rule anything out. “All right, that’s enough about that topic. Let’s hurry a bit more. I want to reach the town before the sun sets.”

“Yeah, agreed,” I said. “Will we reach the town before the gates close?”

“Probably, but let’s run to make sure. It’ll be fairly safe if we just stick to the highway.”

We had headed out of Laffan fairly early so that we wouldn’t end up having to camp out, but we had lost about an hour of time due to bumping into Tomi. With that in mind, Haruka’s plan was a good one, so we started to run with Touya in the front. It felt like we were going at the equivalent of a world-class marathon runner’s speed. We weren’t going at full speed, since we wanted to have stamina left to deal with monsters if we encountered any on the way, but we were still going that fast, which meant that the physical abilities we had obtained after being transported to this world were quite amazing.

On a side note, we could have rented a horse-drawn carriage at the Adventurers’ Guild, but it was much faster to run on foot. Besides, the fee we would have had to pay for a carriage would actually have been quite hefty. On top of that, we would have had a duty to protect the carriage if it was attacked by monsters, and we would have had to pay a penalty fee if they escaped or

managed to kill any of the passengers. What that meant was that there was no benefit to renting a ride on a carriage if we weren't going to carry a lot of luggage with us. *Well, there's a very low risk of being assaulted by monsters on this highway, but still.*

In the end, we managed to reach Sarstedt without any trouble.



Sarstedt was a town that had grown outwards from the ferry that was located at the Noria River. The river was very wide and would flood quite often, so it wasn't rare to get stuck and held back by the river for a few days depending on the weather. It was only natural that demand would give rise to inns around the ferry. The dealings between people who gathered at such inns would then give rise to an economy with all sorts of business exchanges. New stores would slowly open up around the area, which would lead to new houses being built to shelter the employees, which would then lead to walls being built around the area to protect the residents, as well as barracks for soldiers to stay in. Eventually, the settlement would become large enough that the national government would officially recognize it as a town.

Due to this town's history, it was split in two by the river. However, there were only a few inns located on the east side of the river; the bustling parts of town were concentrated on the west side. As a result, the town itself was much smaller than Laffan, which was a good thing for us, since we were going to be searching for people here. The walls that surrounded the town were made of wood, and they looked quite weak compared to the stone walls around Laffan. There weren't any big gaps in the walls where people could pass through, but there were gaps that people could peep through just fine to see what was inside. Despite that, this town did have a proper gate, and there was a single guard on duty.

"Hello," said Haruka.

The guard was a friendly middle-aged man who looked like he was in his forties. We showed him our adventurer cards.

His first words after he'd seen our cards were "Hello, and welcome to Sarstedt. The ferries are operating today." *I guess a lot of people do visit this*

town to cross the river.

“Thank you very much for the information. Would you be willing to tell us where an inn is located as well as where we can find the Adventurers’ Guild?”

The guard pointed at a small building that was located quite close to where we were standing. “The Adventurers’ Guild is located right there, and if you walk straight down this road, you’ll arrive near the harbor. About ten different inns are located in the vicinity. The most popular inn these days is called Riverwind, but—well, that probably wouldn’t be of any interest to your party, I don’t think.”

“Hm? Thank you very much.”

The building the guard had pointed at had a sign over the door indicating that it was the Adventurers’ Guild, but the building itself wasn’t any different in size from an ordinary citizen’s house; it was nowhere near as large as the one in Laffan. *Is that because this town’s much smaller than Laffan?*

“Should we head to the guild first?” I asked.

“No, let’s head there later,” said Haruka. “Even if Yuki and Natsuki are doing work as adventurers, they probably wouldn’t be at the guild at this time of the day.”

“Yeah, let’s find an inn and get some food first,” said Touya. “I’m hungry.”

We had managed to arrive at this town at noon, which was the time we’d initially planned on getting here. That was thanks to the fact that we’d run here without taking a break. We had planned to eat lunch on the way here if it was going to take us some time, but Sarstedt had come into sight right when we’d been discussing whether to stop, so we hadn’t eaten anything yet.

“Mm, okay. Let’s decide on an inn to stay at first and then eat lunch. We can look for Yuki and Natsuki after that,” said Haruka. “We’ll probably manage to find them within the next few days in a town like this if they’re not staying indoors the entire time. Well, that’s if they’re actually in this town.”

“Come on, Haruka, don’t say things like that,” said Touya. “Let’s just hope and trust that they’re in this town, all right?”

Compared to Laffan, Sarstedt was small enough that we could search every road here in one day if we were quick about it. It would be very easy to look for someone in this town, but that was only if that someone was actually here. However, as long as we kept searching, we had no choice but to hope and trust that they were here.

“I want to believe that they are here, but I would feel even more devastated if I had blind faith and then they turned out not to be here. Let’s just go check in at an inn first.”

The road that led straight ahead from the gate continued all the way to the harbor, and we saw many boats moored there when we got closer. The inns in the vicinity didn’t look much different from each other, but the building that had a sign with the name “Riverwind” above its doors was bustling and noisy despite it being a bit past noon.

“Is that the inn that the guard mentioned earlier? He cut himself off midsentence when he was talking about it, but it does seem quite popular,” I said.

“Mm, business does seem to be booming,” said Haruka. “Should we settle for this inn?”

“Yeah, I don’t mind,” said Touya. “In a way, I’m already mentally prepared for whatever comes our way.”

“Right, there’s a good chance that we’ll have to eat something disgusting again...”

Based on our experiences in Laffan, it was actually quite difficult to get a delicious meal in this world. Cheap meals tended to taste bad, and even the expensive ones didn’t taste very good. We would be lucky to get a cheap meal that we could swallow down if we mustered the strength to endure it. That was the best mentality to have so that we wouldn’t get disappointed by any expectations.

“Okay, let’s enter.”

As soon as Haruka opened the inn’s door, we were greeted by the bustling noise of chatter. At a glance, it looked like both the tables and the seats at the

counter were completely filled; there didn't seem to be any empty chairs for us to sit in. *If business is booming that much here, does that mean the meals they offer are delicious?* The dining hall at The Slumbering Bear, where we'd been staying, would also be just as busy during mealtimes, but there was something that stood out to me. There were no girls at all inside this inn. It was completely filled with men at every table and counter seat. *What is this sausage fest? Is this just how things are at a port town?*

My confusion was completely blown away when I heard the voice of a young girl greeting us.

"Welcome!"

"Hell yeah, a cute young waitress!" Touya blurted out excitedly.

I felt exactly the same way he did. The only staff at The Slumbering Bear was that innkeeper dude, and for whatever reason, we hadn't encountered any cute young girls in the other places we'd visited routinely either. *Surely there's at least one cute young girl working at some kind of place we would visit, right?* In a typical fantasy setting, it would be a trope for the receptionists at the Adventurers' Guild to be cute young girls, but young was pushing it in terms of a word to describe Diola-san. *I mean, she does have a cute and charming face, but the weight of age is quite heavy, so yeah, right?* Given all that, I was about to voice my agreement, but I stopped myself when I actually saw the face of the waitress.

"Wait, isn't that Yuki?"

"Yeah," Touya replied.

"I sure didn't expect this," said Haruka.

The face that I saw looked more or less the same as what I remembered of my friend's face. It seemed that unlike us, Yuki had chosen to remain a human. She looked a bit worn out, and she gave off a slightly different impression due to wearing clothes she normally wouldn't have worn back on Earth, but it was still possible to recognize her just fine. As for how Yuki reacted, she didn't seem to realize it was us right away and looked confused for a moment, but she opened her eyes wide in astonishment after she'd looked at all of our faces in order, from me to Haruka to Touya.

“H-Haru—”

Haruka raised her hand and her voice to cut Yuki off right before she could shout Haruka’s name. “We would like to stay here for a night! Are there any rooms available?”

“U-Um, yes...”

“I see. Can you help us register a room, then?”

Yuki looked quite perplexed by the fact that Haruka had cut her off, but she headed to the counter and opened the registry book. Haruka walked towards her and stood in front of her to block her from the view of the other customers, while Touya and I stood behind Haruka.

“Um, you’re Haruka, right?” Yuki had an uneasy tone in her voice as she asked.

Haruka replied in the affirmative. “Yeah. You’re Yuki, right?”

“Yeah! Natsuki’s with me as well!”

“I’m really glad to hear that. You’ve probably realized, but the guys behind me are Nao and Tomoya.”

“I’m glad that you’re okay, Yuki,” I said.

“It’s been a while,” said Touya. “Glad to see you.”

Touya and I raised our hands lightly as we expressed our relief. Yuki looked like she was about to cry after she heard what we said.

“U-Uhm, I—”

“Not now, Yuki. I know how you’re feeling, but not now.” Haruka gently covered Yuki’s hands with her own as she told her to save it for later. “Come to our room after your shift is over. There is a room available here, right?”

“...Yeah. Will a room for three do?”

“Mm. How much is it for one night?”

“Well, it’s twelve hundred Rea for a night’s stay without meals included...”
Yuki gave us a worried look after she told us the price.

Whoa, that's expensive! Actually, was it just that The Slumbering Bear was cheap? Well, that's still double the cost. There, it's only five hundred Rea for a night's stay without meals included. I noticed that Haruka's eyebrows furrowed when she heard the price, so she probably thought it was expensive as well. *No, it's not like we can't pay for it. It's just, well, yeah.*

"Oh well. It's a necessary expense, Haruka," I said.

"Yeah, that's true. All right, we'll take that room."

"Okay, thank you very much."

Haruka handed Yuki twelve large silver coins in exchange for the keys to the room.

"Your room is located up the stairs at the end of the corridor on the right side."

"Thank you very much," said Haruka. Then she whispered into Yuki's ear, "I'm glad to see you again. Let's talk later."

We all headed towards our room.



"No comment about this room..." I said.

The room we had registered was about the same size as our room back at The Slumbering Bear and contained four beds. It was a bit dark inside, and the window was small as well. There wasn't any furniture at all, so it felt larger than it actually was, but that wasn't exactly a good thing. Overall, that meant our room back at The Slumbering Bear was better than this room by far despite the fact that it cost less.

"Is it just that things in this town are expensive, or is this inn not a good one?" Touya asked.

"Well, all I can say is that this inn seems to be relatively expensive given the purpose of this town," I replied.

This town had been founded as a ferry stop, so most people wouldn't be staying at this inn for a long period of time. People would probably only stay here for a few days or a bit longer if they got unlucky while waiting for the

weather to improve, but it was highly unlikely that there would be anyone who would stay at an inn for a long period of time like back in Laffan.

“Regarding the price of things, it might actually be normal, considering there’s sea, or, well, river freight in this town,” said Haruka.

“In any case, considering the price of a room here, it’s a bad idea to stay at this inn for a long time,” I said.

It was technically only about an extra five hundred Rea per day in living expenses compared to our inn that had meals included back in Laffan, but over time, that cost would add up to a significant sum.

“Yeah, fixed costs are a big part of expenses,” said Haruka.

“Wait, hold on. We haven’t eaten any meals in this town yet, so maybe the food here is actually good?”

Touya said that with some hope in his voice, but Haruka and I looked at each other and shook our heads.

“Even if there’s an infinitesimally small chance that the food here is good, this still isn’t a good town to stay in,” I said.

“Based on how small the guild building looked, it’s highly likely that there’s almost no work available here for us adventurers either,” said Haruka.

“Ugh, I guess you guys are right,” said Touya. “We probably wouldn’t be able to find a place to sell boar parts here even if we hunted some.”

“Mm, we’re only able to earn as much as we are now thanks to the population of Laffan,” I said.

Demand was higher than supply back in Laffan for all sorts of things, including herbs, meat, and dindels. It was thanks to that demand that we were able to sell those things for decent prices. With that in mind, the population of Sarstedt was way too small in comparison.

“Oh, wait, there’s something more important to discuss right now!” I exclaimed. “We need to talk about Yuki and Natsuki!”

“Aren’t you the one who got us started on this tangent by saying ‘no comment’ about this room, Nao?” Haruka asked.

“I mean, who wouldn’t feel weird about this room given the high price? Wait, no, enough about that!”

We’d almost gotten sidetracked again.

“Yep, we should talk about Yuki and Natsuki. We managed to find them right away, eh? I thought it would be harder than this.”

“Isn’t it a good thing that we found them right away, Touya? I’m personally really glad that they’re okay. That takes a lot of weight off my shoulders.”

Haruka looked quite at peace as she voiced her relief. In fact, she had the calmest and most relieved expression that I had seen from her ever since we had been transported to this world. She hadn’t brought it up that often, but the fact that her two best friends were missing had really caused her a lot of stress until now.

“I mean, I’m glad that they’re okay as well—don’t get me wrong. It’s just that I had strongly motivated myself to do my absolute best to search for them, so it feels kind of sad that it ended up being for nothing, you know?”

“Well, we were lucky to find them here right away, but I was fairly sure that we would find them here one way or another.”

“Hmm? What do you mean by that, Haruka?”

“I had two possible outcomes in mind. The first one was a scenario where Yuki and Natsuki had teamed up with some of our other classmates and were leading the lives of adventurers.”

That’s basically the scenario we’re in, right? We teamed up as a group of childhood friends rather than as classmates, but it’s the same otherwise.

“However, to be honest, I thought the chances of that scenario were quite low. This world isn’t exactly safe for a party of just girls, and there probably aren’t any guys they trust aside from you two who they would team up with.”

She made it sound like Yuki and Natsuki had no friends at all, but in a way, she was right about their lack of male friends. It wasn’t just about Yuki and Natsuki, though. There probably weren’t a lot of girls out there who knew someone of the opposite gender who they would be comfortable living with twenty-four

seven. Police didn't exist in this different world, so it wouldn't be surprising if someone lost all restraint and cast aside their morals. *Actually, I'm sure there are definitely some guys like that who would yell "I've gotten some skills, so it's my time to shine and stomp all over other people as I build a harem!" or something similar. Yuki and Natsuki are both cute, so both of them are in extra danger from that kind of guy. There are some types of adventurer work that would require adventurers to visit deserted places, after all.*

"The other possible scenario was them working together in town. When I looked up information about this town, I was fairly sure that they would be working as waitresses at an inn if that was the case, and I was right."

"Hmm. There probably isn't much other work available, and waitress work would suit them rather well since they have good looks, so that makes sense," said Touya.

"Oh, wait, are they the reason business is booming at this inn?" The guard at the gate earlier had mentioned that this Riverwind Inn had become popular recently, so I was guessing it was probably because of Yuki and Natsuki. After all, it would make sense, given the fact that the customers in the inn were basically all men.

"Hm? Does that mean that earlier, when the guard said this place wouldn't be of any interest to us, what he meant was—"

"Was it because Haruka was with us?"

Haruka was just as beautiful as Yuki and Natsuki were, so he'd most likely guessed that the two of us guys wouldn't be inclined to choose an inn based on whether or not there were cute waitresses working there.

"No, it was probably because we all belong to different races than Yuki and Natsuki," said Haruka. "Interracial relationships aren't forbidden, but it's a fact that there aren't that many in this world."

After an awkward pause, we both replied, "Oh."

We were all originally humans, so it hadn't really occurred to me, but we were now technically different races than Yuki and Natsuki. I wasn't sure what the difference was in people's eyes. *Would they view us in the same way people*

would view a foreigner back in Japan? Maybe it's more than just that.

“All right, that’s enough about that topic. What should we do for lunch? The dining hall below is, well, full, so should we order a meal and eat here in this room, or should we go out to eat?” Haruka asked. “There’s also the option of just eating dried meat.”

“Nah, dried meat’s not an option at an inn, right? I want to try out the food here at this inn,” said Touya. “The dining hall was packed, so surely the food doesn’t taste bad, right?”

“Yeah, I’m down with that idea as well. We came all this way to a different town, so we might as well try out the food here.”

“Is that so? All right, then. Let’s go order some food, then, Nao.”

Haruka and I went down to the first floor, and the dining hall was still packed, bustling, and noisy. Yuki looked quite busy working in the midst of all that. There were two other waitresses at work as well, but most of the men who were eating in the hall would try to hit on Yuki, probably because she was cute.

Haruka ordered our food from the lady at the counter. “Excuse me, we’d like to order the daily special for three. We’ll be eating upstairs in our room.”

She greeted us with a loud, strong voice. “No problem! Cheers! Please wait for a bit!”

The process of ordering was the same as it was back at The Slumbering Bear, but we probably wouldn’t have to wait as long, since the specials in a dining hall aimed at ordinary people would have been prepared in advance. Haruka and I watched what Yuki was doing while we waited.

“It looks like Yuki’s doing just fine,” she said.

“Yeah. She looks like she’s lost some weight, but it doesn’t look like she’s gone through any awful experiences.”

Yuki had a smile on her face as she worked, but I was fairly sure this tiring work and unfamiliar lifestyle would be quite tough to go through. However, she didn’t have any visible injuries, and she didn’t look like she was worn out to an unhealthy extent either. She had probably managed to get by somehow.

“Mm, I’m really glad for her...”

Haruka let out a sigh of relief, and I patted her on her back as she gazed down at her feet, overwhelmed by the burst of emotion. Eventually, the lady behind the counter started to place some food on large plates and lined them up in front of us. The food didn’t look delicious at all, so I felt a bit uneasy about it. In no time at all, three plates full of that food had appeared in front of us.

“It’ll be 210 Rea in total for this!”

“Okay...”

Haruka paused for a moment before she answered due to the slightly high price of the dishes. However, she ended up paying the price without complaining, and we took the dishes with us back to our room.

“Oh, you guys are back!”

Touya sounded very happy as he welcomed us back, but his face clouded right away once he looked at the plate we handed him.

“What is this...?”

“It’s this inn’s daily special, I guess?”

We had ordered the daily special, so it was unlikely that the lady had given us disgusting food on purpose. After all, all of the customers below were eating this food. There were two slices of what seemed to be stewed carp on each plate. In addition, there were some green objects that looked like vegetables pickled in vinegar, and two slices of normal-looking rye bread. Finally, there was some kind of brown food paste oozing all over the plate. Oozing wasn’t exactly a very enticing word, but there wasn’t really any other way to describe it.

Honestly, this dish doesn’t look delicious at all.

“Well, we shouldn’t judge this before we actually eat it, right? Am I wrong?”

Touya asked for our agreement, but Haruka just shook her head with a bitter smile on her face before she replied. “You’ll probably get disappointed again if you get your hopes up...”

“Come on, we don’t know that yet! Let’s dig in! We should start with the safest food first, though!” Touya was putting on a good show of bravery, but he

started with the safest choice—the slices of fish.

The fish looked like it had just been stewed in a big pot without much care, but looking at it, I thought I had an idea of what it would taste like, so it didn't seem like it would be that bad. I followed Touya's example and started with the fish as well.

"Ugh!" I exclaimed.

Haruka couldn't even find any words.

"I-Is this the definition of a muddy taste?!" Touya exclaimed.

This fish had probably been caught in the river that passed through this town. The only freshwater fish that I had eaten until now were sweetfish, freshwater salmon, and some slightly unusual fish products such as amago salmon sashimi—well, I guess goby and eel should also count as freshwater fish. In any case, all of the fish that I'd had before had been delicious, and none of them had ever had a muddy taste. On the other hand, the fish in front of me right now was very painful to eat. I had to muster all my strength to hold back from spitting it out.

"The cooking method is bad as well," said Haruka. "If this fish had just been salted and grilled or dredged in flour first, then—well, I guess salting and grilling would be the best option, or perhaps frying...?"

The inn lady had probably stewed this pungent-smelling fish together with other ingredients in a pot, so its skin and collagen had most likely melted and stuck to it, which gave it a muddy and fishy taste that lingered in our mouths for a very long time. I could taste what seemed to be herbs that she had used to try to cancel out the taste and smell, but that wouldn't have been enough to make it bearable even if I'd been wearing a face mask. In fact, the herbs made it even worse than if it had just been seasoned with salt instead. If I had to come up with one good thing about this method, it would be the fact that it wouldn't take much time or hassle to cook fish this way, but that was it.

"N-No, not yet! There's still hope left! Let's try this next!" Touya bravely pushed onward despite having suffered a lot of damage from the fish, and the next food he chose to tackle was another safe tile, the vegetables pickled in vinegar. That "safe" tile earlier had led to our loss, but surely there was a limit

to how bad vegetables could taste.

I again followed his example and took a bite. “I-It’s absolutely bitter!”

Is this some kind of stem? If I had to describe it by comparison, then it was similar to the sinewy texture of low-quality asparagus, but with the bitter taste of white radish leaves. This was combined with the strong sour and acidic taste of vinegar. *Actually, was this the result of lactic acid fermentation rather than vinegar?* I could put up with the texture if I had to, but the vegetables still had a pungent smell. It wasn’t something that I would ever want to pay money to eat. As for Touya, he was just chewing on the vegetables with his front teeth. *The chewy parts are definitely going to end up as leftovers at this rate.*

“Ugh, argh, *gulp*! No, I’m not giving up! There are things out there that look like land mines at first glance but are actually safe to walk over! This isn’t over yet!”

“Just give up, Touya,” I said. “Just take a good look at this oozing paste. It’s a land mine in plain sight, you know?”

“No leftovers allowed! I’m going to eat it all!”

“What’s gotten into you?!” I jabbed back at his outburst, but there was probably something weird with me as well, since I’d decided to go along with him anyway. I started by scooping up a tiny amount of the paste with my fork, and I licked it to try it out. “...What is this taste? Acrid? Bitter? A bit salty?”

It was a taste that was hard to describe. If I had to put it in frank terms, then it was disgusting, but it was a taste I could swallow down if I tried my best. *It’s kind of like something that would just taste bitter without other sauce, I guess?*

“This paste is actually a bit similar to Marmite,” said Haruka. “Ale exists in this world, so I wouldn’t be surprised if it’s something like that.”

“Marmite? What’s that?” Touya asked.

“It’s a spread made from yeast extract. It’s consumed in places such as England, but it’s not exactly popular. After all, it doesn’t taste very good.”

“There are actually people who eat stuff like this? Why would the English *do* that?”

Touya grimaced in disbelief as he said that, but every country on Earth had at least one type of food similar to this. For example, natto was a Japanese food that most people wouldn't exactly describe as having a delicious taste and smell. *Well, recently people have come up with variations that aren't as bad, but still.*

"Some people might just like the taste of Marmite, I guess? It's also good for your health. Yeast extract was also sold as a health supplement back in Japan, except it was in pill form for ease of swallowing."

Sake lees are rich in nutrition, and yeast extract is basically the beer version of that; it's also rich in vitamins and good for your body. I wasn't sure which one was more nutritional, but I was confident that sake lees had a better taste.

"So, Touya, any last thoughts?" I asked. "We already know how the rye bread will taste, so let's leave that out."

"I admit defeat!"

He lowered his head and admitted his defeat gracefully, and I just responded with a shrug and a bitter smile.

"I mean, this isn't really about victory or defeat. It's more about deciding that we're definitely not going to stay here in this town and take on work."

"Yeah, I agree," said Haruka. "There might be some places here that serve delicious food, but it's not worth the high inn rates every day."

It was possible that we could find cheaper inns out there if we looked around this town, but we didn't really have a good reason to stay. Our goal was to group up with Yuki and Natsuki as soon as possible and then return to Laffan. We all discussed and agreed on that goal, so the only thing that was left for us to do was to force ourselves to consume and clean up the remaining food on the plates. There weren't any heroes among us who dared to order dinner from this inn as well after the trials and tribulations that lunch had thrown our way, of course. For dinner, in order to clean out the taste in our mouths, we had some of the dried meat, bread, and dindels that we'd brought with us. After we were done, we waited in our rooms until late at night, when we heard a knock on our door. We opened our door, and behind it was Yuki along with one other person.

“Haru—”

“Haruka!”

“Natsuki!”

The person who basically pushed Yuki aside and jumped into Haruka’s arms was Natsuki. She looked more or less the same as before and was still a human, just like Yuki, but she did look visibly worn out compared to before. The scene in front of me with Haruka and Natsuki hugging each other was the very definition of a touching reunion, but Yuki was standing behind them frozen in place with her arms spread out. I felt bad for her, so I half-jokingly spread out my own arms to invite her for a hug.

“Nao!”

Oh, I didn’t expect this. She actually jumped into my arms without hesitating. I thought she was just playing along with my joke at first, but it looked like she was actually crying a bit. I was a bit troubled by this turn of events and looked at Touya for help. He just nodded back at me, so I decided to respond to Yuki with a hug as well and patted her back.

“Waaaaaah!”

I wasn’t sure if I’d done the right thing or not, but she clung to me and started sobbing for real after that. As an average Japanese person, this kind of physical intimacy was honestly a bit embarrassing for me, but I decided it was okay to hug her back in a situation like this. That was what I thought until I saw that Haruka and Natsuki were looking at me with big grins on their faces. *Weren’t you just sobbing together because of this touching reunion?! Wait, don’t you grin at me too, Touya!*

I felt a bit bad interrupting Yuki, but I tapped her shoulders gently to alert her to what was happening around us. She raised her face from my chest, her eyes still full of tears, and was a bit confused at first as she looked around, but as soon as she did that, she seemed to realize what she had just done. She hastily dashed away from me, blushing from embarrassment.

“U-Ugh! N-Natsuki, I can’t believe you pushed me aside all of a sudden!”

It looked like she was attempting to divert attention away from her

embarrassment by pointing at Natsuki and yelling, but I didn't think it was something to be that embarrassed about. They had been thrown into this different world by themselves as just a group of two girls with nothing and no one to help them out. With that in mind, it was perfectly reasonable to hug a friend out of relief, and there was nothing for anybody to be grinning or laughing about. *Especially not you, Touya. You're a guilty man!* Haruka and Natsuki were grinning like they'd seen something heartwarming, but Touya's grin also had a teasing nuance behind it.

"Come on, surely you understand, right?" said Natsuki. "You met Haruka first earlier, so wouldn't it make sense to let me hug her first?"

"I barely got to talk with her earlier, since she told me to save it for later!" Yuki exclaimed.

Yuki had probably wanted to enact a touching reunion earlier when she'd first been reunited with Haruka, but Haruka had stopped her right before she could do that. Well, it would have attracted a lot of unwanted attention and trouble if they had done that in public, so I couldn't really say that Haruka had made the wrong decision or anything. That turn of events earlier must have made Yuki crankier than she would be normally, since she was complaining to Natsuki, but Natsuki's next words, which she said with a smile, left Yuki almost speechless.

"Besides, it's thanks to this that you got to hug Nao-kun, right?"

"H-Huh?!"

"Well, I'm at fault for that as well, so—" *I was half-joking when I did it, but I was the one who gestured to her that she could jump into my arms, so yeah.*

I was about to explain things and back Yuki up, but Yuki herself cut me off. "I-I wasn't happy about—n-no, more importantly, why did you tell me to save it for later when we met, Haruka? I would've been perfectly okay even if you had been the one who jumped into my arms and hugged me."

"Me? I mean, that would be completely out of character for me," Haruka replied nonchalantly.

Yuki clenched her fists in frustration and swung them up and down. "Even if it's out of character, aren't we best friends?!"

“Mm, I might have lost control of my emotions if it had been Natsuki who was there earlier.” Haruka pretended to wipe sweat off her forehead as if to say “Whew!” She was absolutely in a teasing mood.

“Why?! Was there actually a difference in our friendship levels?!”

“No, that’s not it at all. It’s just that you seem like the type of person who’s very tough, you know? As for Natsuki, she’s more similar to, like, a frail and delicate tree, you know?”

“Ugh, I can’t believe that’s what you thought all along, Haruka! I’m absolutely shocked by this sudden revelation! Also, a tree like a willow that’s sturdy but still bends with the winds would be more fitting for Natsuki, wouldn’t it?!” Yuki held her head in her hands.

We all laughed at the sight.

“Well, I’m glad to see that both of you are just as energetic as before,” I said.

“Yeah, we were worried about both of you,” said Touya. “Well, have you both actually lost weight?”

Natsuki sighed. “Mm, the food here doesn’t sit very well with us, so…” She sounded a bit exhausted.

Touya nodded deeply in response. “Yeah, I know how you feel. I can’t stand the food here at this inn either.”

“Mm, I successfully went on a diet by accident,” said Yuki. “With the food in this world, there’s probably no risk of a diet relapse either, but I’m not happy about it at all!”

Yuki hadn’t been anywhere close to overweight in the first place, so it would just be unhealthy for her to lose weight.

“Yeah, it’s perfectly understandable if *that* food is what you had to eat,” said Haruka. “Okay, take a seat—wait, let me cast Purification on everyone first.”

Haruka casually cast her Purification spell on all of us, and we all became completely clean in an instant. We hadn’t seen any combat today on our way to Sarstedt, so we hadn’t gotten dirty by any means, but Yuki and Natsuki looked like literally every trace of dirt vanished from their bodies. They looked at each

other once they noticed what had happened, and their eyes went wide with surprise.

“Huh? Just what is this convenient spell?!” Natsuki asked.

“It’s the spell Purification; you can get it if you have Level 2 Light Magic. It’s a very convenient spell that can be used for all sorts of things.”

Haruka had originally had to use this spell on us one at a time, but she had managed to improve it through constant use. She was now able to cast the spell on all of us at once, and that included Yuki and Natsuki for a total of five people. According to Haruka, this spell’s intended use was for purifying evil creatures, but there were probably very few adventurers who actually used it for that purpose.

“I had no idea that Light Magic offered a spell that was this convenient. Why didn’t I choose to get Level 2 Light Magic back then...?”

Natsuki looked a bit depressed as she said that, and when we asked her about it, she explained that she did have the Light Magic skill, but it was Level 1.

“It was thanks to my Light Magic that we didn’t have to worry about most types of injuries or about finding a source of light at night, but it didn’t help with baths...”

“Mm, we struggled with laundry as well,” said Yuki. “We barely had any money, so we didn’t have any real change of clothes at all.”

Both of them sighed as they recalled their struggles, which was perfectly understandable. If Haruka hadn’t had the Purification spell, then I myself might have gotten depressed. *I mean, it’s a spell that can clean anything in an instant! That applies both to my hands when they get dirty from gutting boars and to the sweat on my body and clothes when I work out training alone, so yeah!* The only problem I had with the Purification spell was the fact that it didn’t really make me feel refreshed, but that would be asking for too much.

“Yeah, in this world, there’s no such thing as three-pack sets of underwear priced at the equivalent of one thousand yen, and outerwear is expensive as well,” said Touya.

“Yeah! I can’t believe how expensive things are—wait, Tomoya, I’m not

wearing cheap underwear like that, okay?!”

“What kind of weird statement is that, Yuki?” Haruka asked. She slapped Yuki on the head lightly. “Look, take a seat and calm down. Have both of you eaten dinner already?”

They both responded with an awkward look.

“Well, we did eat dinner, but...”

“The taste of it was, well, you know...”

“I figured. Here, try this food out.”

Haruka handed them the bag of dried meat and the bag of bread. The dried meat also served as our emergency rations, so there was a lot of it, but the amount of bread was just about two day’s worth that we’d bought back at The Slumbering Bear. We had eaten some bread at lunch, and most of it would probably disappear if we split it with them, but considering the kind of “food” they’d had to put up with until now, I was perfectly happy to share as much as they wanted to eat.

“Dried meat? Let me take a bite—what is this?! It’s so, *gulp*, so, so delicious!”

“Yuki, it’s bad manners to talk while eating,” said Haruka. “Follow Natsuki’s example.”

Natsuki was eating in silence, completely focused on chewing. Something about the way she chewed was sort of similar to a hamster. It was rather cute.

“I mean, I just want to express how amazed and moved I am! I had no idea food this delicious actually existed in this world!”

“We made it ourselves.”

“Oh, I see...” Yuki had overreacted a bit at first—she’d had tears in her eyes as she chewed on the dried meat—but she wilted a little as soon as she heard from Haruka that the dried meat was something we’d had to make, not something you could easily buy.

“As for the bread, however, we bought it from the inn that we stay at.”

“The bread? Let me take a bite. O-Oh, it tastes normal. By that, I mean it

actually tastes good...”

The bread that was sold at The Slumbering Bear was just plain and simple bread that was easy to eat, but it wasn’t like the kind of bread sold at bakeries back in Japan that was delicious by itself. There was nothing special about the inn’s bread—in a way, it could be described as very basic—but it definitely tasted good compared to rye bread. Rye bread wouldn’t ruin the taste of other food, but the bread’s taste itself wasn’t easy to swallow down. Natsuki was also going back and forth between the bread and the dried meat, and she looked like she was enjoying her meal. *Hmm, now that I take a closer look, her cheeks really have gotten more hollow...*

“Are you okay, Natsuki?”

“Yeah, I’m fine. Thanks, Nao-kun. Honestly though, I’m not sure if I would have survived until now if I hadn’t gotten skills like Robust, Disease Resistance, and Poison Resistance.” She replied to me with a smile on a face that gave off a fragile aura, which was fitting, since she had been a bit sickly and frail back on Earth.

Haruka had described her as being similar to a frail and delicate tree earlier, and while I wouldn’t go that far, it was a fact that she was the weakest person physically among the five of us here. That was probably why she’d decided to get those skills related to health, although I wasn’t sure if Poison Resistance had really helped her. *I mean, that food wasn’t poison by any means, even though it did taste disgusting.*

“There are also some desserts available once you feel decently full,” said Haruka.

“Desserts!” Yuki exclaimed. “I can’t believe I lived to hear such a fantastic word again!”

“...Yuki, just what kind of diet did you—never mind, forget what I just said.”

Yuki’s eyes were already locked on the dindels that Haruka was peeling with her hands. Well, her eyes were locked on at what Haruka was doing, but her mouth and hands were still moving to consume food. Haruka swiftly finished peeling the dindels and then handed them over to Yuki and Natsuki on some plates. Both of them hastily swallowed the food that was in their mouths before

they each reached out to take a dandelion and all but threw the fruits into their mouths.

“It’s so sweet...!” said Yuki.

“Yeah, it really is...!” said Natsuki.

“This is like the nectar of the gods...!”



They were basically sobbing uncontrollably as they ate the dindels. *I completely understand why they would react like that, though. After all, I felt some very similar emotions when I ate some dindels after that “lunch” earlier.*

“Can we have one more to eat...?” Yuki asked hesitantly.

Haruka happily responded with a smile. “Of course. Feel free to eat as much as you can, since we have a lot of them.”

“Are you some kind of goddess, Haruka?!”

“I can tell from those words what kind of struggles both of you went through with food, and it really makes me want to cry...”

Haruka’s hands kept moving despite what she said, and peeled dindels continued to pile up on the plates. Yuki and Natsuki would snatch those dindels as soon as Haruka placed them on the plates, but they seemed to be full after they had eaten three more dindels, so they stopped.

Yuki beamed at Haruka. “Whew! Thanks a lot, Haruka! I’m really glad that we’re friends!”

Haruka’s own smile was more awkward. “This isn’t really a fitting situation for nice words like that, Yuki...”

Natsuki was usually the type of person who would eat quietly and with grace, but she also joined in on the praise session with a beaming smile. “Haruka, meeting you will forever be one of my most treasured memories.”

“Don’t play along with her, Natsuki!”

After tapping Natsuki on the head playfully, Haruka reached out for the remaining dindels.

“Oh, I’ll have some too,” said Touya. “What about you, Nao?”

“Sure, I’ll take a slice.”

There happened to be exactly three slices left, so the three of us ate one slice each. *Mm, yeah, it’s delicious, but I’ve been eating this almost every day recently, so I kind of want to try out a different fruit. I won’t buy one since it would be expensive, but still.*

“Sorry that Natsuki and I didn’t hold back on the fruit,” said Yuki. “These were expensive, right? Fruits are luxury goods in this world, after all.”

“Yeah, the market price for these would be something around five hundred Rea apiece,” Haruka replied.

“F-Five hundred?!” they exclaimed in unison.

“W-Was it really okay for us to devour this kind of luxury fruit?” Natsuki asked.

“Haven’t you shared luxury fruits with us before that were more expensive than these, Natsuki?”

“Those were just gifts that my family received, Yuki. It’s not like my family bought such fruits on a regular basis.”

Natsuki’s family was actually quite wealthy, and we’d all benefited from that in the form of desserts that she would bring for lunch and high-quality sweets that she would share with all of us. In Japan, families like that would often receive a lot of gifts during times like the middle of summer and the end of the year, and apparently, the total amount of those gifts would often be too much for a single family to consume. Gifts of food would have an expiration date, and the family would have to give gifts in return for each one, so Natsuki had mentioned that her family didn’t really like receiving food. *I guess it makes sense, since gifts like that tend to be expensive for no good reason. If you have to give gifts of the same quality in return, then you’re basically being forced to buy expensive things that you wouldn’t normally need to.*

“Besides,” Natsuki went on, “our current circumstances are completely different. We all started with just one thousand Rea, right?”

“Yeah, it was really tough in the beginning...” Haruka had a distant look in her eyes as she recalled how things had been in the beginning.

All of us remembered those days too. We hadn’t been able to buy a change of clothes after we’d bought the absolute necessities from the general goods store, and the only weapon we’d had on us was a wooden sword for Touya. It had definitely been a hard-mode start to our lives here rather than easy mode. Yuki and Natsuki had probably had to go through similar troubles in the

beginning.

“Well, these fruits—they’re called dindels—were ones that we went out to gather ourselves, so don’t worry about it,” said Haruka. “You can thank Touya for them, since he’s the one who came up with the idea of going to gather these on our way here. Oh yeah, Touya is Tomoya, if you haven’t noticed.”

“Is that so? Thank you very much, Tomoya-kun,” said Natsuki.

“Nah, all I did was come up with the idea. Nao was the one who actually climbed up to gather these dindels. Oh, also, you can just call me Touya. That’s the name I registered with at the Adventurers’ Guild.”

“Okay. Thank you very much as well, Nao-kun. Was it hard to gather these fruits?”

“Well, I had to climb up a tree that was easily over fifty meters tall, and the fruits grow at the very top of the tree, so it would be very difficult to gather these fruits if they existed back on Earth.”

“Fifty meters?!” said Yuki. “There’s no tree as tall as that back in Japan.”

“Wait, you climbed a tree that tall, Nao?” asked Natsuki. “You didn’t have any modern climbing ropes or carabiners, right?”

Natsuki and Yuki stared at me in surprise. I understood why they were doing so; I myself would normally have thought that such a feat was dangerous or impossible.

“Yeah, I didn’t have anything like that. However, as you can see, Haruka and I are elves, so it wasn’t that hard for us.”

“Mm, it was a lot easier for us than you would think from the words fifty meters alone.”

“Oh, so your race does affect your abilities?” Natsuki asked.

“Yeah, that seems to be the case. We definitely felt a difference from something like racial traits.”

A racial trait of elves was their natural sense of balance, and a racial trait of beastmen like Touya was their sixth sense, which allowed them to detect the presence of other beings in a wide radius even without the Scout skill. Back

during the initial character creation process, it had cost points to choose a race other than the default—human—so each race had a lot of perks to match its cost. There were also quirky races such as dhamphirs that had huge drawbacks, of course, but those weren't that common. However, racial discrimination was apparently common in certain areas of this world, so that meant it wasn't always a good idea to choose a race other than human.

“Okay, now that you're both full, let's discuss what to do from here on out,” said Haruka.

“Oh yeah, that's important,” said Yuki.

“By the way, the reason why I told you earlier that you should save it for later was because I didn't want to cause a fuss and invite trouble. It wasn't because there was a difference in our friendship level, so rest assured, okay?”

“Huh? Wait, you're explaining that now, after all this time?! I'm happy that you did, but it still feels weird!”

Haruka had suddenly returned to that previous topic from a few minutes ago to reassure Yuki, but Yuki had a look on her face that was a mix of happiness and confusion. Haruka had never treated Yuki any differently from Natsuki, but the fact that she'd brought this up now would probably cast doubts on that statement. *I'm not wrong about this, am I?*

“By trouble, do you mean you didn't want to stand out in a bad way?” Natsuki asked.

“Yeah. It looked like Yuki was the most popular waitress, so it would only invite trouble if I acted friendly with Yuki in that situation, right?”

“Mm, that's a very real possibility. You've become even more beautiful than you were before, Haruka, and since Nao-kun and Touya-kun were with you as well, there was a high chance someone would find that unpleasant and voice their discontentment.”

“I also wanted to avoid attracting attention from our former classmates. A lot of them probably have land mine skills, after all.”

“Land mine skills, huh? That's a good way to put it. However, I think the chances of bumping into our classmates are very low here.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. When we first arrived here, we did our best to stand out by walking up and down the main road, and we’ve been working here at this inn ever since then, but...”

“If someone wanted to group up with you two, then they would’ve already made contact. I see.”

“I’m also fairly sure that those of our classmates who did have land mine skills have already been weeded out by now.”

“Listen to this, Haruka! Natsuki used the term ‘freebies’ to refer to our classmates who had the Plunder skill!” Yuki sounded like she thought that was a bit mean and wanted to get our agreement, but that wish wouldn’t be granted.

“Freebies, eh?” said Haruka.

“That’s a good way to put it,” said Touya.

“Oh, so they were actually freebies,” I said. “Maybe we missed out on some gifts?”

“All of you agree with her?!” Yuki had a very confused look on her face when she saw us nod in agreement to Natsuki’s choice of words.

It really was a fitting moniker for those classmates. If I took into consideration the attributes and talents Yuki and Natsuki had had back on Earth, then they’d probably started with a number of points equal to or more than what I’d had. If they’d spent their points on a variety of skills, then that would be enough to use up the entire life span of anyone who used the Plunder skill on them, regardless of what kind of skill build either of them had gone for. What that meant was that their skills would only disappear for a second before returning along with a boost to their life spans. Freebies really were a good way to describe our classmates with the Plunder skill. *I wish we’d also stood around on purpose to benefit from these freebies—actually, I guess it would’ve been pointless, since those were probably the ones who had already died when we arrived in town.*

“It looks like you’re in the minority here, Miss Freebie,” said Natsuki.

“Huh?!” we all exclaimed.

All three of us were shocked when we heard what Natsuki said. Haruka was the first one of us to recover from that shock, and she stood up to grab Yuki by her shoulders.

She shook Yuki back and forth as she started to interrogate her. “Wait, did you get the Plunder skill, Yuki?!”

“No, I didn’t! The skill I got was the Copy skill! Natsuki, please don’t say something misleading like that!”

“It doesn’t change the fact that you weren’t careful and made a mistake. Relax, Haruka. I told her right away not to use the skill carelessly, so nothing bad has happened.”

“O-Oh, that’s good to know. Whew, I’m really glad that I don’t have to abandon Yuki...” Haruka released Yuki from her grasp and breathed a deep sigh of relief.

Yuki’s face quickly came to resemble that painting *The Scream* when she heard those words at the end. “What?! There was a chance that you were going to abandon me?!”

“It would depend on the situation you were in, but yeah,” Haruka answered nonchalantly while innocently tilting her head to the side.

“I thought we were best friends, Haruka!”

“I mean, if you randomly used your Copy skill on everyone you encountered and became unable to learn all sorts of normal skills, then I wouldn’t have much choice. Right, Nao?”

“We wouldn’t take you along with us for adventurer work in that case, yeah,” I replied. “It would be too dangerous.” Haruka had requested confirmation from me, so I gave a rational answer.

If Yuki had randomly copied skills from a lot of people in town, then she would have ended up with most of the skills that an ordinary adventurer would need, but they would have been Sealed. That would have meant the end of her chances at being a career adventurer.

“Well, if it came down to that, then you’d have to stay in town and wait for us

to come back each day,” said Haruka. “In a way, I guess you’d be like a household maid?”

“Wait, wouldn’t skills related to things like cooking also end up with the Sealed status if she’d copied them from ordinary citizens?” Touya asked. “What would you think about a maid who couldn’t cook, Haruka?”

Haruka averted her gaze in an awkward manner when Touya pointed that out. “Well, in that case, she could just do other sorts of chores, I guess?”

“Th-That’s so mean, Haruka! I can’t really complain, though, since it makes sense to me as well!”

“Relax, Yuki. That potential future got averted, so you don’t have to worry about it. It was thanks to me, you know? Feel free to worship me if you want to express your gratitude.”

“Of course! Thank you very much, Natsuki-sama! I really mean it!”

Natsuki smiled in a playful manner as Yuki worshiped her in a completely serious tone of voice.

I asked Yuki why she was so grateful, and she told me that Natsuki had forbidden her from using the Copy skill as soon as she’d found out about it. Natsuki had also apparently let her copy her own skills and had successfully taught her how to use them.

“She managed to learn the skills I taught her quite easily, so the Copy skill might actually be useful depending on how you use it. If all of you teach her your skills, she might be able to become a downgraded version of everyone here.”

“Downgraded version?!” Yuki exclaimed. “That doesn’t sound nice at all!”

Natsuki came up with an alternative after a few moments of thought. “How does a title like ‘jack-of-all-trades and master of none’ sound instead?”

Yuki still seemed unhappy about it. “It’s better than before, but it still has a negative connotation! Give me a cool title like Multiplayer Master or something!”

“As you wish, Multiplayer Master Yuki,” I said.

“We welcome your addition to our party, Multiplayer Master Yuki,” said Touya.

“You’ll have to work very hard to keep up with us, Multiplayer Master Yuki,” said Haruka.

“I feel like you guys are still making fun of me!”

I mean, that title’s kind of lame, you know? It’s in a similar vein to a title like Super Omni Content Creator with how “unique” it sounds, so yeah. I felt an urge to pat her on the back comfortingly to let her know that she didn’t have to try so hard.

“All right, let’s leave the teasing at that and move on. Just to make sure, both of you are going to come with us, right? If you want to continue working at this inn, I’ll still respect your decision.” Even as she asked them for confirmation, Haruka sounded like she was sure they wouldn’t want to stay here.

Both of them nodded to indicate that they were coming with us.

“No, please let us team up with you,” said Natsuki. “Honestly, our working conditions here aren’t good at all.”

“Yeah, we don’t really have a plan for the future, and our livelihoods could collapse at any moment,” said Yuki. “We’re provided lodging and food as part of our jobs here, but we can only earn one hundred Rea per day even if we work all day. Can you believe that?!”

“Damn, those are some actual exploitative working conditions!” Touya exclaimed.

“The food provided is *that* kind of food from earlier as well, right?” I asked. “I would die inside within three days if I had to work here.”

“That pay would be reasonable for an apprentice, but that sounds way too low otherwise,” said Haruka. “Were there no other kinds of work available to the two of you?”

There were apprenticeship systems in this world similar to those that had existed in the past back on Earth. The apprentice would receive clothes, food, and lodging as they were learning the ropes of a job or trade. In exchange for

that, the apprentice wouldn't receive a salary, only small sums of allowance from time to time. In Yuki and Natsuki's case, however, their clothes weren't included, and their job was just waitress work. Their contract also had worse conditions than a normal part-time worker would have, and they could be fired at any time. With those conditions in mind, a daily wage of one hundred Rea was way too cheap, even if we also took into account the fact that this was a different world.

"This is a small town, so there isn't much work available here," said Yuki. "We don't have any days off either, so we haven't found the time to go look for a different job."

"Technically speaking, we could take days off, but we would have to pay food and lodging fees on those days if we did," said Natsuki.

"You took a day off today to look for work, though, right, Natsuki? Did you find anything?"

"Nope, nothing at all. The only work available would require us to go outside of town."

Apparently, there was a small amount of adventurer work available here in Sarstedt that included gathering quests and hunting quests for both monsters and regular animals. However, that kind of work would be dangerous for Yuki and Natsuki to take on as a group of two. We asked them what combat skills they had, and apparently Natsuki had Level 4 Spearmanship and Level 3 Martial Arts. In terms of just the ability to deal damage, she was stronger than any of us. On the other hand, Yuki only had the skills she'd copied from Natsuki, and all of those skills were just Level 1 because of how the Copy skill worked. She mentioned that she could also use the Level 1 Earth Magic skill, which she'd started out with, but there were risks other than animals or monsters out there, like malicious intent from other people, so it was still dangerous for the two of them to take work that would require them to go outside of town.

At the same time, they wouldn't be able to stabilize their livelihoods at all if they continued to work here at this inn for a mere one hundred Rea per day. They mentioned that they had sort of been gambling on the possibility that they would eventually be able to group up with us, but they also said that they might

have swallowed the risks and tried to take on adventurer work if our reunion had been delayed.

“I mean, in our current state, we couldn’t even afford to buy a change of clothes! If the clothes that we had on us when we first got transported to this world hadn’t been sturdy, then we would’ve ended up in a really dire situation.”

“Mm, that’s for sure. Oh yeah, there was a time where Yuki sneaked into my bed naked because we didn’t have any change of clothes, and—”

Natsuki made a show of weeping out of pity as she started to tell us that anecdote, but Yuki swiftly cut her off.

“D-Did you really have to mention that, Natsuki?!”

“Oh, you’re into yuri, Yuki?” I asked.

“A yuri scene between Natsuki and Yuki wouldn’t feel too off, since they’re both quite high-ranking in the looks department,” said Touya. “By that, I mean it would be something interesting to observe.”

“Yuki, I don’t swing that way, okay?” Haruka got up and sat a bit further away from Yuki as she said that.

“I don’t swing that way either, Haruka! Also, don’t say something like that, Touya! Besides, what actually happened at that time was that we were drying clothes that we’d washed, so we agreed to sleep together—just for warmth!”

“Was that what happened? We’ve been quite busy recently, so my memory’s not very clear...” Natsuki tilted her head to the side as if she was pondering the past.

Yuki grabbed her by her shoulders. “There’s no way you don’t remember, right?! You’re not the type of person to forget about things due to being a bit busy, Natsuki!”

“So yeah, that was just how dire things were for us. That’s why we would be more than happy to group up with the three of you, Haruka.”

Whew. The way she said that with a straight face, as if nothing had happened, was a bit frightening. Would it be too much to back Yuki up, Natsuki? I feel kind of bad for her.

“Okay, let’s set aside the yuri suspicions, since it doesn’t matter. When can the both of you leave with us? Honestly speaking, we’d like to head back to Laffan as soon as possible, so...”

“What do you mean it doesn’t matter, Haruka?!” Yuki exclaimed.

“Well, our contract doesn’t stop us from quitting right away tomorrow, but I would feel bad about that, so how about the day after tomorrow?” Natsuki asked.

“Are you sure about quitting so soon? I don’t mind waiting a bit longer if needed.”

“Yeah, it’s fine. We told the inn lady that it was possible we might quit at any time, and we were hired through the Adventurers’ Guild anyway.”

It sounded quite similar to the difference between direct employment and employment through an agency back on Earth. The tradeoff for less compensation was more freedom, but that also meant that they could be fired at any time. *Also, I feel bad for Yuki again, since she got casually ignored.*

“Are you okay with this as well, Yuki?”

“Yeah, I am. Also, just to be clear, I really don’t swing that way, Haruka!”

Our discussion for the day ended with that firm declaration from Yuki.

The next day, Haruka and I went out to explore Sarstedt together. Yuki and Natsuki stayed behind at the inn to finish their last day on their job, and Touya stayed with them as their bodyguard. Natsuki’s Martial Arts skill had helped the two of them deal with all the men who had tried to make a move on them so far, but there was a chance that some of those men would get unpleasant ideas after Yuki and Natsuki quit their waitress jobs. Touya’s presence served as backup in case anything happened. He had upgraded his gear recently and gave off an aura of strength now, so he would be a good deterrent.

“What’s the plan for today, Haruka?” I asked. “Based on what we heard from Yuki and Natsuki, it doesn’t seem like there’s anything of interest to us in this town.”

The town of Sarstedt didn’t have unique products to attract travelers from

afar. Given the size of the town and how it had been founded, that wasn't strange at all, but it still didn't change the fact that it had few selling points other than the ferry. Well, this town did have a harbor where freshwater fish could be caught, but the taste of the fish we'd had here wasn't anywhere close to good. No matter how hard I thought about it, this town didn't seem like it offered any sort of attraction.

"The freshwater fish we had yesterday were horrible as a dish, yes. However, the fish itself might be useful as an ingredient, right?"

"Oh, I see."

"Well, the fish would have to be alive if we wanted to get rid of that muddy odor before preparing it, so it might be pointless."

"I guess that idea goes straight in the garbage bin."

If the fish was already dead, that muddy odor wasn't something you could get rid of just by cooking it a specific way.

"It might be worth it to give fishing a try if we have the time. The water might be clean if we head upstream, after all."

"Hmm, that sounds like a good idea. I've never actually gone fishing before."

Back in Japan, even if you thought it would be cool to go fishing, opportunities were actually quite rare. At places on the harbor or near the sea where you could theoretically fish, fishing and even entry tended to be prohibited. Lakes weren't really a good idea either, considering the number of invasive species in most of them.

In Japan, fishing in a lake would normally be trespassing, right? Well, that's unless you own the lake yourself, but yeah. On top of trespassing, fishing in the lake would count as theft, and releasing fish back into the lake would count as illegal dumping. The only way to fish that's both legal and environmentally friendly is to go to a fishing spot that operates as a business. It might be different in the countryside, but I'm not sure about that...

"We should have more time to do all sorts of things once Yuki and Natsuki join our party," said Haruka. "It's something to look forward to in the future, but right now, let's focus on looking for a bookstore here in this town."

“Books? Oh, are you looking for an alchemist encyclopedia since they were sold out back at Laffan?” I asked.

“Yeah. I haven’t put my Alchemy skill to use at all yet, so it’s about time. You want to craft a magic bag as well, right?”

“Of course. I’ve been practicing myself, but my Time Magic skill is still Level 1...”

“Mm, it seems like it’s difficult to level up. I guess all we can do is continue to work hard at it.”

We continued to chat about that topic as we were walking down the main road, and in no time at all, we found a bookstore. It was smaller than the one back in Laffan, but considering how small Sarstedt was, this was probably the only bookstore in town. As for the interior of the store, it was exactly the same as the one in Laffan, with worn-out books in the front that seemed to be clearance goods. *Is this what most bookstores are like in this world?* However, the cost of the clearance goods here was eighteen hundred Rea per volume, so they were a bit cheaper. Books were expensive in this world regardless of their condition, so stores probably tried to sell any they had even if they were in bad shape.

“Would you happen to have any alchemist encyclopedias in stock?” Haruka asked the clerk behind the counter.

He responded right away without searching any records or shelves. “Yeah. It’s a bit old, but there is a copy of the 18th Edition in stock.”

Whoa, he knows the inventory and edition of the book we’re looking for by memory? That’s impressive.

“What’s the newest edition released?”

“That would be the 20th Edition. If you’re just going to use it to look up information on ingredients, then there’s no real difference, you know?”

“Is that so...? Oh, do alchemists not buy the newest edition every time one is released?”

“Nah, probably not. Well, revised editions do get published, but they aren’t

relevant for most alchemists, so we don't stock those here."

Developments in the field of alchemy weren't exactly rapid, but there were sometimes new research papers. Revised editions of the current and previous editions would also get published, but that was even rarer. However, from a business perspective, new research tended to be useless most of the time, so it wouldn't be worth it to most alchemists to pay a hefty sum for every new edition of the encyclopedia. What that meant was that revised editions were quite difficult for bookstores to obtain. *Well, that's what the clerk had told us, at least.*

"How much would it be for the 18th Edition?" Haruka asked.

"Since it's an older edition, how about twenty thousand Rea for one?"

"That's a bit expensive. Isn't it two editions out of date? Could you give a slightly cheaper price?"

"Hmm, well, there aren't many people in Sarstedt who would buy this book, but even so..."

I watched Haruka negotiating the price out of the corner of my eye while I browsed the clearance books. These kinds of goods had always drawn my attention whenever I found them. Most would be unsold goods that had been sitting in stock for a long time, so there probably wouldn't be anything good among them, but the possibility of finding a great deal was always so tempting for some reason. However, used books that were up for clearance would sometimes have pages missing. It would be absolutely horrible if pages were missing from something like a mystery novel. Thankfully, it seemed like there were barely any fiction books among the used books here, but it was still possible that important pages would be missing from academic books, so purchasing one would be highly risky. It would be quite difficult to find multiple copies of the same book to replace missing pages, since books weren't mass-produced and printed in this world like they were back on Earth.

Hmm? There are three books in decent condition hidden here among the worn-out books. It looked like none of them had any information either on their covers or on their spines. Book covers in this world seemed to have only one purpose: to decorate or protect the book they were attached to. That meant

that most covers would have nothing written on them, so the lack of information here wasn't strange at all. *Let's check the inside of these three books. Huh? Wait, Time Magic: Beginner, Intermediate, and Advanced?! Okay, calm down. I'm not hallucinating, right? Let's take another look. Okay, yeah, my eyes are working properly. Are these really priced at eighteen hundred Rea per copy?! For real?!*

It would have been a bad idea to give away any hints that I wanted these books, though. I held up the books in my hands and asked the clerk about them to confirm that they were the ones I wanted. "Uhm, why are these three books here? They look like they're in good condition."

"Hmm? Oh, those books? It's because they're grimoires on Time Magic. There's no point leaving them in the shelves behind me since they won't sell, so that's why they're there."

"They don't sell?"

"Nope. They might sell at bookstores in the capital, but who would come to buy grimoires on Time Magic from this bookstore all the way out here in the countryside?"

That made sense, since it seemed like the way this bookstore functioned was that a customer would ask the clerk to fetch whatever book they were looking for. That meant that the only customers who came here were looking for specific books. If I factored in the rarity of grimoires on Time Magic and the location of this town, then the chances of someone coming to this bookstore in search of those kinds of grimoires were basically zero.

"If they won't sell at all, isn't it pointless to even put them on clearance?"

"That's only with respect to the contents. They're nice-looking books, so a guy could buy them and place them in the corner of his room to seem intelligent and impress girls, right?"

"Oh, I guess that's one way I could put these books to use." I nodded, pretending that I agreed with him, but girls weren't that simple at all. *Also, if a girl's willing to come to your room, then wouldn't you have to be on very good terms with her already? This definitely sounds like it's just exaggerated sales talk.*

“Are you interested? The binding looks nice as well, so don’t you think these grimoires would look great as display pieces?”

“Hmm, as display pieces? I don’t know if it’s worth paying that much just for decorations. How about four thousand Rea for all three of these volumes together?”

“Oh, come on! At those prices, I’d be selling at a loss. The lowest I could go would be forty-eight hundred Rea. That girl who’s with you bought something here as well, so I’ll give you that much of a discount.”



I pretended to hesitate. “Hmm...”

“Nao, are you going to waste money again?” Haruka interjected after taking the alchemist encyclopedia she’d bought and stowing it in her backpack. She had a look of amazement and slight annoyance on her face.

“Come on, you don’t have to be so harsh, Haruka. I’ll appear intelligent if I have these grimoires, so it’s not a waste—right, sir?”

“Y-Yeah, of course!” the clerk replied. “Fine, I respect that mentality, so I’ll let you have the three books for forty-five hundred Rea in total! Take it or leave it!”

Thanks for the help, Haruka. It seemed like the clerk had been afraid that I was going to change my mind because of Haruka’s words, so he’d given me an even bigger discount than I’d originally asked for.

“Thanks for the deal! All right, I just got paid recently, so this’ll be my first step to becoming a refined intellectual!”

“Cheers!”

The clerk laughed happily as I handed over the money in exchange for the three grimoires on Time Magic. I had decided I would buy these books even if I didn’t get an additional discount, of course, but I had ended up saving an extra nine hundred Rea. The clerk probably thought he had managed to foist goods that wouldn’t sell on a sucker who didn’t know what he was buying, but I was extremely happy that I had obtained the books that I really wanted. We both felt like we’d won, so in a way, everything worked out fine in the end.



“You managed to get a good deal, right, Nao?”

“Yeah, I did. It would have been bad if I’d slipped up. The clerk could have said these three grimoires were placed in the clearance area by mistake. Thanks for the backup earlier, Haruka.”

A fair price for the three grimoires on Time Magic would have been at least ten times what I had paid. It was possible that the clerk would have raised the price if I’d given any hints that I really wanted them. After all, unlike in modern-day Japan, there was no guarantee that shopkeepers would honor what they’d

written on a price tag.

“These three books together are a bit heavy, but we’ll probably have space for them in our bags, since the dindels will most likely all be gone by the time we get back to our room.”

“Mm, Yuki and Natsuki seemed like they were really starving for sweet food.”

“They were starving for anything good to eat!”

They had devoured two dindels each earlier this morning. I would have been satisfied with just one slice, and so would Haruka and Touya. It was a huge difference in terms of consumption. However, when we had first discovered dindels, we had devoured just as many as Yuki and Natsuki had, so their appetites were perfectly understandable.

“Well, we finished our business for the day sooner than I thought we would. Should we return to the inn, Haruka?”

“No, let’s go look for a bakery. You don’t want to eat rye bread today and tomorrow as well, right?”

“Yeah. I don’t mind if the bread we eat isn’t delicious as long as it doesn’t taste disgusting.”

Yuki and Natsuki had already consumed the bread that we had brought with us to this town. That was a foregone conclusion, given that they’d had to eat *that* kind of food every day here.

As we searched the town for a bakery, Haruka and I asked for directions from the people we came across, but we only ended up finding two bakeries. We bought bread from both and tried some to compare them.

“How is it, Nao?”

“This one’s disgusting. As for this one, it just tastes bland, I guess?”

“That’s how they tasted to me too. All right, let’s go with the bland one, then.”

We decided to purchase more of the bland bread via process of elimination: it wasn’t delicious by any means, but at least it wasn’t disgusting. Next, we headed outside of the town walls. Once we found a suitable place to start a fire,

we started to cook meat from the boar that we had hunted yesterday and sandwiched the cuts between pieces of bread so that we would all have something to eat other than the food from the inn.

“Do you think Yuki and Natsuki will be happy to eat this, Nao?”

“Of course they will. Let me take a taste... Yeah, the meat makes this delicious enough.”

“Mm. The bread’s bland, but this will be fine even once it gets cold, I guess?”

We definitely couldn’t start a bonfire to cook things at the inn, so we had to cook the meat here and then bring it back with us. The closest comparison to this food would be something like a cold hamburger from a fast food restaurant, but it would still be better than having to eat the food from that inn.

“I wish we had cheese or fresh vegetables like lettuce and tomatoes to go with this...”

“We can probably get our hands on pickles in this world, but cheese is most likely expensive, Nao. Also, fresh vegetables aren’t exactly safe for consumption. Thankfully, we all have the Robust skill, but I’m not sure if that helps at all against things like parasites.”

“Touya and Natsuki should be fine with their Robust skill levels, right?”

Touya and Natsuki both had Level 4 Robust, while Haruka and I had Level 2 Robust. Yuki had the lowest level of any of us with Level 1. Natsuki had probably chosen to get a high level for the Robust skill due to the fact that she’d been a bit sickly and fragile back on Earth. On the other hand, Yuki had always been perfectly healthy, so that was probably why she’d only gotten Level 1 Robust. She had yet to get sick in this world, so it did seem like even Level 1 Robust was doing a lot of work.

“The Robust skill makes us resistant to diseases, but parasites aren’t exactly a disease.”

“So you’re saying we should boil our food to disinfect it if we want to be absolutely safe, Haruka?”

“There are other methods like chlorine disinfection and radiation sterilization,

but that's not possible here."

"Radiation sterilization? Is that actually safe?"

"Back on Earth, irradiation is banned in Japan for most purposes, but people overseas use it without any issues. The process doesn't require chemical products like hypochlorous acid, so it's safe, and you can disinfect foods even in their raw state, so it's a good method."

"But you said it's mostly banned in Japan?"

"Yeah, because a lot of Japanese people don't like the concept of radiation."

Based on what Haruka told me, it was possible to irradiate food without heating it up, so irradiation could deal with problems that used to be common on Earth, such as food poisoning from raw meats like liver. Thus, it was a very good method for disinfecting food. Irradiation was apparently also used to disinfect medical equipment. The reason it wasn't legal for use on very many food products was probably that the word radiation gave the average consumer a bad impression.

"Hmm, I wonder if it's possible to create something like a gamma irradiation spell. You said you'd like to eat fresh vegetables, Nao?"

"It sounds like it would be a useful spell, but please don't actually try to develop something like that. What are you going to do if you release excess gamma rays while developing the spell?" Most early radiologists had died due to radiation poisoning. I wasn't going to stubbornly deny the usefulness of radiation, but I wouldn't be willing to agree to experiments unless they were done in a facility with proper protective measures in place. "Oh, what about Purification? Would Purification be able to disinfect food as well, Haruka?"

"I don't think Purification is quite that omnipotent—but actually, come to think of it, I'm not sure. It can even get rid of insect eggs in clothing, so maybe it could do the same with food." She'd started by shooting down my idea, but she changed her mind midway through and paused to ponder the possibility.

If it was possible to sterilize food with the Purification spell, then its usefulness would be off the charts. In fact, it might even be worth inducting it into the magic hall of fame or something.

“I hope you can develop that kind of alternative use for Purification, Haruka. A hypochlorous solution spell would work as well.”

If she decided to develop a hypochlorous solution spell, then it would most likely give off a distinct smell, but the advantage was that we could use magic to heal any damage caused by accidents. On the other hand, genetic damage from a radiation spell seemed like it would be difficult to cure with normal healing magic.

“A hypochlorous solution spell? Do I start by trying to create sodium hypochlorite? It might be possible via electrolysis of brine. What type of magic would it be classified under? Earth? Wind?” It looked like Haruka had fallen into deep thought; she was brainstorming out loud.

Meanwhile, I continued to cook the meat. I hadn’t been very good at chemistry, sadly, so I had no advice to offer to her. It would probably be best to leave things to Haruka, Natsuki, and Yuki. They were all smart people, so there was a good chance that the three of them would be able to come up with an idea. *I still feel like Purification would be an easier method, though. I mean, you can use it to clean all the clothes someone is wearing in an instant, including their underwear. In fact, Purification is so thorough that it even cleans the grease stains inside the clothing fibers. With that in mind, it feels like Purification should have no problem getting rid of any insect eggs attached to vegetables.*



When we finished our errands and returned to the inn, Haruka and I were greeted by the sight of Touya doing his usual daily training outside.

“We’re back, Touya,” I said. “Did any problems come up?”

“Nope. Yuki and Natsuki said they wouldn’t tell the customers that they would be quitting, so things should be fine.”

Technically speaking, it was kind of cold of them to not mention that they would be quitting, but in the end, those guys were just customers. Yuki and Natsuki weren’t exactly on good terms with any of them, so it was definitely better to stay silent in order to avoid unnecessary trouble.

“I see. Oh yeah, here’s lunch for you.” I handed him two of the hamburgers that I had made earlier—well, I guess they were more like sandwiches?

“Thanks, dude! I really didn’t want to eat *that* food from this inn again.” Touya happily took the sandwiches from me and took a bite out of one right away. “Mm, the bread’s all right too. I think I can put up with this until we return to Laffan. There isn’t much taste to it, but it’ll do.”

It would have been a bit hard to chew the meat if it had just been sandwiched between two thick slices of bread, so I had added extra cuts to make it easier to chew on, but that was it; it was true that the sandwich lacked toppings for more flavor.

“Maybe we should have bought pickles to go with these sandwiches,” said Haruka.

“Pickles? They don’t taste disgusting in this world, do they...?” Touya asked.

“I’m not sure. When we think about the word pickles, what comes to mind are vegetables preserved in vinegar, but there are also pickles that are made with lactic acid fermentation, so pickles in this world might have a distinct taste to them.”

“So those vegetables we ate yesterday actually were pickles?” I asked.

Those vegetables had seemed like they had quite a strong taste for being pickled in vinegar. Back on Earth, fermented food was well known as a type of food that was “love it or hate it.” In Japan, vegetables that were pickled over a long period of time tended to be made with lactic acid fermentation, but they were definitely not something every Japanese person enjoyed. Besides, pickles sold in Japanese supermarkets in recent times tended to just be vegetables that had been marinated briefly. There were probably very few supermarket pickles that were actually prepared via the long, tedious traditional methods.

“If it’s possible, I’d rather eat pickles that you made, Haruka,” said Touya.

“I completely agree,” I said. “We can’t go wrong that way.”

“Uhm, I only have a vague idea of how to make the marinade for pickles, you know? Well, I’ll give it a shot.”

I heard her mutter something about vinegar and white wine afterwards as she tried to recall the ingredients, but I was sure she would succeed eventually. *I'm placing my absolute faith in you, Haruka!*

Side Story—Jade Wings: Episode 1

You never know what might happen to you in life. I certainly didn't expect to die in a traffic accident. I knew some people who had gotten into such accidents before, and the average person's chances of dying in a traffic accident were supposedly higher than their chances of dying in an aircraft accident, so it wasn't like I thought it would never happen to me, but still... Well, that's a lie. I really did think a traffic accident would never happen to a girl like me, and I had no logical basis for thinking so. Yeah, I was wrong. *I guess this is how Yoshino Kitamura's life comes to an end.*

So yeah, I was dead. It was quite a shocking truth to absorb, but I never got the time to process my emotions due to the overwhelming rush of shocking information that followed. *Evil god? Transportation to a different world? What? Is this some kind of game? Oh, something that looks like a display screen appeared in midair. Okay, so we can allocate points to get skills from this list here. It looks like I have 145 Points that I can use.*

The instructions on the display screen made this sound kind of similar to the character creation process for a tabletop RPG. I had played tabletop RPGs before with my big bro, since he'd needed an extra body to get a campaign started. I had only played a few times, though. I'd always been kind of annoyed whenever he'd dragged me into sitting through sessions with him; I'd had no idea that experience would turn out to be useful at this important crossroads in my life.

Thanks, big bro! I'll always be grateful to you even after I'm reborn in another world! I hope you'll live a good, long life and take care of our parents in my place! In exchange, I'll forget about the lewd content I discovered on the secondhand computer I got from you! I wanted to use that as blackmail one day to extort some spare cash out of you, but I died without getting a chance to—wait, what if my mom sees those lewd files?! She would have thought I was the one who'd collected them, right? Okay, let's forget about that. I did name the folder "Brother Blackmail Content," so I hope she won't misunderstand.

All right, that's enough about the past. It was time to start creating my character. Based on what I knew from my previous experiences, a character that was specialized for one field was the strongest build you could go for. If you tried to build a character who was equally good at everything, you would end up with a character who couldn't do anything. That would have been okay for the tabletop RPG sessions that my brother had dragged me into, but I definitely didn't want to spend my new life as some kind of useless background character. The only logical choice here was to go with a specialized build.

As for what to choose, I had medical skills in mind. After all, in the past, I had dreamed about becoming a doctor. The heartwarming episode that inspired that dream wasn't really relevant. All that mattered was that becoming a doctor wasn't something you could accomplish just because you wanted to. That reality had slapped me in the face after I'd been in high school for a while.

Back in middle school, I'd been considered one of the smarter people in my class, but I'd been relegated to average once I entered high school. Then, when I was researching where to go to college, I discovered the tuition and the standard exam score required to get into a medical university, and I'd come to the realization that it would probably be impossible for me. Now, however, if I wanted to become a doctor, I wouldn't have to spend any money on tuition or "donations" to grease the wheels. *I don't even have to study! That's how these skills work, right?*

All right, doctor it is. It also seemed like doctors earned a lot of money. I had heard stories of bad working conditions and long hours, but those probably only applied to doctors who worked at big hospitals. *The doctor I knew who worked at the clinic near my house seemed to have a very easygoing life.*

Wait, that's not relevant to what's in front of me right now. Okay, let's focus. It looked like the skills available that were related to the medical field were Medicine and Pharmacy. Actually, there was magic available as well. It would be way cooler to heal all sorts of diseases and wounds in an instant with magic. An amazing doctor like that would surely be able to earn a lot of money. In fact, I was fairly sure that if a doctor who could heal bone fractures in an instant had existed back in Japan, then people wouldn't have hesitated to pay tens of thousands yen for that treatment. *This plan will work, right? Yeah, it definitely*

will. My life might be secure and easy now.

Hmm, what's this? I couldn't increase the level of my Light Magic at all for some reason. The name of the skill itself was grayed out on the display screen. It looked like I probably needed to get the Magic Aptitude: Light skill that was next to it in the list. The aptitude skill itself would cost 10 Points, but it looked like the logical choice to experiment with.

Okay, I see. The Magic Aptitude: Light skill is a prerequisite for the Light Magic skill, and each level of Light Magic requires an additional 5 Points. That means I would need to spend a total of 60 Points for the aptitude skill and Level 10 Light Magic. The total cost is definitely worth it—wait, hold on. I would need 10 Points to get to Level 4, but the cost per level increases by 5 Points at Levels 6, 8, and 10. I would need 25 Points to level up from Level 9 to Level 10, which means that the total number of points I would need to reach Level 10 Light Magic is 140.

Ugh. I wasn't sure if that was worth it. I could just barely afford it, but it felt like it would be a waste. After all, I could also get a different type of magic to Level 3 with those 25 Points. That being the case, it would probably be better to stop right before the larger increases in cost at Levels 5, 7, or 9. The only problem was that I had no idea what kinds of spells would be available at particular levels. It seemed like there probably wouldn't be many good spells available at Level 5, so I would have to get my Light Magic to either Level 7 or 9. If I leveled up my Light Magic to Level 9, then I would end up with 30 Points remaining. It didn't sound like a bad plan for the specialized character build that I wanted, but I wasn't completely sure.

W-Well, this is a different world I'm going to be transported to, and there might be all sorts of unknown dangers lurking, right? I just want to open a clinic in a safe area, like inside a town, and watch the money roll in, but is that actually impossible...?

Actually, I would need funds to open a clinic in the first place, and that means that I would need to start out by earning a decent sum of money on my own. I wasn't sure what kind of world I was going to get transported to, but I would probably need money to rent a place, just like how I would have needed to pay a security deposit and rent back in Japan. In addition, I wouldn't get a lot of patients right away, so I would need a decent amount of money for my living

expenses until more people began visiting my clinic.

What else is there to take in account...? Oh yeah, it would be bad if I couldn't protect myself against slave traders who kidnap people to sell, so it would probably be a good idea to make sure I have skills for prowess with weapons. Okay, let's go with Level 7 for Light Magic, and that'll leave me with 70 Points to spend on other skills.

All right, that change left me with a lot of points to spare for whatever else I need. It would probably be a good idea to decide on a weapon skill first. A blunt weapon like a club would be the simplest to use, right? With a club, I would only have to swing it around and smack people, and it would be much easier to maintain than something like a sword. I took another look at the list of skills, and I found a skill called Club Fighting. This will probably do just fine. Weapons like maces probably counted as clubs as well.

Enhanced Mana Capacity also looked like a good skill to get. I would be useless whenever I ran out of mana for healing spells, after all. *Oh yeah, if I'm going to heal the sick, I'll need to be able to prevent myself from getting infected as well. Pathology or Pharmacy? Hmm, I'll go with Pharmacy. I should probably get the General Knowledge skill with my remaining 5 Points. As a doctor, I'll have to interact with people who were born and raised in a different world, and a doctor without common sense would be quite sketchy.*

Okay, my skill build looks like it's complete.

General Knowledge (5 Points required), Magic Aptitude: Light (10 Points required)

Enhanced Mana Capacity (10 Points required), Level 2 Club Fighting (10 Points required)

Level 2 Robust (15 Points required), Disease Resistance (5 Points required)

Poison Resistance (5 Points required), Level 7 Light Magic (65 Points required)

Level 3 Pharmacy (20 Points required)

All that was left to do was to wait for the transportation to happen. I wanted

to use the remaining time to take another look at what other skills were available in the list, but it appeared that this was a system where you were only able to see the skills you were able to afford. I had no points left since I had finished my skill build, so I was only able to see the skills that I had decided to get. There was the option of resetting my skills so I could look at the list again, but it would probably be bad if I ran out of time while I was looking at other skills. *Yeah, I should hold back.* I wondered if there were any skills that cost more than 150 Points, but of course, I couldn't see any.

While I was spacing out, the evil god announced, “Well then, are you all done? It’s about time for your transportation! I’ll use any leftover points on random skills after this, so keep that in mind!”

It sounded like there was a bailout system in place for people who ran out of time while deciding on skills. However, random skills would have ruined my build, so I had made the right choice by not going back to check the other skills available. *Very smart of me, if I do say so myself. It’s always a good idea to finish things ahead of time.*

“Oh yeah, the souls closest to you right now will also get transported to the same place in the other world. It might be a good idea to stay near people you know—if you can tell each other apart!”

What?! We aren’t going to be transported to the same place together?! Oh God, this is bad! I didn’t expect this at all! My skill build only works if I’m in a party with other people for combat! Okay, if I have some kind of sixth sense, it better start working now!

Oh, I felt a flash of insight! Hmm, okay, that direction! No legs—gotta dash forward somehow! No arms—gotta grab a soul somehow and ram into another one with my body! Okay, I made it!

“All right, I hope you all enjoy your second life!”

As soon as I heard the evil god say those words, my surroundings were engulfed in a bright light.



After the light faded away and I could see again, I felt a familiar presence near

me, and I yelled excitedly, “Victory!”

“Don’t yell so loud!”

“Oh, my bad—wait, who are you?!”

I was sure that it was my best friend Kaho Kawabuchi who was near me, but when I turned to take a look, her appearance wasn’t at all what I’d expected. She looked shorter than average height for a girl, which helped convince me that she was Kaho. I was used to her being short; people mistook her for an elementary school student all the time. *But what’s with those fine ears on your head and that fine tail on your butt?! Also, why does your face look so much more beautiful than before?!*

“No, seriously, who are you?!”

“My my, such bad manners when you were the one who yanked me to your side. I’m Kaho, of course.”

“Yeah, that’s what I thought! But what’s up with that way of talking?! I can accept the fact that you look like you went through cosmetic surgery, but I don’t remember you ever speaking like that, Kaho!”

“Oh, this is merely the character that I intend to role-play. After all, it’s entirely possible to fade away into the background as a non-player character with no distinct qualities, but the game master might deign to save a character who stands out as especially memorable, so I decided upon this persona—just in case I should ever fumble a dice roll.”

My big bro was friends with Kaho’s brother, and Kaho’s brother had also sometimes dragged her into tabletop sessions. She’d been way more eager to participate than I had been, however.

“So you’re saying that the evil god from earlier is like our game master?”

“Indeed. That god had an air of mischief about him similar to the trickster gods in all sorts of myths from around the world. He seemed like the type of god who would enjoy bestowing powers and blessings upon humans whom he deemed interesting.”

“Ugh, you’re right! But still, I feel like you have way too many character traits

for this role of yours. I mean, on top of that slightly pretentious way of talking, you have what look to me like fox ears, so...”

“Don’t call it pretentious! *Cough*. Please, this is merely refined role-playing.” She’d dropped the character she was role-playing for a brief second, but she resumed it after the cough. If she was going to insist that it was just role-playing, then I didn’t really have any rebuttals.

“Um, I would appreciate it if you two would hold back from talking about things I don’t understand. An explanation would also work instead.”

“Oh, my bad, Sae,” I said. “Wait, you didn’t choose human as your race either?!”

The other soul I had rammed into earlier was Sae. Her full name was Saeko Yamamura. At first, I’d thought both Sae and Kaho looked the same as before, but after I took a closer look, I realized Sae appeared to be an elf.

“You two adjusted your appearances way too much! The fact that both of you look so different makes me stand out in a bad way!”

Kaho obviously looked like she had blown points on skills to adjust her appearance, and Sae had also become beautiful due to being an elf. On the other hand, all of the skills I had decided to get were practical ones, so my appearance probably hadn’t changed at all.

“It’s only natural that I would change my appearance, tee hee,” said Sae. “After all, the desire to become beautiful has crossed every girl’s mind at least once.”

“I must say, though, I’m quite impressed by the fact that you were able to distinguish us back when we were merely two souls among countless other sparks, Yoshino,” said Kaho.

“It’s because my sixth sense kicked in! Also, are you really going to continue role-playing that character of yours, Kaho?”

“Of course. It might turn out to be useful now that we have verified the existence of gods.”

Hmm, I guess that’s a good point. Oh well, it’s not really a problem. Besides,

the fact that she's doing her best to role-play is cute in its own way, so why not?

"All right, let's share what our skills are before we do anything else," I said.
"It'll help us decide on a course of action."

"Indeed. It would be pure folly not to form a party after we were blessed with the good fortune to find one another like this."

"I guess I'll be the first one—wait, what's this? I see something," said Sae. She tilted her head in confusion and extended her hands out in front of her face as if she was searching for something.

"What do you see?"

"Do you not see it, Yoshino? I can see my name, my age, and the skills that I decided to get earlier. This screen appeared in front of me when I thought about what my skills were."

Is it like a character sheet for a tabletop RPG? Do I just have to think to myself that I want to see—oh, there we go. I see all of the skills that I decided to get earlier. It looks like there are no character stats in here, though. Oh well.

"Oh, I had no idea we could access something like this," I said.

"Indeed. It would also appear that this is the only means available to check our skills."

"Well, this just means people who forgot some of the skills they chose can rest easy." Before she listed her skills, Sae mentioned that she had gotten so few that she couldn't possibly forget them.

Magic Aptitude: Fire, Magic Aptitude: Earth, Level 8 Fire
Magic

Level 4 Earth Magic

What was she thinking with this skill build...? "Your build is way too specialized, Sae! How many points did you have to spend on all of this?!"

"Well, as you can see, I also chose the elf race, so I spent a total of 150 Points on my skills."

"You had more points than I did! You should have given it more thought

before you decided on what skills to get!" *The skill build that I aimed for was a specialized one as well, but I look like a jack-of-all-trades compared to you, Sae!*

"Isn't this a normal skill build for a mage?" Sae asked. "I wasn't confident in my ability to use a sword, so I felt like it would be easier for me to cast spells from the back lines. I thought our entire class would be transported together, after all."

"That sounds like a perfectly reasonable strategy," said Kaho. "Armed with magic of such a high caliber, you would be more than capable of carrying your own weight."

"That's only if you can find people with different skill builds to make up a well-balanced party, like in a game! Your strategy was gambling way too much on others!"

People like Sae who had little experience with fantasy games probably assumed a standard party would consist of something like a warrior, a mage, and a priest. That kind of party composition would work fine if you were only taking combat into consideration, but...

"Is that so, Yoshino? I happen to have a skill build that's rather similar to Sae's."

General Knowledge, Attractive Appearance, Weapon Proficiency: Greatswords

Level 8 Greatsword Fighting, Level 3 Peerless Strength

"My race of choice was beastwoman, so I allocated 130 Points for my skills."

"Your skill build is even worse, Kaho! The only thing you can do is swing around a greatsword!"

General Knowledge only provided information about common sense in this world, Attractive Appearance only affected her looks, and Peerless Strength only increased her strength, so her skill build really was specialized just for swinging around a greatsword.

"Couldn't you have at least skipped out on getting the Attractive Appearance skill or lowered your Greatsword Fighting Skill to Level 7 in order to have points

for other skills?”

“A jack-of-all-trades would have no opportunities to shine, Yoshino. Characters who are unparalleled in a certain field are the ones who can determine the course of fate.”

Doesn't that only apply to games? This world isn't a game, so we have to deal with daily life here, unlike in games that only have combat, you know?

“Now then, it's time for you to reveal your skills as well, Yoshino.”

“Well, my skill build is also kind of specialized, so...”

General Knowledge, Magic Aptitude: Light, Enhanced Mana Capacity

Level 2 Club Fighting, Level 2 Robust, Disease Resistance
Poison Resistance, Level 7 Light Magic, Level 3 Pharmacy

I had aimed for a specialized skill build, but it actually looked pretty normal compared to the builds that Kaho and Sae had decided on.

“Intriguing. Your skill build appears quite well balanced.”

“Yeah, it's well-balanced compared to you two! The two of you are good for nothing but greatsword combat and magic!”

“I'm glad you chose to specialize in close combat, though, Kaho,” said Sae. “If you'd specialized in magic like I did, then Yoshino would have to be at the front for close combat.”

“Yeah, I'm glad as well,” I said. “I would've felt uneasy about being responsible for holding the front line with just Level 2 Club Fighting.”

The fact that none of us had any real defensive skills also made me feel uneasy, but our only option was to have Kaho as our front line while I did my best to cast healing magic on her. Considering how small Kaho was, I felt a bit bad about this arrangement, but it was better than having a mage as our front line.

I blurted out a thought that came to me all of a sudden. “Oh yeah, it looks like none of us took skills like Plunder that seemed absurdly strong.”

Both Kaho and Sae glared at me.

“Who in their right mind would willingly accept a skill that seemed so strong from someone who called himself an evil god? I never considered that an option,” said Kaho.

“Overwhelming power most likely comes at the price of guaranteed doom as well,” said Sae.

“Indeed. It was probably the kind of power that certain gods would offer to humans to tempt them. A skill of that kind would be more fitting for the protagonist or antagonist of a story, but it would most likely lead them to misfortune or to an untimely demise,” said Kaho. “I would be reluctant to play an undistinguished background character whom the game master might choose to snuff out at any moment, but neither do I have any desire to take on the role of a protagonist who would have to overcome all manner of obstacles in her path.”

“Kaho, you’re thinking about this too much like a game—or, well, I can’t really say that, since we actually did meet a god,” I said.

“Is that what you two were talking about earlier in relation to standing out enough as a character?” Sae asked. “It sounds like a hard thing to balance.”

Sae looked like she was a bit amazed at the amount of effort Kaho was putting into role-playing, and I felt the same way. Anyway, we would probably have to go through trials and tribulations due to the fact that we had attracted enough interest from a god for him to give us blessings and powers in the first place. *All right, I guess I’ll use my background character power level to help counterbalance Kaho’s main character power level. Part of me wanted to show off like a main character with my amazing healing skills, but oh well.*

“Well, thankfully, our party balance isn’t that bad, is it?” I said.

If I had to classify our party, then it was actually a fairly standard one with a warrior, a priest, and a mage.

“Indeed. Fortune has not abandoned us yet. Your skill build would probably have enabled you to support any two other party members regardless of their builds, however.”

“I guess that’s true.” Even if I were in a party with two other warriors, that would still be a pretty standard configuration. A party of three priests with skill builds similar to mine would have been fine as well, since we would all technically be capable of combat and could all heal ourselves as well. The worst combination would be if the two other party members were both mages, since I would have to be the frontline fighter. It would be a bit difficult, but I felt like I would be able to pull it off somehow.

“Even if all of us happened to have skill builds similar to mine, there would still be plenty of paths to circumvent the problem,” said Kaho. “However, we would have no end of trouble if we were all like Sae.”

“Wait, is my skill build bad?”

“Well, no, but we wouldn’t really make a good party of adventurers if we were all mages, you know?” I said.

That kind of party would have overwhelming firepower, but it would also fall apart if enemies got anywhere near us. It was a type of party that would shine in war, not as a normal party of adventurers. In many ways, Sae was probably the one who would have been in the most danger if she’d been transported to this world by herself.

“So I guess we were all blessed with good luck due to the fact that Yoshino didn’t go for a completely specialized build,” said Sae.

“I mean, I decided on these skills with a specialized build in mind. I did think a bit about making it balanced as well, but still.”

Kaho and Sae had been two big factors in my mind when I’d been deciding what skill build to go for. Well, the reason that I had decided to specialize in healing magic with Cure spells was just because I enjoyed the healer role, but I’d also been fairly sure, based on Kaho’s personality, that she would choose skills related to close combat, since I had played tabletop sessions with her before. On the other hand, Sae didn’t really play any games, and she didn’t seem like the type of person who would enjoy the concept of close combat, so I’d been fairly sure she would choose a build that would allow her to attack at range, like a mage or archer. *They both ended up with builds that are more specialized than I thought they would be, but my predictions were more or less*

correct, so the bond of our friendship really is quite strong!

“Well, how about we test our combat abilities before we head somewhere else?” I asked. “It looks like there’s nobody nearby, so that’s convenient for us.”

Our party balance was technically good, but that was just on the surface. None of us had a clear idea of what any of us could actually do. Thankfully, it looked like we had been transported to the middle of a grassy plain somewhere. There was a highway visible nearby, but there were no signs of people on it. It looked like the area we were in was quite safe. However, my General Knowledge skill had taught me that outside of towns, it was normal to encounter monsters roaming around in the wild, so it was important for us to test out our combat abilities. *It’s also kind of scary to me that the only one among us who might actually be able to handle combat right now is Sae...*

“All right, I’ll start by testing my skills,” said Sae. “The strongest skills I have right now seem to be either Jet Fire or Explosion from my Level 8 Fire Magic.”

“Explosion! The very name of that skill sounds incredibly powerful!” Kaho exclaimed.

“Well, I guess I’ll try that spell out first, then.”

“Oh yeah, just to make sure, remember to cast at a place far away from us,” I said.

“Okay. *Explosion!*”

The moment Sae exclaimed the name of the spell, a shining spherical object rocketed out of her hands. It was about the size of a baseball and shone bright yellow. It flew as fast as a baseball shot out of a pitching machine and landed dozens of meters away. When it landed, it exploded in a burst of light and sound. That explosion created an enormous crater in the ground and kicked up a huge volume of dust and dirt into the air.



All of us were completely speechless at the sight of this overwhelming destructive power. It had completely surpassed our expectations. As we all fell silent, Sae wobbled on her feet as if she'd lost her balance and then collapsed to the ground.

"Are you okay, Sae?" I asked.

"Yeah, I'm fine. I feel like I've been drained of *something*, though. Maybe that was my mana?" As she said that, she tried to get on her feet again, but she collapsed back onto the ground and placed one of her hands on her forehead. The spell she'd just used had definitely looked like it would cost a lot of mana given its sheer destructive power. *A spell that exhausts almost all of your mana after one use sounds way too costly...*

"Might that imply that the level of a magic skill and your total mana capacity are two separate statistics?" Kaho asked. "These simple restrictions upon the use of magic will certainly make life trying for us."

I had thought that mana points or something like that would also increase if I spent points on increasing the level of a magic skill, but reality wasn't as simple as games were. It probably wouldn't be as bad for me, since I had decided to get the Enhanced Mana Capacity skill, but it would still be a good idea to watch out for how much mana each spell consumed.

"I guess I'll go next? There's not really much that I can do, though..." As soon as I'd been transported to this world, I'd found that I naturally had a grasp of what kinds of Light Magic spells I could use at my level. *However, there's one problem, and it's that Light Magic has zero offensive spells! Well, I could use spells like Purification against undead monsters and enchant weapons with the Holy Weapon spell, but those aren't things I can test right now...*

"Oh, are you going to abstain, Yoshino?" Kaho asked. "That would mean it is I who is the next challenger, but..."

"Mm, you don't have a greatsword on you, so we can't really test anything. Okay, that's it for our tests! Yay?"

If we were to summarize what we had discovered from our tests, then we'd learned that Sae's magic was powerful, but she would only be able to use her

most powerful spell once.

As for Kaho and me, we wouldn't be able to do anything at the moment, even if we encountered a monster.

"Uh, we're in a bad situation, right...?" Sae asked.

"Yeah," I replied. "The worst part about this is that none of us have weapons."

"Well, Sae, there is the alternative strategy of picking weaker spells that you can use many times rather than using your strongest spell once," said Kaho. "Yoshino requires a club to be able to make use of her skill, but there is, in a manner of speaking, a way to deal with that problem. Let's see..."

She looked around our surroundings for a moment before going and breaking a branch from a nearby tree. The branch was about fifty centimeters long and as thick as my arm, and she stripped it of twigs and leaves before she handed it to me.

"Here. You can use this as a temporary substitute for a club."

I took the branch from her and swung it around for a bit. However, it would be ridiculous to consider this simple tree branch an actual club.

"This would probably give off a bad impression..." *I mean, this branch just makes me look even more suspicious, right?*



"Hmm, you want to perform healing here?"

"Yes. Is that forbidden?" I asked. "We happen to be in need of some more money for our traveling expenses..."

"No, you're free to do so, since this is outside of town, but..."

Yep, this guard is definitely suspicious of us. We were standing outside the gates of the town that we had discovered down the highway—standing there exposed to the guard's look of suspicion. That was to be expected, since we were a group of three girls who were just wearing plain clothes. The only possession that any of us had was my fake club, and our group was also a weird mix of races, with a human, an elf, and a beastwoman who looked like a child. If

there was any guard out there who wouldn't be suspicious of a group that was strange in all of those ways, then I would have loved to meet him.

I offered my healing services for free in an attempt to make a good impression. "Well, uhm, we encountered some trouble on the way here, so that's the reason for our plight. Oh, if you would allow me to prove myself, then I could heal any injuries that you might have."

Luck happened to be on my side. "I'm not doubting your abilities. I do happen to have a bruise that I suffered the other day. Can you take a look at it?" When he rolled up his sleeve, I saw a black and blue bruise on the guard's upper arm.

"No problem! Leave this to me."

It was a great trade: a single use of Light Cure to counter his initial suspicion. I would be able to test out my healing magic as well, so all things considered, this was a very convenient opportunity for me.

"Light Cure."

Right after I had cast my spell, the bruise healed completely.

The look of suspicion in the guard's eyes vanished just as quickly as the bruise. "Whoa, it appears you're quite skilled at healing magic. You'll definitely be able to earn money for traveling expenses. However, in my experience, it's rarer to see adventurers with injuries at this gate compared to the gates of other towns."

"Really...?"

"Yeah. You probably know this as well, since you walked here from the highway, but monsters rarely appear on that road. You would have to be very unlucky to arrive here at this town from Laffan with injuries. If you're going to heal adventurers in exchange for money, then I would suggest doing it over there outside of the gate on the other side of the river."

I looked in the direction the guard was pointing, and I saw what looked like a harbor at the end of the straight road in front of us. *Oh, so this town is a ferry landing, and it's more dangerous at the other side of the river. I'd be able to earn more on the other side, but that's only if we can manage to protect ourselves there.*

“Thank you very much for the useful information.”

“Don’t worry about it. Consider it my thanks for the healing.”

I felt like I had just completed a quest in a game, with sound effects playing in the background as a message window like “Yoshino obtained useful information!” popped up. If this were a game, then another message window would have appeared with the words “New Quest: Cross the river while spending as little money as possible!” to indicate what we should do next.

The total amount of money we had between the three of us was thirty large silver coins, and in front of me was a guard with a friendly smile on his face. As for my fellow party members standing behind me, I had Sae, who didn’t have the General Knowledge skill, and Kaho, who definitely looked like she wouldn’t be fit for the task of negotiating with adults due to how small she was. *Great, negotiating is most likely going to end up being very difficult!* I muttered those words to myself in my mind as I pretended to wipe some sweat off my forehead.

Chapter 3—Return to Laffan

Fortunately, nothing of note happened during Yuki and Natsuki's last day as waitresses, so we were able to leave Sarstedt the next morning, just as we had planned. We weren't pressed for time on our journey back to Laffan the way we had been on our journey to Sarstedt, so we took our time, especially since Yuki and Natsuki were with us now. On the road, we just ate the sandwiches we'd made for all three meals of the day, but Yuki and Natsuki enjoyed them way more than I'd thought they would. Tears almost came to my eyes out of both happiness and pity when I saw they were so glad to eat such simple food. I had an urge to exclaim something like "I'll treat you girls to some great food!" after I saw their reactions to the sandwiches.

"Did neither of you ever go outside of Sarstedt, Yuki?" I asked.

"No, all we did was register at the Adventurers' Guild. We weren't able to afford equipment that we would need for work outside of town, after all."

Natsuki and Yuki had registered at the Adventurers' Guild without changing their names, apparently. That meant that I didn't have to change the names that I called them like I had with Touya.

"Mm, that makes sense. I would've been very surprised if you'd been able to buy proper equipment with that tiny amount of starting money."

Yuki and Natsuki were wearing normal clothes made of plain cloth, similar to the ones you would start with in an RPG. The only weapon they had on them was Natsuki's spear; they had squeezed the money out of their budget so they would look like proper adventurers, but they hadn't actually used it in combat yet. *Natsuki's Spearmanship skill is Level 4, though, so it's higher than mine. Hmm, maybe she should use my spear.*

I brought the idea up to her. "Uh, Natsuki, do you want to use my spear? You'll probably be able to put it to better use."

"Huh?" She looked surprised for a brief second but then shook her head. "Oh,

no, I haven't contributed in any way at all yet, so it would be wrong for me to use that expensive-looking spear of yours. Besides, you know, there's that proverb about how only a bad workman blames his tools, right?"

"I see—so you're basically telling Nao that he has to depend on an expensive spear because he isn't a very good spearman?" Haruka asked.

"Ugh!" I said. "I can't believe you would say something so mean, Natsuki, but I can't deny it!"

"Haruka—?! No, hear me out, Nao! That's not what I think at all, okay?!"

I was really touched by the sensitivity Natsuki showed when she panicked and did her best to soothe my ego. Of course, I knew Haruka was just joking, so it wasn't like I had actually suffered a painful blow to my confidence.

"It's a fact that Natsuki's the strongest of any of us when it comes to close combat, however," said Haruka. "She has the Weapon Proficiency: Spears skill along with Level 4 Spearmanship and Level 3 Martial Arts, after all."

It was definitely true that Natsuki seemed like she was quite strong based on those skills. She had other good skills as well, such as resistance to poison and disease, healing via Light Magic, and skills that would fit a scout or thief role in a standard fantasy game party. Overall, her skill build made her the most capable of any of us at adapting to whatever situation that might come her way. Her skill build was a bit similar to mine as well, so there was a very real possibility that I would end up becoming a downgraded version of Natsuki if I didn't do my best to improve my Time Magic. More importantly, if I failed to do so, then I wouldn't be able to joke about the word downgrade with Yuki.

"That's just in terms of my skills, though," said Natsuki. "I haven't actually seen any combat yet. How was it when the three of you experienced combat for the first time?"

We looked at each other and did our best to recall our first experience. *Our first foe was a tusk boar, if I remember correctly. Touya faced the boar head on, while Haruka and I backed him up from the trees, so...*

"I would say that I got used to it fairly quickly, I guess?" said Touya. "But I also couldn't really stop and worry at the time."

“I only had to use my bow and magic, so I think it was a bit different for me,” said Haruka. “However, I was easily able to cast aside my hesitation after I thought about the money we would need for things like inn fees and other expenses, since I knew we could earn that money by slaying the boar.”

“Whoa, a pragmatic perspective. That’s exactly what I’d expect from you, Haruka,” said Natsuki.

“In a way, boars are basically like a free source of money that chases you,” I said. “Gutting the boar was quite difficult the first time, though.”

These days, I was able to gut and butcher boars with ease, but in the beginning, I had struggled with things like skinning a boar or slicing its head off, which had made me feel nauseous. I didn’t feel that way about the meat once we had finished butchering a boar, but the internal organs still gave me an uncomfortable feeling.

“Gutting, huh? I guess we’ll have to get used to that as well. Let’s do our best, Yuki.”

“Oh, so I have to learn as well? I’m not good with that kind of thing, but oh well...”

Yuki had a bitter smile on her face when she heard what Natsuki said to her, but she still looked like she was willing to learn. She wasn’t the type of girl who would say “There’s absolutely no way I can do that!” even about things she wasn’t comfortable with, after all. Well, if she’d actually said something ridiculous and selfish like that under these circumstances, then I wouldn’t have hesitated to slap her, girl or not.

“You’ll both get used to it eventually, even if you don’t really want to,” I said. “You have the Copy skill, Yuki, so you might quickly get better at it than we are.”

“You also need to get used to seeing blood and guts if you want to actually accomplish anything in combat,” said Touya. “If you flinch at the very sight in the middle of combat, then you’ll die right away.”

Touya made a very good point. If we had a party member who screamed things like “I’m scared!” or “Eww!” during combat, then I was confident that I would disband that party on the spot.

“It sounds like you all went through and overcame all sorts of troubles,” said Natsuki. “Well, I suppose that goes without saying, considering that you managed to get to Sarstedt as quickly as you did.”

“I wanted to go to Sarstedt much earlier than we did, but I wasn’t completely sure if you two were actually there, so I had to wait and make sure we’d be able to protect ourselves on the way there,” said Haruka.

“Nah, don’t worry about it, Haruka! You did amazing compared to us!” said Yuki. “I was a big part of the reason we didn’t go outside of town, but that doesn’t change the fact that we weren’t able to venture outside.”

“Mm. I was hoping that you would be able to find us, so I’m actually quite relieved,” said Natsuki. “Right before you found us, we were thinking about how it was about time to quit our job at that inn, even if it meant taking on more risks.”

“Yeah, I guess you wouldn’t be able to plan out a future with the meager pay from that job,” I said.

“Yes, that just seems to be how it is for jobs that anyone can do in this world.” Natsuki smiled bitterly as she said that. It had truly been an exploitative part-time job, but life wasn’t easy in this world.

“Oh yeah, we can just slay any enemies we encounter on our way back as practice for Yuki and Natsuki,” said Haruka.

Yuki looked very surprised when she heard what Haruka said, and she raised her voice in a panic. “Huh?! I don’t have a weapon, you know?! I don’t have any skills related to weapons either!”

“I guess you can try to make do with your Martial Arts skill?” Haruka lifted one of her hands to her chin and slightly tilted her head in a cute way as she said that.

However...

“Please don’t expect the impossible from a beginner!” said Yuki. “I learned this skill from Natsuki, but I haven’t actually put it to use yet!”

...Yuki is right that Haruka is expecting too much from her. It would be

absolutely crazy to take on a wild animal with nothing but Martial Arts, even if you had some experience.

“Hmm, what else are you capable of, Yuki?” Touya asked.

Yuki looked absolutely shocked at Touya’s question. She averted her eyes and answered without much confidence. “Touya, are you really asking *me*, the one who took the Copy skill? I can technically use spells like Sand Blast from Earth Magic, but...”

“She can blind someone with that spell,” said Natsuki. “It doesn’t actually inflict damage, but it can be a useful spell depending on how it’s used.”

Uh, I don’t know what to say about that. It doesn’t sound as simple to use as something like my Fire Arrow spell... “What other spells can you use?”

“A spell called Ground Control...”

“It’s a spell that can dig holes and create small protrusions in the ground.”

“If you’re going to describe my spells, don’t make them sound so lame, Natsuki! You’re making me sound like I’m totally useless!”

After she heard Yuki’s complaints, Natsuki briefly paused in thought before she spoke again. “I don’t think I’m wrong... Oh, by that, I don’t mean that you’re useless. I’m just saying that my description isn’t wrong.”

Yuki furiously shook her head and pointed at Natsuki. “Don’t correct yourself like that! It makes it sound like there’s some hidden implication behind your words!” It appeared that she wasn’t pleased with Natsuki’s response.

Both of Yuki’s spells sound like they could be good depending on how they’re used, though. “Hmm, that Ground Control spell could be used for snares,” I said.

“Oh yeah,” said Touya.

“What do you mean by snares?” Yuki asked.

Oh, Yuki and Natsuki don’t know what snares are? It’s a fairly basic term for people who know about fantasy. It’s kind of strange that it didn’t come to mind for Natsuki, since she has a skill for that just like I do, but oh well.

“Uh, well, it’s kind of like a staple for fantasy novels,” said Touya. “Snares are

more or less like traps, right, Nao?”

“Yeah. All snares can usually do is make it harder for enemies to take actions while they’re caught in one, but they can be quite useful if you know how to use them well.”

Snares weren’t fancy by any means, but they were easy to use. The type of snare I had in mind wouldn’t be feasible in every type of terrain, but Earth Magic probably wouldn’t be affected by those restrictions—well, except perhaps indoors, where there was no earth to use.

“Oh right, I guess tripping in a small hole can still cause sprains and bone fractures,” said Natsuki.

“That’s if you know how to use the spell at exactly the right moment, but yeah,” I said.

“It’s okay! I can pull that off! Well, I’ll practice so I can pull that off!” said Yuki.

I wasn’t sure if it was going to be that easy. It was hard enough for me to land my Fire Arrow on agile enemies that were moving around fast, so the task of tripping them sounded even more difficult. If you created the snare too early, then they would just dodge it. Even if you created the snare at the right moment, you would have to match the enemy’s speed. It would probably be easier to trip someone with a protrusion in the ground instead, but holes would be better for inflicting sprains or bone fractures. Yuki’s spell definitely sounded like it could be used for lethal purposes if done right, but that didn’t change how difficult it would be.

“If we find a tusk boar, how about we lure it to us and have Yuki face it head on?” Haruka asked.

Touya expressed his disapproval at Haruka’s reckless suggestion. “Huh? That sounds a bit too dangerous, Haruka...”

On the other hand, Yuki tilted her head in confusion, since she had no idea what a tusk boar was. “What’s a tusk boar, Nao?” she asked me. “Based on its name, is it just a kind of boar?”

“It’s a type of boar with huge tusks, Yuki. Most tusk boars weigh at least one hundred kilograms as well.”

Yuki's face turned pale as soon as I told her what tusk boars were, and she rapidly shook her head in fear. "Impossible! I'll die!"

"The fear of death if you mess up would help you do your best, wouldn't it?"

"What's with that Spartan mentality of yours, Haruka?! Where did the gentle and kind Haruka that I knew disappear to?!"

"That Haruka is dead. I'm a new and reborn Haruka."

Mm, I also died before coming to this world. I guess I'm a new and reborn Nao, then.

"I mean, yeah, it's true that we had died before getting transported to this world, but that's not what I'm getting at!"

"Okay, I'll reactivate my kindness. Natsuki can be at your side while you face a tusk boar head-on."

Natsuki looked a bit confused when Haruka named her. "Huh, me? I mean, I don't mind doing it if I need to, but..." She still held her spear up to indicate that she was ready for the task, though. *That spear's probably going to break in half if you try to stop a boar's charge head on with it, so please don't try it, Natsuki.*

"Even if Yuki succeeds in tripping the boar, it'll still be dangerous," said Touya. "If she does succeed, that's a lump of meat that weighs at least one hundred kilograms rolling towards her, which could easily crush her, right?"

"Touya makes a very good point," I said. "If you're going to assign someone to stop the boar, then it should be him."

"I'm just joking, of course," said Haruka. "Half-joking, that is." She shrugged in response to what Touya and I said, but that could only mean she was serious about the other half. "For an actual serious formation, we'll have Touya in front next to Yuki and Natsuki as our main attackers. I'll take on the support role, and Nao will be the one in charge of luring a tusk boar over to us."

Okay, that sounds like a better formation for Natsuki and Yuki to get practice in combat. However, Natsuki gave me a worried look when she heard the formation that Haruka proposed. "Doesn't that formation put Nao-kun in danger?"

“Nah, I can deal with boars just fine, Natsuki. We’ve slain a lot of them before. Or rather, we’ve slain almost nothing but boars.”

Our lives in this different world were basically full of memories of encounters with boars. If we didn’t include birds, then the only other living beings that we had slain were a wipe bear once and a couple of goblins. In a way, our bodies and equipment were made out of boars and dindels.

“Oh, you guys haven’t slain many monsters, then?” Yuki asked. “Does that mean your character levels are still low?”

“Hm? Character levels? There’s no such—”

Touya was about to refute Yuki’s strange idea, but Haruka cut him off. “No, character levels actually do exist. Or, well, there’s *something* that you could call character levels.”

“Huh? Really, Haruka?”

“Yes, really.”

Huh? Didn’t you previously say there wasn’t anything like character levels in this world, Haruka? Actually, come to think of it, maybe she just didn’t say anything about it at all.

“Whoa, a gamelike element to this world after all this time!” Touya exclaimed.

“Haruka, I can’t seem to recall you mentioning this before...” I said.

“Yeah, that’s because I didn’t mention it.”

“Why didn’t you tell us about this until now?” *If you’d told us, then—*

“Remember how the concept of experience points came up when we discussed skills before? That’s the answer.”

I thought back to what we had discussed at that time. *Oh, yeah, she was right not to mention this until now.*

“What are you guys talking about?” Yuki was asking us because she hadn’t been there with us when we discussed skills.

Haruka sighed before she answered. “If I’d specifically brought up the

existence of character levels, then Nao and Touya would most likely have gotten an itch to engage in reckless behavior due to being gamers at heart. To put it frankly, it would have been a pain in the ass to stop them if that had happened.”

Whew, those sure are some frank words, Haruka! It's kind of sad that I can't deny them, though. Her conclusion that we wouldn't be reckless if we didn't know about leveling up was completely sound and logical.

“I wanted to wait until we grouped up with Natsuki and Yuki before mentioning this, since we'd have more hands to help out in case we got into bad situations as a result of the two of you acting reckless, Nao and Touya. But it's true that I kept this a secret until now, so I'm sorry about that.”

“Oh, nah, you don't have to apologize. It's not like it caused any harm,” said Touya.

“Mm, you made a good decision, Haruka, considering how Touya would've likely gone nuts.”

“Huh? Why me?”

Why do you look and sound so surprised, Touya? You're a hundred percent guilty! “Do you not remember the number of times you suggested that we take on hunt quests for monsters? What would you have done if you'd known about character levels?”

“Uh, I would have suggested that idea even more often. Okay, yeah, I'm sorry...” He lowered his head in apology without hesitation. It looked like he had finally realized that he was guilty of recklessness. However, I wasn't really in any place to scold Touya, since I had no confidence that I could have restrained myself if I had known about character levels.

“Um, what exactly are character levels?” Natsuki asked.

It appeared that Natsuki was the only one among us who wasn't familiar with the concept of character levels. Touya and I were gamers, while Haruka and Yuki had the General Knowledge skill. Natsuki wasn't in either category, so character levels were something completely new to her.

“Yuki, did you not bring this up when you discussed things with Natsuki?”

Haruka asked.

“Oh... No, I didn't. We didn't plan on going outside of town initially, so I thought it wasn't necessary.”

“All right then, I'll take this opportunity to explain what character levels are. Character levels—well, people in this world won't understand this concept, but I'll use the term since it's easy to understand. First off, there's nothing like that displayed in our status screens, right?”

“Right.” The information contained in your status screen included your name, race, age, condition, skills, and the levels of those skills if they had levels. That amount of information was already useful on its own, but character levels weren't included.

“With that in mind, if you ask me whether or not character levels do exist, then...”

“They do, right?”

“I'm not sure,” she said after a pause.

“Huh?”

The words that had come out of Haruka's mouth after that pause had been words of disappointment to us. We all stared at her with confusion in our eyes, and she hastily waved her hands around as if she wasn't sure how to phrase things, but then she added more information. “What I mean is that I don't have concrete proof. I'm just assuming character levels do exist based on the circumstantial evidence and the hints we've gotten, but there's no way for me to prove it for sure.”

The circumstantial evidence she mentioned was the fact that you would become stronger by slaying monsters than by slaying other living beings, even though the act of slaying a monster was more or less as difficult as slaying another human.

“Hmm. I guess it would be normal to assume there are some invisible parameters at work if there's a clear difference in strength between two people with the same physique,” I said.

I went on to give them an example: I could imagine a scenario where I had enough strength in my back muscles to lift a one-hundred-kilogram weight, and there was some other, more muscular person who could lift a three-hundred-kilogram weight. That would be normal. However, if I were able to lift a three-or four-hundred-kilogram one with my current physique, then that would clearly be abnormal.

Yuki pointed right at me and brought up an extreme example. “Nah, there’s a simpler example we can use. Let’s say a girl stabbed you in the back with a kitchen knife, Nao. What do you think would happen to you then?”

“Huh? I mean, the knife would stab right through me, and that would be it, right? Or rather, why did you choose that as an example, Yuki?” *Don’t tell scary jokes like that, Yuki!*

“I dunno—it just came to mind. Well, yeah, you’d normally just be stabbed, and you might die depending on the circumstances. However, I’ve personally seen that if the person being stabbed is a high-ranked adventurer, then the knife won’t be able to pierce his skin. Strange, isn’t it?”

“Huh? You mean without dodging, right? Wait, just what kind of strange sight did you see?!”

“There’s no catch to this, right, like if that person was wearing armor or something like that?” Touya asked.

“Yeah, not at all. The adventurer I saw was just wearing regular clothes.”

“Oh, I think I get it!” I exclaimed. “That adventurer was wearing chain mail underneath his clothes, right?”

“Ah, that makes sense.” said Touya. “High-ranked adventurers would have to take into account the possibility of being stabbed by girls, huh?”

A high-ranked adventurer who would hit on girls sounds like a very unpleasant person.

“With that in mind, it would be a good idea for you to hide something like a magazine or manga volume under your clothes to protect yourself, Nao,” said Haruka.

“Huh?! Why me? I haven’t done anything that would get me stabbed, right?” I looked at Haruka, Touya, and Yuki as I said that, but they all avoided meeting my eyes. *Huh? You guys aren’t going to back me up?*

“Well, for now, let’s put aside the topic of whether or not Nao is a playboy.”

Wait, that’s not what we were talking about up until now, is it, Haruka? I sincerely wanted to raise an objection, but I decided to keep quiet in order not to sidetrack the conversation.

“The most important takeaway from the story Yuki brought up is that it’s hard to stab a high-ranked adventurer regardless of their equipment or clothes,” said Haruka. “It seems like a knife can slightly stab through if the adventurer lets their guard down, but they can’t suffer a lethal injury just from being stabbed. It’s as if their entire body is covered with some kind of barrier.”

“That’s way beyond what a normal person can achieve just via training, isn’t it?” Touya asked. “The ability to deflect things with your muscles—that’s like something out of a manga with a humorous setting.”

If that was actually how things worked in this world, however, then that meant you would become more impervious to injuries as your character level grew, which was a good thing to know. I had honestly been really scared about the possibility of having to fight an enemy as strong as a wipe bear again, given that I had assumed that I only had a normal human’s resistance to injuries. I mean, it was flabbergasting that a single clean hit from a wipe bear would almost be enough to kill you.

“Yuki’s example of a high-ranked adventurer is easy enough to understand, but what it implies is that your physical abilities can improve independently of your muscular strength, so there’s definitely some factor at work that’s separate from the normal results of training,” said Haruka.

“Hmm. If that factor is leveling up your character level, then would you be able to level up via training too? Wait, actually, based on what Yuki described, do you level up your character level by slaying monsters?” I asked.

“Based on what people in this world have learned over the ages, it seems like the most efficient way to level up is by slaying monsters. Conventional wisdom in this world dictates that there’s no real point in slaying regular animals or

other people for the purpose of improving your abilities.”

People in this world couldn't carry out proper experiments since they weren't able to see or measure character levels, which meant that they weren't able to prove their existence. It was just a rule of thumb that the most efficient way to become stronger was by slaying monsters.

“What's the difference between slaying monsters and other living beings? Is it the presence of magicite?” I asked.

“I'm not sure,” said Haruka. “The most popular theory in this world is that it's against the will of the gods to slay living beings that aren't monsters, but...”

Haruka had an uncertain look on her face as she explained that theory. *The will of the gods? Before I was transported to this world, I would have just laughed that off as impossible, but...*

“Gods, huh? I didn't believe in gods up until now, but I can't deny their existence anymore after the way we got transported here to this world,” said Touya. “Well, that's if this isn't all just a dream I'm having.”

“Am I just a character in your dreams, then, Touya? Well, the existence of gods is commonly known and accepted here in this world,” said Haruka. “Also, I'm not sure if this is true, but supposedly the gods sometimes send messages or descend to earth in person as well.”

In contrast with the way things were back on Earth, almost everyone in this different world believed in the existence of divine messages, divine punishment, and events such as gods descending to earth. This was because gods would sometimes intervene in the affairs of mortals, and instances of divine punishment had been observed before. According to Haruka, one of the gravest sins a mortal could commit in this different world was to impersonate a god, and the divine punishment on whoever committed that sin tended to be very dramatic and flashy. Due to this awareness of divine punishments, religious sects devoted to the gods were fairly clean of corruption, and wars in the name of religion didn't exist in this different world. On the other hand, gods wouldn't intervene in conflicts between mortals, so wars between countries would occur from time to time. However, such wars weren't that common due to the existence of monsters that plagued every country in this different world.

“Well, all that we need to know for now is that we can become stronger by slaying monsters,” said Haruka.

“Yeah. There’s no way ordinary people like us will get involved in wars between countries or religions,” said Natsuki.

“Oh no, don’t say things like that, Natsuki. You might jinx us,” said Yuki.

Natsuki looked a bit confused. “What do you mean? We’re not particularly strong, and it’s not like we stand out in any other way either, right?”

I mean, you’re technically right about that, Natsuki, but...

“We’d normally be fine, but we might get dragged into trouble by our other classmates,” said Haruka.

Yeah, that’s exactly what I’m worried about. There are a lot of skills that attract trouble.

Natsuki sighed when we reminded her of the factors that could bring us unwanted trouble. “Oh, right. Let’s make sure we stay away from our other classmates.” She had a serious look on her face as she said that.

We all nodded in agreement, of course. *We absolutely need to dodge people who have skills like Heroic Aptitude, yep.*

★★★★★★★★

“Oh, I’ve detected a signal on my radar!” I exclaimed.

“Report!” Touya exclaimed.

“Code: boar! Two, located fifty meters out!”

Haruka sighed when she heard Touya and me excitedly exchanging radar operator chatter. “Nao, Touya, what are you two doing playing around?” It seemed that she wasn’t a fan.

“Huh? I’ve just always wanted to say lines like that.”

“I know exactly how you feel, Nao! Or rather, let me say the operator lines!”

Yep, that’s the Touya I know. I figured he would be down for this. I wouldn’t really mind swapping roles, but my scouting abilities are better than yours, ha ha! We were a bit away from the highway, walking closer to the forest. It was

almost time for lunch, so we had decided to go along with Touya's suggestion to hunt boars in order to get food and combat practice at the same time. I kind of wanted to have some poultry for lunch instead, though. *I'll bring it up if we successfully finish boar hunting without too much trouble.*

"Uh, Nao, what you mean is that there are two boars located fifty meters away from us, right?" Haruka asked.

"Yeah. Should I go lure them over?"

"Hmm. Let's split it up like this. Touya, Yuki, and Natsuki will take on one boar, and if you end up luring both boars, then we'll take on the other one together, Nao."

"Sure. Oh yeah, here, trade spears with me, Natsuki."

"Huh? Um, but..." She had a perplexed expression on her face as she looked at my spear and compared it with hers. My spear was probably worth at least ten times as much, so her confusion was reasonable.

"We're just swapping for the time being. Also, to be honest, your spear will probably snap in two if you try to use it to stop a charging boar."

"You're going to be fighting in a team of two with Haruka, though, right, Nao-kun? Aren't you in more danger than I am?"

"It's better than the chance of you getting injured, Natsuki. Besides, I can fight with magic as well, so I'll be fine."

She looked somehow happy after she heard what I said. "I appreciate the sentiment, Nao-kun. I'll borrow your spear, then."

She exchanged her spear for mine. When I took her spear, I struck it into the ground before heading into the forest. A long spear would only hold me back if I was going to lure boars, after all. I chose a random animal trail to follow into the forest, and Haruka climbed up a nearby tree as soon as I did. After she climbed to a secure position, she held her bow to indicate that she was ready at any time. I continued to use my Scout skill to check the movements of the signals as I gradually approached them, and as I got closer, I discovered a pair of tusk boars. They both looked much larger than I had expected them to be. In fact, they were two of the largest tusk boars that I had encountered up until

now. One of the boars was considerably smaller than the other one, but it was still quite large. *If they're both large, I guess they're a breeding pair instead of parent and child?*

Tusk boars tended to lack intelligence, so if I provoked them, they would immediately charge, but I would have to adjust that strategy a bit since I had to deal with two boars instead of just one. It would probably be best to start with the smaller boar. Tusk boars would sometimes flee if attacked with something that would deal a lot of damage, so I shot a normal Fire Arrow at it to start off. As soon as the Fire Arrow landed, I jumped forward to where the boar could see me and began making loud noises to attract its attention. As soon as I heard the boar's roar of anger, I ran back towards the path that I'd come from. I paid attention to the sound of its footsteps as I ran, and I leapt out of the forest towards the spot where I'd left the spear struck in the ground, snatched up the spear, and then headed towards where Touya was waiting with Yuki and Natsuki.

"It's coming!"

My Scout Skill told me that there were only ten meters left between me and the boar. I was about to run past Natsuki and leave the rest to them, but a hole in the ground appeared in front of my feet as soon as I took a step forward. *Whoa, perfect timing! Or it would have been if I were the boar, that is!*

"Gaaah!"

I immediately struck my spear into the ground to halt my forward motion and forced myself to take a half step in order to dodge the hole. Afterwards, I did my best to recover my balance before I looked behind me and saw the larger boar charging in my direction. At the same time I turned around, the sound of Natsuki thrusting her spear into the boar vibrated in the air. *Yikes, she aimed perfectly for the eyes and thrust with such strength that the spear pierced all the way through the back of the boar's head! The boar definitely looks like it died instantly from that.*

Wait, now's not the time to just look on at what's happening! A boar with arrows stuck in its body jumped out of the forest right afterwards—the boar that I had aimed my Fire Arrow at initially. Two more arrows flew and struck the

boar before I could react, and as soon as I saw that, I hastily dashed at it to deal the finishing blow with my spear. The boar was staggering on the verge of death. As soon as I landed my blow, its movements stopped completely. I checked with my Scout skill to make sure it was dead before I took a deep breath and sighed in relief.

“Whew, good work,” I said.

I had fought these boars many times by now, but I still got nervous during combat. After she saw me sigh, Yuki hastily ran towards me.

She hung her head as she approached. “Nao, I’m really sorry! I didn’t mean to —”

“Oh, don’t worry about it, Yuki. There’s a first time for everything, right? You’re unlikely to succeed on your first try.” I smiled and patted her on the head to imply that she didn’t have to lower it in shame.

Even if I had tripped in the hole she’d made, it wouldn’t have really been a problem. I might have sprained a leg if I’d tripped, but Haruka could heal sprains just fine, and Touya had also been around to help me out if I’d actually been in danger from the boar that was charging from behind. All that had happened was that I’d been forced to perform some acrobatics, so everything was fine.

Haruka agreed with what I said as she hopped down from the tree and retrieved the arrows from the smaller boar. “Yeah, it’s exactly as Nao said. The whole point of practicing is to get experience so you can eventually succeed every time.”

“U-Um, sorry. Also, thanks.”

I lightly slapped Yuki on the shoulder as she expressed her gratitude, and then I went to retrieve the spear, which was still stuck in the smaller boar. The spear wasn’t broken, but it was in a worse condition than the first spear I had used. It would probably be a good idea to buy Natsuki a more durable spear once I got back to Laffan.

“I need you to try to learn the Disassemble skill, Yuki,” said Haruka. “That’s even more important than combat. Luckily, we have two boars here that you can practice with.”

“Ugh! I’ll do my best...”

She flinched a bit at first, but she still courageously expressed her resolve to learn. *Good luck, Yuki. You’ll get used to it eventually.* As for Natsuki, she had forcefully pulled her spear out of the boar’s head, but her hands weren’t shaking at all. She looked a bit pale, but she seemed fine otherwise. The sight of a boar with a spear piercing its head was quite grotesque, so I was impressed by her mental fortitude. It had taken me a while to recover from the shock when I slew a boar for the first time, so Natsuki’s resilience surpassed mine by far.

“Thanks for lending me your spear, Nao-kun. If I had used my own spear, it would have probably broken in half before it pierced through the boar.”

“No problem. That was really amazing of you, though. I can’t believe you managed to slay this boar with just one thrust.”

The quality of my spear had also played a part in how easily Natsuki had thrust it through the boar’s head, but I couldn’t imagine the sheer self-possession she’d needed to calmly take aim at a charging boar’s vitals, especially considering that it was her first time in combat. The way that I had thought things would go was that Natsuki would attack the boar while Touya held it back and dealt the finishing blow, so I was amazed that she’d managed to face the boar head on and slay it with just one thrust. On top of that, her body hadn’t been pushed back at all despite the fact that the boar had been charging towards her, which meant that she’d managed to hold back the entire weight of the boar with her spear. It was probably a matter of technique and finesse rather than raw strength, so it really was amazing. Level 4 Spearmanship truly made a difference. Our muscular strength was probably very similar if I took into account the difference in race and gender between us, but I definitely wouldn’t have been able to pull off the feat she had just performed.

“Ugh! On the other hand, all I did was almost injure Nao! This was the first time in combat for both of us, so why’s there such a huge difference?!” Yuki exclaimed.

“Well, I practiced martial arts a bit back on Earth, so that could be a factor,” said Natsuki. “Don’t worry, Yuki. You’ll get better as well after you get more practice.”

“Also, if you’re creating a hole to trip an animal that’s charging right at you, it’s probably very difficult to get the timing perfect, so there’s no need to feel bad about it,” said Haruka. “It’s probably impossible to succeed on your first try.”

“Thanks for the support, Haruka. I’ll do my best to practice my Ground Control spell.”

“Mm. However, what you need to practice right now is the Disassemble skill. Copy the skill from me, Yuki.”

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

Haruka handed Yuki one of the knives we used for gutting, and Yuki nodded to indicate that she was ready.

“All right, I’ll teach Yuki how to use the Disassemble skill here. It would probably be a good idea for you to watch as well, Natsuki. I’d like every one of us to be able to do this.”

“Okay.”

“As for Nao and Touya...”

Haruka looked at us as if to ask what we were going to do, and I voiced an idea that had come to my mind earlier. “Can I go hunting for some game, Haruka? I kind of want some poultry, since it’s been a while since the last time we had some.”

“Poultry? Can you shoot down birds without me?”

Haruka had been the one who had always shot down birds in the past, but I would probably be able to do it as well. However, it would be embarrassing if I failed to bag any birds, so I brought up an excuse in case that happened. “Well, it’s just a way to kill time.”

“Is that so? All right, don’t venture too far into the forest while you’re hunting.”

“Yep, gotcha. Let’s go, Touya.”

“You want me to tag along? Well, I don’t mind, I guess. We’ll be back later, Haruka.”

Haruka had a look of concern in her eyes as she sent us off. I entered the forest again with Touya at my side this time.

“So what’s the plan, Nao? How are we going to hunt birds?”

There were plenty of birds flitting around, so it wouldn’t be too difficult. The ideal scenario would be to bring back a bird that had delicious meat, but for pride’s sake, my first priority was to bag any bird at all.

“Our best chances would be with my Fire Arrow, but it’d be great if you could just dash at a bird and stab it with your sword, Touya. You have the Fleetness skill, don’t you?”

“You’re asking for the impossible, Nao! I can’t reach the birds above the trees! Well, if it’s walking on the forest floor, I might be able to do it.”

“Do you mean something like a quail? I feel like a quail would get squashed if you swung at it with your sword, though.”

Unlike Japanese swords, Touya’s sword was crafted in a way that prioritized blunt force over sharpness. If he swung that kind of sword at a quail, then the likely result was fairly obvious.

“It should be fine if we aim for birds like pheasants or pigeons, I think,” I said. “Oh, what if you stop a bird in its tracks with your Roar skill?”

“Nah, that wouldn’t work. We wouldn’t be able to bag more than one bird at a time that way. The rest would scatter.”

Touya’s Roar skill would make his target wince in fear, but it hadn’t seen much use so far. There was no point in using it against our main quarry, which was tusk boars, since they would just charge directly at us, and we hadn’t had the luxury of taking the time for Touya to use Roar against the more dangerous wipe bear. The skill had an effect on goblins, but Touya had only used it once, so it was hard to say that he’d put it to good use. It was very effective against birds and rabbits, but it would cause animals nearby that weren’t the targets of the skill to run away, so it wasn’t really suited for hunting.

“All right, I’ll leave any birds that you can reach with your sword to you, Touya. I’ll shoot down the ones you can’t reach with my Fire Arrow spell.”

“That sounds fine to me, but even if you get a clean shot at a bird, wouldn’t your Fire Arrow spell just burn it up? Well, you could burn their wings and leave the finishing blow to me, I guess?”

“Please, I’ve improved by now! My Fire Arrow has evolved to new heights!” I took my training seriously, so my magic had improved significantly. I still hadn’t managed to level up any of my magic skills, but I had much better control over magic than in the beginning. “You can say that my Fire Arrow has been updated to version 2.0!”

“That’s a weird way to put it, Nao. I get what you’re saying, though.”

“Whatever, dude. Basically, what it means is that I can compress the flames to increase the amount of piercing damage. If I can land a hit, then I can blast just the head off of a bird like a quail.”

“If...?”

“Well, I’m still working on perfecting the accuracy part. You’ll have to wait for version 3.0 of Fire Arrow before it’s perfect.”

I could compress the flames to a diameter of twenty centimeters, so I could easily hit a target within ten meters as long as it was standing still, but I would have to get within at least five meters of smaller targets like quails.

“Should we aim for slightly larger birds, then, Nao?”

“Yeah, and ideally birds that have meat that isn’t hard to chew.”

Small birds were more difficult to detect even with my Scout skill, but they tended to taste better than larger birds. However, there was a downside to small birds as well: there wouldn’t be as much meat on the bone.

“All right, let’s start searching.”

“Yep.”

Searching for birds meant repeating the same process over and over: I’d detect a signal with my Scout skill and then slowly approach it to check what it actually was. I hadn’t learned to tell exactly what my Scout skill was detecting from the signals themselves quite yet. Well, I had learned to recognize a tusk boar signal more or less accurately, so I was hoping that if I leveled up my Scout

skill at some point in the future, I would eventually be able to identify other living beings too. Touya's Beastman sixth sense was even more ambiguous when it came to distinguishing what he detected, so it wasn't a good idea to rely on him while hunting. However, he had become very good at sensing the intent to kill from other living beings; his sixth sense would detect hostility very accurately.

"Oh, we found a bird this time," whispered Touya. "Apparently, it's called a cotas bird."

"Is that what your Appraisal told you?" I whispered back. "This bird sure looks quite small..."

I described the bird as small, but it was still larger than a quail. As for how it looked, it was a light brown bird that didn't have any speckles.

"All right, let's start off with my version 2.0 Fire Arrow," I whispered.

"Roger," Touya whispered back.

I concentrated and compressed my flames as hard as I could and then shot a Fire Arrow the size of a pen at the cotas bird. However, it only brushed the head of the cotas bird and landed on the ground behind it.

"I messed up!"

Before my mind could fully register the fact that I had missed, Touya had already jumped to his feet and stabbed the cotas bird in the head with a knife that we used for gutting.

"Wait, huh?! What did you mean earlier when you said you 'might' be able to do this, Touya? You pulled it off easily!" *Also, you jumped to your feet as soon as I shot my Fire Arrow before it even missed, didn't you? Did you not trust my ability to land a hit...?*

Touya had a grin on his face as he turned around and looked at me. "I mean, I'm also surprised that I managed to pull it off. I was just prepared to catch the bird in case you happened to miss with your Fire Arrow and it flew away, you know?"

"Ugh..." I didn't have a rebuttal. There had been only five meters between me

and the cotas bird, so I should have been able to land a hit. *Well, its head wasn't even three centimeters long, so I can't really be blamed for missing such a difficult target, right? Wait, Haruka managed to land her arrows in the eyes of the tusk boars earlier, and Natsuki got a clean hit as well, so...*

"All right, I'll leave the birds to you, Touya. I'll aim for the birds that you can't reach." *Okay, let's just forget about inconvenient truths. There's no need to record such things!*

"Well, with large birds, it's probably fine to aim for the body instead of the head. Your version 2.0 Fire Arrow is quite powerful, after all."

"Come on, I'll properly aim for the head! Trust me, I'll succeed next time, yep!" *Also, stop emphasizing the version 2.0 part! It feels embarrassing when you do that!*

Touya had skillfully brought down a decent number of cotas birds by the time I had finally found the right prey for me to take on. It was a dark brown bird with some white feathers near its tail, and its total length was only about fifty centimeters with its wings included. *That bird is sitting still on top of a tree branch, so Touya won't be able to get in my way—ahem, I mean that I won't need his help. All right, fine, it was my own fault that I missed, but still.*

"What kind of bird is that, Touya?" I whispered.

"That one? It's called a kuulas, apparently. Is its meat edible? It looks kind of like a crow to me," Touya whispered back.

"It'll probably be fine. Oh right, I can just check. *Help Guide*. Oh, it displayed its name along with the tag 'edible' next to it." When I had used my Help Guide on a tusk boar before, it had only told me that it was edible, so I had assumed that it would only tell me whether this was an edible bird, but it was displaying the bird's name as well. That was probably because I had known the name of the bird before I used the Help Guide on it. "Besides, people used to hunt wild birds for food, although not as many people do nowadays compared to in the past."

I had heard stories about how my great grandfather had hunted game birds and eaten them. These kinds of birds existed in towns as well, so perhaps it would have been possible to reduce the damage caused by pest birds like

pigeons if people just hunted them, but that probably wouldn't work; the majority of people would probably unconsciously think that such birds were dirty, and birds were smart enough to flee away from towns if they realized they were being hunted down.

"All right, it's time to bring down this kuulas."

"Right. Good luck, version 2.0. You'll need it."

"Shut up, Touya." I took a deep breath, aimed at the kuulas, and shot my Fire arrow at it. "*Fire Arrow.*"

The arrow instantly reached the kuulas and blew off its head. It fell from the branch it was sitting on and dropped to the forest floor.

"Hell yeah!" I went over to pick up my quarry, and it looked like the rest of its body wasn't damaged at all. *This was nicely done, if I do say so myself.*

"Whew, you succeeded. How are we supposed to drain the blood from a bird like this, though?"

"Oh, right."

My Fire Arrow had cauterized the bird's neck, so it wasn't bleeding at all. It would be an extremely bad idea to leave it like this, so I took out my own gutting knife and made some small incisions to drain its blood.

"All right, let's return now that you've bagged a bird yourself, Nao."

"Right..."

We already had more than enough poultry from earlier, since Touya had hunted down six cotas birds. I had insisted on continuing until I found a bird I could bring down myself, which had turned out to be this kuulas, and Touya had been kind enough to humor me. Technically speaking, I already had the excuse that I'd brought up to Haruka before we started out hunting, but it still would have been embarrassing if I'd returned with nothing in my hands while Touya had six birds. I thanked Touya for his patience as we headed out of the forest.

Once we had returned to where Haruka and the others were, we saw that the two boars had been cleanly gutted. It looked like the girls were already done with burying the boars' internal organs, since there were traces of digging in the

ground nearby. Yuki was preparing a bonfire right next to the carcasses, most likely for the purpose of cooking the meat for lunch.

“Welcome back,” said Haruka. “It looks like you two managed to get some birds without too much trouble.”

“Yeah, thankfully,” I replied as I placed the kuulas and some firewood on the ground. I had picked up that firewood on our way back. Touya followed my example and placed his six cotas birds on the ground as well.

“I was thinking about going ahead and cooking the boars, but I guess it was the right idea to wait for you two.”

“I did say I was going to hunt some birds, didn’t I? Ha ha ha!” *I don’t have to mention that I was very close to coming back with zero results, right?*

“The birds that we placed on the ground are the ones each of us hunted down,” said Touya.

“Touya?!” I exclaimed. “Um, well, we divided the work between us! I’m the one who found our quarry!” Touya had revealed the details that I’d wanted to keep a secret, so I did my best to recover my dignity. *I found all of the birds with my Scout skill, so share some of the credit with me, Touya!*

“The fact that Touya hunted down more birds means he was better at it than you were, right, Nao?” Haruka asked.

“Well, um, I can explain...” *It’s just that my accuracy rate with my Fire Arrow is still low, that’s all! I can nab birds fine if I get a clean hit!*

“Oh well, it doesn’t matter how you got them. It’s more important that you try gutting these birds, Natsuki. Nao and Touya went out of their way to hunt them, after all.”

“Oh, okay, Haruka.”

“What about you, Yuki?”

“Um, can I pass on these birds? I’ve learned the Disassemble skill, so that’s enough for now, right...?”

“Huh? You’ve already learned the skill, Yuki?” I asked.

“Yeah, somehow.”

She looked a bit exhausted when I asked her how things had gone, and she told me that she had successfully learned the Disassemble skill after she had gutted the second boar. However, the gutting process had only started to go smoothly when she was halfway through with that second boar, so that was probably when the Sealed status had disappeared.

“If the Copy skill makes it that easy to learn a new skill, it sounds like it’s actually quite useful,” said Touya. “Nao still hasn’t managed to learn the Disassemble skill, after all.”

“It should become available to me at any moment now, but it still hasn’t, yeah. If this is all that it takes for Yuki to learn a skill, though, should we all take some time to teach Yuki our skills?”

“Yeah, that sounds like a great idea!” exclaimed Yuki. “I don’t want to be useless!”

“Sure, let’s all teach each other our skills,” said Haruka. “I’m not sure if we can learn each other’s skills as easily as Yuki can, but it’s probably still worth a try.”

“Yeah, especially for skills like Evasion,” I said. “It’s worth practicing even if we can’t learn it as a skill.”

We probably couldn’t learn skills like General Knowledge or the Help Guide that provided knowledge and information, but practicing skills related to physical abilities might help all of us learn to defend ourselves better. We had plenty of time to allocate for training now due to the fact that our daily income had increased significantly since we first arrived in this world, so there was no reason not to train as often as possible.

“Hey, that sounds important and all, but right now, let’s prepare the birds,” said Touya. “In a way, they’re harder to prepare than boars, right?”

“Mm. Let’s leave five cotas birds for Natsuki to practice on. As for the rest, can we leave it to you and Touya, Nao?”

“Sure, no problem. Bring out the pot, Touya.”

We had initially bought this moderately large pot for the purpose of

preserving food. Haruka created some boiling water in the pot with her magic, and then she soaked the birds. This was for the purpose of making it easier to pluck their feathers, but it wasn't absolutely necessary, so we would normally just work very hard and pluck feathers with sheer willpower.

"Um, Haruka, you created this boiling water with magic, right?" Yuki asked. "What kind of spell did you use?"

"Well, the base spell that I made this variation from is a spell called Water Blast. However, that base spell isn't very important. You probably know this as well, Yuki, but magic is a field that offers a lot of freedom depending on the caster's imagination."

"The amount of mana required to cast a spell also increases with how much you alter it from the base spell, though. Does that variation of yours cost a lot of mana?"

"Not really. The water's boiling hot, but I'm not blasting it out at high speeds, so the mana consumption isn't that high."

In a way, the law of the conservation of energy did apply to the relationship between magic and mana. For example, there was a straightforward spell called Light, which—obviously—would create a source of light. There wouldn't be much difference between the amount of mana required to cast Light at a luminosity of ten lux for ten minutes and the amount required to cast it at one hundred lux for one minute. A similar concept applied to the Water Blast spell. The spell would use up much more mana when the water was blasting out at higher speeds, but less mana at reduced water pressure. However, this wasn't an absolute rule. For example, it would be impossible to cast the Light spell at sixty thousand lux for 0.1 seconds with the same amount of mana that was required for my first example. The amount of mana required for sixty thousand lux would be astronomically larger in comparison. It would also be impossible to use the same amount of mana in the first example to use the Light spell at 0.1 lux for an entire day. Common knowledge in this world dictated that there was a certain boundary beyond which mana usage would become very inefficient. However, the amount of mana consumed by a spell was something that only the user could measure intuitively, so no quantitative research had been carried out yet in this world.

“All right, these birds should be ready now,” said Haruka.

She took the birds out of the pot, and we all started to pluck them. Once we were done, the next thing we had to do was to actually finish dressing the birds.

“Be careful not to damage the internal organs when you extract them.”

It would be an absolute disaster if we damaged the internal organs of an animal, which was something I had learned from working on boars. After all, there were all sorts of nasty things inside those organs. I had messed up multiple times when I was practicing with boars, so I didn’t want to go through that again. Haruka had saved us with her Purification spell whenever one of us had messed up, and we had sold that meat instead of eating it ourselves. And just to be clear, we didn’t do that in bad faith! We had Haruka purify the meat, so it was perfectly clean! It’s just a matter of appetite, yeah. What the buyer doesn’t know can’t hurt him, after all!

“A lot of bird organs can be eaten as offal, but let’s discard everything aside from the heart and liver this time.”

Offal from boars would go bad quite fast and was annoying to prepare, so we tended to discard it. However, the heart and liver of a bird were decent enough just with a little salt after we cooked them. We never bothered with gizzards, however, because they took much more time to prepare.

“After that, we just need to slice off the legs, and any remaining down on the skin we can burn off in the bonfire. The last thing we need to do is to clean the birds, but my Purification spell will take care of that.”

“Okay, I’m done,” said Natsuki.

It had taken her a fair amount of time, but considering that it was her first try, Natsuki had actually managed to follow Haruka’s instructions quite well. She hadn’t messed up at all during the process, and Haruka nodded at Natsuki’s work with a satisfied expression on her face.

“Mm, you did well. Keep up the good work and repeat the process on the next bird.”

“Okay.” Natsuki nodded back and then started to dress the next bird right away. It didn’t seem like she had strong feelings of revulsion when it came to

gutting animals. She had already gutted a boar before this, though, so perhaps a bird didn't faze her in comparison. *Well, if you just consider all animals food, then there isn't much difference between gutting a fish and dressing a bird.*

"I'll start cooking while Natsuki's dealing with the remaining birds. Copy my Cooking skill and help me out, Yuki."

"I'd be more than happy to help out with cooking! Wait, hold on, why did you decide to get the Cooking skill? Neither of us got it because I already know how to cook, and Natsuki's even better."

"Mm, I dabbled a bit in cooking back on Earth, so I didn't get the Cooking skill."

On a side note, dabble was definitely not the right word to describe Natsuki's mastery of cooking. There had only been a few times when I had gotten to eat food that Natsuki had cooked, but she was probably even better at cooking than Haruka. In fact, I would go as far as to say that she was on the level of a professional chef.

"So yeah, what's the Cooking skill like, Haruka?" Yuki asked.

"Well, if I had to describe it frankly, then..."

"Yeah?"

"It's completely different from what I expected. I've cooked things the same way I would have normally back on Earth, but the food I cook ends up perfectly delicious even if I accidentally spill salt all over it. Honestly, this phenomenon feels like the strangest fantasy experience I've had in this world."

Magic was the most obvious fantasy element in this world, but it was something that we had all come to accept as normal. On the other hand, cooking was something that we had been able to do back on Earth, so the strange way that the Cooking skill worked probably stood out to Haruka more than other things.

"If it's that different, then I'm really looking forward to your cooking!" Yuki exclaimed.

"It sounds like quite an interesting skill," said Natsuki. "Would I be able to

learn it as well?”

“It appears that chefs in this world have this skill, so you’ll probably be able to learn it if you work hard.”

“I see. If that’s the case, then I’ll do my best to practice cooking as well when we have free time!” Natsuki clenched her fists and sounded pumped up as she declared that. It was quite rare to see her this excited. *I guess she must have really enjoyed cooking, since she was so good at it back on Earth.*

“Mm, that’ll have to wait until we return to Laffan,” said Haruka. “All right, let’s make some grilled bird skewers, Yuki.”

“Okay!”

It had been a while since the last time I’d eaten some grilled game bird skewers, and they were just as delicious as I remembered them being. The cotas birds were a bit annoying to eat since there were a lot of small bones in the meat, but they tasted so good that I didn’t really mind. I compared the birds Haruka had cooked with the ones Yuki had cooked, and while the ones Yuki had cooked were decent, the ones Haruka had cooked were definitely different and tasted better. That just proved how potent the Cooking skill was, and now Yuki had managed to learn that skill as well, so we could probably expect the same quality of food from both of them the next time they cooked something.

“Hmm, this kuulas meat is kind of hard to chew on,” said Yuki.

“Mm. It’s easy to eat since it doesn’t have any small bones, but I feel like the cotas bird meat is better,” said Natsuki.

“Really? I actually like that it’s tough and that there’s a distinct taste when I chew on it,” said Touya.

“The toughness of the meat probably just depends on how you cook it,” said Haruka. “It just means that kuulas meat isn’t suited for grilling.”

Compared to the cotas birds that Touya had bagged, it appeared that there were mixed opinions about the kuulas that I had brought back. The party was roughly divided in half between positive and negative opinions. Well, Yuki’s opinion didn’t seem to fall in either category. As for me, I agreed the most with what Touya had said. At the same time, I agreed with the girls that kuulas meat

was hard to chew. *This kuulas would probably be better as minced meat or thinly sliced like beef tongues.*

“Honestly, though, I’m just really happy that we’ve been able to eat delicious food ever since we reunited with each other, Haruka,” said Natsuki.

“Yeah, definitely!” exclaimed Yuki. “I can’t believe so many people willingly came to that inn to eat the food there!”

That’s probably because you and Natsuki were there as waitresses. I’d hope that the other places in Sarstedt didn’t serve food worse than that—or rather, I don’t want to think about it. It’s too early to fall into despair about the food in this world!

“The first meal we experienced in Laffan was quite bad as well...” I said.

“Yeah, it definitely betrayed my expectations,” said Touya. “I thought rye bread would be delicious, but nope.”

“We also got betrayed by the taste of ale,” I said. “A single sip was enough for me to decide that I didn’t want to drink any more of it.”

Natsuki nodded deeply to convey an understanding of the pain we’d all been through. “It sounds like you all struggled with food in this world as well, Nao-kun.”

“Nah, our horrible experience was just a onetime thing.” Haruka had a bitter smile on her face and shook her head before she cleared things up. “You two had it far worse than us since the two of you had to eat *that* kind of food on a daily basis, Natsuki.”

“Yeah, now we’re staying at an inn that provides decent-tasting meals, so food hasn’t been an issue for us,” I said.

The mysterious guard who had recommended The Slumbering Bear had really helped us out. *Well, it’s less that he’s mysterious and more like I don’t remember his name. I don’t want to meet him again either; he stared at Haruka, and he’d probably do the same to Yuki and Natsuki since both of them are cute.*

“Well, we didn’t really have a choice when it came to food back in Sarstedt,” said Yuki. “A wage of one hundred Rea per day meant that we couldn’t afford to

go out to eat...”

“Mm,” said Natsuki. “It might have been possible to find good places to eat out if we’d been willing to take on risks, but I didn’t want to do so since we were just a group of two girls.”

“In that regard, I had an easier time since Nao and Touya were with me,” said Haruka. “Gender definitely makes a difference in this world.”

There had been a few guys who’d tried to hit on Haruka over this past month, but thankfully, none of them had been brave enough to try to push Touya and me aside. It was probably because of how intimidating Touya looked; it was common knowledge that beastmen were generally quite strong.

“I’m really envious of the bond between you three. It’s amazing that you all still managed to stay together even when we were all souls!”

Yuki smiled at us after she expressed her envy, but that smile only caused me pain inside. *Well, uh, I was the only one out of the three of us who couldn’t tell the others apart. It was just because I’m a bit dense, right? There’s no way I actually felt nothing deep inside, right? Ugh, it’s all that evil god’s fault that I can’t fully trust myself anymore!*

“Oh yeah, while we were gutting the boars, I noticed that we had to throw away most of each carcass,” said Yuki. “It felt like it was up to about half of each boar.”

“Mm. There’s even less if you only count the meat that’s edible,” said Haruka. “It’s because there are a lot of bones and fat that get discarded as well.”

When gutting a boar, the first thing we had to do was throw away all of the internal organs, and that was already a significant amount of flesh. As for the skin and tusks, we’d save them since they could be sold for money. If we didn’t have much time, then we would also discard the fat and the head. After all, in spite of its weight, the head wouldn’t sell for much. If we didn’t have to discard the head, then Touya would roast it and sprinkle some salt all over it before eating it whole. It was a bit of a scary sight to witness. Well, I’d tried some out myself, and it did taste good, so I didn’t really mind. There would be less weight to carry back with us if we just cooked and ate the heads on the spot.

“We do bring the fat back with us if we can, but it doesn’t sell for as much as the meat does.”

Haruka had mentioned before that the fat would be used for all sorts of purposes, like for cooking and as fuel for lamps, but that second part wasn’t relevant to us since we had magic for light. On a side note, if you used lard as fuel for something like an eternal flame, it seems like the smell would make the people tending to it hungry.

“By fat, you mean lard, right?” Natsuki asked. “We might be able to make some tempura with that.”

“Tempura? That sounds good,” said Yuki. “I’d love to eat some tempura, since it would be delicious even with nothing more than salt.”

Yuki smiled at the very thought of eating tempura, and I could feel myself salivating as well just from hearing the word. *Ugh, I’d love to eat some!*

“We could make some fried pork cutlets as well!” Touya exclaimed. “We don’t have any rice to go with them, but they’d still be delicious if we turned them into pork cutlet sandwiches.”

“Deep fried chicken would also be possible, wouldn’t it?” I asked.

All of us were lost in our fantasies about food for a moment before Haruka snapped us all back to reality by clapping her hands. “Okay, that’s enough fantasizing about food! Touya, we don’t have any sauce to go with fried pork cutlets even if we make some. Besides, it’ll be hard for us to find opportunities to cook such things while we’re living at an inn.”

“Oh yeah, I forgot about that. We’ve gotten on fairly good terms with the innkeeper by now, but it’s not like we can actually borrow the kitchen area, right?”

The innkeeper was already treating us very generously in that he’d lent us some storage space in the warehouse. It would be too much to ask to borrow the kitchen area when he needed it to prepare food for customers.

“Is it not possible to rent a house, Haruka?” Natsuki asked.

“A house? Hmm. Well, our main priorities so far have been saving up for new

equipment and searching for you and Yuki, so...”

“How much would these two boars go for, Haruka?” Yuki asked. “Would it be possible to rent a place with the money from these?”

“Hmm, they’ll probably fetch a total of about fifteen thousand Rea, I think.”

“Yeah, that sounds about right,” I said. “We might even be able to get a bit more than that.”

Yuki’s eyes went wide and she spread her arms in surprise. “Fifteen thousand Rea?! That’s a huge amount! It’d be the equivalent of a hundred and fifty days of work back at the inn we were at!” In reality, though, it was more like her wages had been way too low.

“It’ll be three thousand Rea per person if we split it between the five of us,” said Haruka. “Three thousand Rea is roughly equivalent to thirty thousand yen, so if we want to have a stable future, that means we should aim to consistently earn this much every day.”

“Hmm, so is that how much we need to save up for retirement if we take into account physical decline due to old age?” Natsuki asked. “Actually, it’d be better to earn more if possible, considering that there’s no social security system in this world.”

If we took no days off work, we would be able to earn the equivalent of at least ten million yen per year, but I would prefer to be able to take some days off from time to time. In addition, we had to take into account that we had no idea when we would need to retire from adventurer work.

“We’re a party of five now, so we can probably earn more since we have more hands to carry stuff. If we take the differences between elves and humans into consideration, then both of you can carry as much as Nao can, I think.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, I’m much weaker than Touya, although I’m still stronger than I was before back on Earth.”

This was fairly obvious, but the weakest person among us—physically, at least—was Haruka. Touya could carry twice as much luggage as Haruka, and even

with that extra luggage, he would still be just as agile as Haruka was without it. If Yuki and Natsuki could carry about the same amount of luggage I could, then that would mean women in this world had stamina and strength equal to or more than that of men back on Earth.

“I’ll need you two to make backpacks for yourselves as well once we return to Laffan.”

“Wait, do you mean make them by hand, Haruka?”

Haruka smiled at Yuki. “Yes, Yuki. You have the Sewing skill available to you, so do your best.”

Yuki fell silent for a brief moment before she nodded in response. “Ugh—okay, I will...” That probably meant that Haruka was telling her to copy and learn the Sewing skill.

“I sure am envious of the fact that you’re learning so many new skills, Yuki! Ha ha ha ha ha!”

“If you’re truly envious, then stop that forced laugh, Nao. Haruka, is it possible for Nao to help out as well even if he doesn’t have the Sewing skill?”

“Well, I have—”

“We don’t need him. He’ll only get in the way.”

“Ugh!” I had been about to say that I had my own training to do, but Haruka had cut me off and implied that I was useless. However, it was true that there hadn’t really been anything I could do to help out even back when she’d crafted the backpacks for the three of us. She’d crafted the first backpack through trial and error without any sewing pattern to follow. The only thing I had helped with was cutting cloth along the lines that Haruka had drawn. I had also helped a bit with processing the leather, since that required some strength to do, but that was all.

“Don’t worry about it too much. Just leave the sewing to us,” said Natsuki. “We’re better at it, so there’s no need to feel bad.”

“Thanks for cheering me up, Natsuki.”

She smiled kindly at me and said, “No problem.” Her soothing presence really

made me feel relieved, and I was glad that we finally had someone like her in our party now.

“Oh yeah, did you make these backpacks by hand because you wanted to save money, Haruka?” Natsuki asked.

“No, it was just because these types of backpacks weren’t sold in stores. I was able to make adjustments since I made them by myself, so they’re quite comfortable to use.”

“Hmm, is that so?” said Yuki. “Wait, if backpacks like these aren’t sold in stores, wouldn’t you be able to sell them?”

“Yeah, you probably could get money for these,” said Natsuki. “Adventurers would most likely appreciate how useful and convenient they are.”

If we took into consideration the prices of other types of bags sold in town along with the price of the raw materials required, then these backpacks would actually be a decent source of income. Well, that was only if we could develop a sales channel and if Yuki and Natsuki helped out with sewing.

“Well, the idea has crossed my mind before, but I discarded it since we’re living at an inn.”

“Oh yeah, we were talking about whether or not it was possible to rent a house,” said Yuki. “You probably have enough money saved up for that by now, right, Haruka?”

“Well, we do have over two hundred fifty thousand Rea in savings, so—”

“Two hundred fifty thousand Rea?! That’s over two and a half million yen!” Yuki yelled in surprise. *I wonder how she would react if she found out that we actually had the equivalent of over ten million yen up until a few days ago.*

“We won’t be able to afford equipment for both of you if we use the money on a house, though,” said Haruka.

“Wouldn’t one hundred thousand Rea be enough to rent a place, Haruka?” I asked. “For a million yen, you could rent a place for a year in any town in the Japanese countryside, so maybe it’s similar in this world.”

I had no idea how rent actually worked in this world, but Laffan was definitely

not an urban area. It seemed like it was closer to a small town in a rural area, so I felt like it should be possible to rent a place with that amount of money.

“Hmm. Land and housing in this world are cheaper than they were back in Japan, so your idea might work.”

“We can use the remaining one hundred fifty thousand Rea to buy chain mail and weapons for Yuki and Natsuki. It’ll be a spear for Natsuki, and a—wait, what kind of weapon do you use, Yuki?”

I looked at Yuki, but she averted her eyes before she quietly muttered a response. “I don’t have any skills related to weapons...”

“Oh, I see. Well, um, we can buy some random weapon for you, I guess?”

It appeared that she wasn’t pleased with my choice of words. “What do you mean, a random weapon?! I have the potential to learn how to use any weapon!” She lowered her voice and added, “Well, that’s if one of you has the skill...”

I mean, she’s not wrong, since she can just copy weapons skills from us, but I don’t think we can afford that many different weapons. Hmm... “Oh, actually, you can just use a baton as your weapon.”

“A baton?”

“Yeah, there’s a skill called Staff Fighting for it. You still have that thing you bought back then, right, Touya?”

“You mean that baton that caused me to learn the Staff Fighting skill? Yeah, I do. It’s a thick iron baton, though. Do you think Yuki can actually make use of it?”

“If she manages to learn the skill for it, then yeah. Besides, she’ll mainly be focusing on magic. Right, Yuki?”

Yuki was only able to use Earth Magic, but she also had decided to get the aptitude skills for Fire, Water, and Time Magic. According to what she’d told us, she’d gotten so many aptitude skills because she’d figured aptitude was something innate that you couldn’t obtain later in life. *Wise decision, Yuki.*

“Mm, yeah, you’re right, Nao,” said Yuki. “Okay, I’ll focus on practicing magic

for now.”

She had paused in thought before replying to me, as if she was considering how much we would have to spend on a new weapon for her, but it looked like she had no objections to my idea, since she nodded after replying. I was glad that she seemed to have understood the potential cost. If we eventually managed to save up more money, it would be fine for her to learn whatever weapon she wanted, but our priority right now was to choose the best possible options for our group as a whole.

“All right, we should probably start heading back to Laffan now,” said Haruka. “We took our time here, after all.”

We’d sat around and chatted while we ate the grilled game skewers and bread along with dindels for dessert. There was still plenty of time to reach Laffan before the gates closed for the day, but we had definitely spent a bit too much time resting here.

“Okay. Oh yeah, um, can I go do something before we head back...?”

Yuki stood up and went to whisper in Haruka’s ear. Haruka nodded and gave out instructions to me and Touya. “Touya, lend me the hoe for digging. Nao, stay on alert with your Scout skill.”

“Haruka?! Why did you bring it up?!” Yuki had a look of shock on her face that indicated she hadn’t expected to be betrayed. *Oh, so she’s referring to that kind of business.*

“Oh, do you not need a hoe for digging since you can use Earth Magic? Using a hoe would probably be more convenient for covering—”

“No, you know what I mean, right?!” Yuki’s face looked a bit red as she pressed Haruka to stop.

After a moment, Haruka nodded as if she had only just realized what Yuki was talking about. She placed her hands on Yuki’s shoulders to calm her down. “Yuki, you don’t have the luxury of feeling embarrassed about guys knowing what you’re doing or hearing the sound. You’ll die if that’s what you’re worried about, since you’ll be absolutely defenseless during the process.”

“But...”

“Look, I know how you feel all too well. I’ve gone through this experience myself, after all. Don’t worry—you’ll get used to it right away.”

Haruka had hesitated to mention it to us whenever she had to go to the bathroom, but she had learned her lesson after she’d almost had a close encounter with a boar on her own. After that had happened, she’d made sure to bring up the subject every time before she went off alone. *Girls can’t just stand up like guys can while pissing, so it’s more dangerous for them.* Also, based on what Haruka had told me, girls were in the most danger when they had to go to the bathroom in times of disaster or in refugee camps. When they were defenseless at times like that, other people with malicious intentions were enough of a threat, so it would be even more dangerous if they encountered animals or monsters.

“Dig a hole with this hoe when you have to deal with your business,” said Haruka. “Turn your back to us and pay attention to your surroundings while you do so. If you see something, then run to us right away even if you don’t have time to put your underwear back on.”

“Don’t have time to put my underwear back on?!”

“Don’t worry, I can clean any stains that might happen with my Purification spell. Would you prefer to die or to live, even if that means having the lower half of your body exposed?”

“Ugh...”

Yuki had tears in her eyes as she glared at Haruka, but everything that Haruka had said was the truth, sadly. Guys would just laugh it off if their private parts were exposed out in the open or, at worst, get arrested for public indecency, but for girls, the mental damage would be much greater. *I’m pretty sure most people would prefer that over death, though.*

“Well, if you die, more than just the lower half of your body might get exposed. Your insides might end up on the outside too.”

“S-Stop with that kind of dark humor, Haruka! It’s not funny at all...”

“The ideal situation would be for all of us to stand guard somewhere near you, but you probably wouldn’t be able to carry out your business if we were

that close. Be glad that it's not necessary since Nao has the Scout skill."

I'm sorry, Yuki, but nothing's going to change even if you glare at me with tears in your eyes.

"Uh, just to be clear, all my Scout Skill can detect is hostile intent and the presence of other living beings, so don't worry about me using it to spy, Yuki," I said.

"Y-You'll cover your ears, right, Nao?" Yuki's face was completely red.

Haruka shot down that request right away. "There's no way he can do that. Hearing is an important part of scouting, after all. Okay, that's enough complaining! Go and finish your business right away! You wouldn't want to let loose in the middle of combat, right?"

Damn, you're really cornering her, Haruka. Wait, are you cornering her like this so that she has to overcome the same humiliation that you did? Nah, she's surely just doing this out of concern for Yuki's health.

"Also, I'll have Touya dash to your side to protect you if Nao detects a hostile presence, so just accept that fate if it happens."

Whew, she actually went and dealt the finishing blow to Yuki. Yuki glared at Touya after she heard Haruka's words, and Touya awkwardly averted his eyes. I mean, he's our front line, so it's only natural that he'd be responsible for protecting you in emergencies like that. He might have to stand in front of you to protect you from enemies if it comes down to it, even if you're in the middle of your business. So, um, please stop glaring at us, okay?

"Ugh! You're a big stupid dummy, Haruka! Waaaaaaah!"

Even after all her yelling and crying, Yuki still took the hoe and ran into the bushes. *Well, I mean, it's only human for things that come in to go out eventually. That's just how the body functions, and everyone's subject to it, regardless of gender or age. Only pop idols of the past could pretend like they had some special power that let them live without using the bathroom.*

"Um, is there really no other way around this, Haruka?"

"Oh, do you have to go to the bathroom as well, Natsuki?"

“Well, not now, thankfully. I just feel uneasy thinking about having to do it in the future...”

“It’s just natural bodily functions, so it would be best to give up and accept that you have to do it. Besides, it’s not like Touya and Nao are the kind of guys who get sexually aroused from girls going to the bathroom, right?”

It was a delicate topic, so both Touya and I had done our best to not get involved, but then Haruka had suddenly dragged us into it, so we both replied as fast as we could. “O-Of course not!”

I’m aware there are guys out there who have that fetish, but I can’t relate at all. I mean, there’s no difference between the stuff that comes out of girls and guys, right?

“No, I’m not worried about that at all. It’s just that it’s still embarrassing. You know, with the sound, and, um, the smell...”

“Only Japanese toilets have high-tech devices like Otohime that play melodies to cancel out any sounds. Are you going to replicate the effect by singing while you go to the bathroom?”

Haruka, that’s a horrible idea. That’d just make it obvious that someone’s at the climax of their struggle when the song falters partway through.

“The only thing you can really do to avoid this is to try to go to the bathroom in town before heading out, I think,” said Haruka. “You might get sick if you hold it in for too long. Either way, I still think the best option is to just accept this as part of life in this world. You won’t have a choice if we have to camp out outside over multiple days for work, after all.”

“How do the people in this world deal with this?”

“Well, precisely because of things like the bathroom issue, mixed gender parties aren’t very common, but if people have to form one, it seems that they just don’t worry about it. Or rather, they have no choice but to ignore it if they want to get along as a party.”



“Are there no magical devices that can deal with these issues, Haruka?” Natsuki asked. “There’s magic stuff like that in this world, right?”

“Magical devices for the toilet? There might be some that you can set up in your own house, but you’re asking about ones that we can use while camping out, right? Do you mean something similar to the Otohome device I mentioned earlier?”

“That doesn’t sound like it’d be very useful by itself. We’d also need something that can protect us—maybe a device that can create walls that won’t buckle if a monster rams into them?”

“When it comes to camping, a device like that would be extremely useful for all sorts of purposes, but that’s not realistic. Or rather, there may well be magical devices that can create physical barriers, but I doubt an ordinary person can afford one.”

Mm, Haruka makes a very good point. A magical device as convenient and useful as that would be way more common if it was priced within reach of the average person or adventurer.

“Nao, do either you or Touya have any ideas or opinions?”

“Wait, are you really asking us, Haruka?” I replied. *The bathroom discussion is kind of awkward for us to join in on. Oh well, I guess I’ll give it some thought. Hmm...* “Well, I think the first thing we need to do is establish what problem you want a magical device to solve. For example, a magical device that prevents others from knowing that you’re going to the bathroom is out of the question, right?”

“Mm, it would be too dangerous and worrisome to sneak off and disappear by yourself while everyone else is resting.”

“As for what else comes to my mind, a magical device that could block out both sound and smell would be good. It would also be nice if we had a magical device that could create a physical barrier that was strong enough to buy some time for you to clean up in emergencies.”

“Let’s put aside that idea for now, but we definitely need something around to serve as a barrier while we go to the bathroom,” said Haruka. “Up until now,

we've mostly been adventuring around in forests, but we'd be completely exposed if we were out in a flat and open area. That wouldn't be pleasant even for you two as guys, right?"

"Mm, yeah, I don't really want to be exposed out in the open if possible," said Touya.

We had bought some lengths of cloth that we could use as curtains, but we hadn't used them for that purpose yet. None of us had gotten the urge to go to the bathroom while we were out in the plains, and in the woods, bushes were more than enough to hide behind.

"Hey, what are you guys talking about?"

While we were discussing the bathroom, Yuki had returned, carrying the hoe over her shoulder. She looked like she had gotten over her embarrassment, as she had a very relieved expression on her face.

"We were talking about what we can do to deal with the bathroom issue in the future," said Haruka.

"I wish you guys had discussed this much earlier! What ideas did you come up with?"

"We discussed how we want to find a way to deal with the sound and smell, something to use as curtains, and how we also want a strong physical barrier if possible."

"That would definitely put me at ease. Oh yeah, you have the Alchemy skill, right, Haruka? Are there any magical devices you can make with that skill?"

"There's no way such things exist. That would be way too convenient— Actually, wait, I have an alchemist encyclopedia on me that I can check." She took a thick book out of her backpack and flipped it open to check the contents. "Let's see. Oh, there's a magical device called a Sound Barrier that seems to be used primarily for private conversations or meetings. As for the smell problem, I might be able to solve that if I tinker with a magical device that can be used as an air freshener. As for devices that can create physical barriers, both the cost and the difficulty involved in crafting one scales with the strength of the barrier."

“Oh, so magical devices that can solve our problems do exist?”

“Yeah, a lot of research and development seems to have been done on these devices since they can be used for all sorts of purposes. Devices that can create physical barriers seem like they’ll be hard to obtain, though.”

Haruka told us that such devices could be used for protection when camping outside or as home security systems, but even ones that could only create small barriers were way too expensive and not something an ordinary adventurer could really afford.

“What about the curtains?” Natsuki asked. “Even if we use something that we can assemble on site and then break down for ease of carrying, it’ll take up a lot of space when it’s assembled, right?”

“Mm. We bought some cloth to use as curtains, but we haven’t used it yet since we can’t really carry around the poles we’d need to hang them on.”

If we’d had carbon fiber on us, then we would have been able to hang cloth up like a tent, but all we could obtain were long wooden poles. It wouldn’t be practical for us to carry such things around all the time.

“Can’t we solve that problem with magical devices, Haruka?” Yuki asked. “If there are magical devices that can create barriers, then couldn’t you just adjust them so the barriers were opaque?”

“That means we’ll need at least three devices in total for blocking out sound, smell, and vision, right?” Touya asked. “Is it really worth investing that much time and money in bathroom stuff?”

Yikes, Touya, that’s not a good thing to say to them!

“Huh?! It’s important and totally worth it, Touya!” Yuki exclaimed. “This is a quality of life thing!”

“Our psychological well-being affects the physical performance of our bodies as well,” said Natsuki.

“Mm. It’ll cause us stress if we have to put up with bad bathroom conditions, which will also be bad for our health,” said Haruka.

“O-Oh, I see. Yeah, you guys are completely right.”

Damn, all three of the girls ganged up on him and smacked him down. Touya flinched and ducked his head as he walked away from where the girls were and came over to sit next to me.

“Is that stuff really that important, Nao?” Touya whispered.

“Yeah, I think so,” I whispered back. “I’d prefer to have those kinds of magical devices as well.”

“Hmm. Oh yeah, I guess they would be good for when we have to let out a number two.”

“Think about it this way. If you’re resting and having a drink, you wouldn’t want to be interrupted all of a sudden by the sound of me shooting out a number two—or by the smell.”

“Yeah, that’d be disgusting!”

“Right? At the same time, it would be dangerous for me to go off on my own to some place where I wouldn’t disturb you, so we definitely need magical devices to solve this problem.”

“Luckily, so far we’ve mainly just had to go do number one outside, but I guess we’ll definitely need magical devices if a number two emergency does happen.”

It appeared that our whispered conversation had convinced Touya of the necessity of magical devices, since he nodded back at me in the end. The girls looked like they had reached a conclusion of their own, since they were also nodding at each other.

“Basically, we need the materials to craft the magical devices we want, the money to afford those materials in the first place, and for Haruka to level up her Alchemy skill,” said Yuki.

“Mm, we’ll need to earn a lot of money for the materials,” said Natsuki.

“It’s the only realistic way to obtain those magical devices, since it’s not easy to buy the finished product in a store,” said Haruka. “Both of you are okay with this course of action, right?” Haruka looked at Touya and me as she asked us that, and we both nodded back immediately.

“Of course!” Touya exclaimed.

“Yeah, I’m fine with it as long as we don’t overextend ourselves,” I said. “We have to earn more money regardless, and it’ll definitely be worthwhile for Haruka to level up her Alchemy skill.”

If leveling up her Alchemy skill also enabled Haruka to craft things like potions, then it would be an even better investment. In fact, in the short term, the ability to craft potions would be more important than those magical devices. We had Haruka’s magic for healing purposes, but injuries and diseases were still scary in this world.

“Okay, now that we’ve decided on a course of action, let’s head towards town!” The minute she said that, Yuki got up and started walking. She sounded very happy, probably because we had found reason to hope that we could eventually solve the bathroom problems she had been worried about.



A few hours had passed since we’d rested and eaten lunch. We had almost reached Laffan when Touya stopped in his tracks as if something had come to mind all of a sudden.

“Oh yeah, earlier we met Tomi somewhere around here. I wonder if he managed to safely reach Laffan by himself.”

Yuki tilted her head to the side. “Tomi? Who’s that? Is it someone you know?”

“By Tomi, I mean Wakabayashi. He’s a dwarf now. He had collapsed from hunger.”

“Wakabayashi-kun is a dwarf?” Natsuki asked. “That’s hard to picture in my head...”

“Yeah, we didn’t recognize that it was him until he specifically told us,” I said.

“He hadn’t changed the way he talked at all, so it didn’t match his looks and deep voice at all,” said Touya.

I wish he had tried to speak like some tough middle-aged man. Well, in a way, that’s a narrow idea of what dwarfs are like. There must be young dwarfs and dwarf children out there, so it’s unlikely that they all sound like middle-aged

men.

“He had apparently been transported into this world along with Tanaka and Takahashi, but...” I repeated the story of what had happened to those two along with our guesses about the skills they had.

Yuki’s face went pale and she replied, “Yikes, land mine skills are really scary!”

“So, um, how many of our classmates do you think are still alive at this point?” Natsuki asked.

“I’m not sure, since it’s hard to track down people who changed their race from the default human,” I said. “From what we know, it seems like around four to five of our classmates have died in Laffan from using the Plunder skill.”

“It seems like there were three of our classmates who died that way in Sarstedt,” said Yuki. “I’m fairly sure about this since I overheard stories about it at the inn.” Yuki also mentioned that Sarstedt wasn’t a large town, so rumors about three dead bodies without a visible cause of death had spread quite fast.

“We’ve also bumped into other classmates aside from Tomi, but the only one we’ve directly interacted with was Umezono,” said Touya.

“Oh yeah...I completely forgot about her.” It looked like Haruka was reflecting on our encounter with Umezono. She frowned.

“What happened?” Natsuki asked.

“Well, it’s just that Umezono tried to pick a fight with Haruka.” While I was at it, I went ahead and told Yuki and Natsuki what had happened. *Why did she have to gloat about it before she ran away? Did she really want to become Haruka’s enemy that badly?*

“Whoa, I never thought Umezono-san was brave enough to do something like that! Only a brave fool would pick a fight with Haruka!”

“What are you trying to imply, Yuki? Are you saying that I’m somehow terrifying?” Haruka had a smile on her face as she questioned Yuki, but that smile in itself was a bit terrifying.

“I mean, I don’t think you’re terrifying at all. It’s just that it’s hard to believe that someone would take that kind of risk, you know?”

“Yeah, I feel the same way,” said Natsuki. “The wiser choice would be to surrender instead of picking a fight with you, Haruka.”

Yuki and Natsuki nodded to each other in agreement. In fact, none of the boys in our class had ever been stupid enough to pick a fight with Haruka, since there had been a high risk that not just Haruka but a majority of the other girls in our class would end up hating them. After all, it was a rare boy who wouldn't mind all of his female classmates hating him.

“I can't believe you're both so mean to me! I'm a pitiful victim here no matter how you look at it! From an objective perspective, that is.”

Well, objectively speaking, she did get insulted for no good reason even though she just listed her skills as Umezono had requested. Your choice of words makes it hard for me to truly sympathize with you, though, since you sound like you don't actually care that much, Haruka.

“Anyway, this doesn't matter at all. She's not a threat by any means.”

Yep, that's the Haruka I know. Her scariness and air of mental strength definitely come from this cold and rational side. Well, we've managed to survive and lead mostly peaceful lives in this world thanks to that strength of hers, so it's a good thing.

“Based on what we know so far, it seems like about twenty-five percent of our classmates have died already. That's way too many careless people, isn't it?”

“This appears to be Haruka-san's conclusion on this case,” I said. “What are your thoughts, Touya-san?”

I brought an invisible air microphone to Touya for him to state his thoughts like an expert on television, and he played along with my skit. “Haruka's not considering the fact that she's in the minority here. Like, if you think about how many land mines there were among the skills the god initially offered us during the character creation process, then a death rate of twenty-five percent is actually quite low.”

“Yeah, I have the same opinion as you do, Touya. It all depends on whether you considered the cost of the Help Guide as a necessary expense or not,” I

said. “I’m not sure if I would’ve been able to resist the allure of skills that looked like cheat skills if I’d had fewer points available to me in the beginning.” *Whew, I’m really proud of my past self for deciding to get the Help Guide in the end despite hesitating at first.*

“Mm, same here! On the other hand, Haruka managed to resist getting skills that seemed strong and went for both the Help Guide and the General Knowledge skill, and she’s been careful the whole time even after getting transported to this world,” said Touya. “Without Haruka around, I’m pretty confident that I would’ve started taking on goblin hunt quests by myself within a few days!”

Yuki nodded vigorously with a huge smile on her face. “Yeah, there were so many tempting skills, so you can’t really blame someone for getting one!” she exclaimed.

“That’s pretty rich coming from someone who took the Copy skill,” said Natsuki.

Yuki’s smile faded. “Oh, come on, don’t bring that up again! Trust me, I actually do regret my choice!”

“Actually, I guess it wasn’t a bad choice given your current situation, since you can learn skills from all of us.”

“Yeah, absolutely!”

After Natsuki backed her up, Yuki had a happy smile on her face again, and she nodded in agreement, but Haruka was about to dash Yuki’s spirits again.

“However, you’ll have to decide something to focus on. If you don’t, you’ll just end up being a jack-of-all-trades and master of none. Your training will also probably be more difficult than ours.”

“Right...”

“Well, it’ll still be amazing if Yuki manages to learn even half of all the skills that we have, right?” I said.

“Yeah, I’ll do my best to learn skills! Please teach me whatever you can, all of you!”

“I don’t mind teaching you my skills, but the training’s going to be relentless,” said Touya. “We’ve allocated a few hours per day for training as part of our daily routine, so it won’t be easy.”

“Oh, so it really does require a lot of time and effort. I guess that makes sense, since results don’t come that easily.”

All three of the girls had been smart in school, but they weren’t the genius type of smart. Rather, it was the type of smart that just came from hard work and taking their studies seriously. They’d also participated in practice for school events like sports day; they would never skip out on such things. Their efforts had always paid off, so that meant they were gifted to an extent, but none of them had ever been the type of person who could perform any task easily without effort or practice.

“I’ve obtained a strong and healthy body in this world, so I guess I’ll have to do training as well,” said Natsuki.

Natsuki hadn’t been bad at sports back on Earth, but she’d definitely had less stamina than other people. In fact, she would sometimes have to take days off school due to her frail health. On the other hand, Yuki had always had the most energy and stamina among the three girls. Haruka had been in the middle, but she’d always gotten the hang of things fairly quickly, so her results had been on equal footing with Yuki’s. Both of them had been near the top of all the girls at our school in terms of performance and results for sports.

“Oh, how many people do you think actually decided to get the Help Guide, Haruka?” Natsuki asked.

“There’s a high chance that the girls who hadn’t really played games before would decide to get the Help Guide. In fact, that was the case for you, wasn’t it, Natsuki? Also, the god did warn us that there were no cheat skills, so there are probably some people who took that warning to heart and avoided the land mine skills.”

Haruka also mentioned that we were in a fairly normal world, not a wild and lawless one, so she believed that our classmates would be able to earn enough money every day to get by even if they didn’t become adventurers. However, I wasn’t so certain about that.

“You sure about that, Haruka?” Touya asked. “Weren’t there tempting skills for girls too, like Heroine Aptitude, Charm, and Attractive Appearance? I’d think some of them would choose skills like those if they didn’t have many points available to them.”

“As for the girls who had played games and read light novels before, they’d probably just take skills like Plunder or the EXP skills without thinking,” I said. Those skills would seem good at first glance if you didn’t pause to think about them, after all. “Well, that’s if they didn’t have anything specific they wanted to get like Touya and Tomi did.” Tomi had always wanted to become a dwarf, which was why he had decided to get skills like Drunkard and Blacksmithing to fit his image of what a dwarf should be.

“Oh yeah, we haven’t asked you yet, but why did you choose to become a beastman, Touya?” Natsuki asked.

“It’s because I wanted a wife with animal ears!”

In response to Touya’s energetic declaration, Yuki and Natsuki both replied “I see...” in unison and then nodded silently. I wasn’t sure what they actually thought deep down since both of them refrained from making any further comments. *No need to hold back! Feel free to call him stupid! Well, actually, that would just cause Touya to rant about his animal ears fetish, so I guess silence is the right choice.*

“Well, I’m really glad there aren’t any cheat skills in this world,” said Yuki. “If cheat skills were rampant and everybody could use them without any consequences or restrictions, then that’d be an absolute cancer for the people of this world. It’d also make our lives harder.”

“Yeah, definitely,” I said. “It would lead to things like conflicts between people who both have cheat skills, and people who’d forcibly create their own harems with their skills.”

“Mm. Ordinary people like us should just aim for relaxing and peaceful lives,” said Haruka.

We all muttered skeptically in response to what we had just heard from Haruka.

“Ordinary people...?”

“You, ordinary...?”

The girls had a hint of doubt in their voices, as did Touya and I.

“Huh?” She raised her fingers one by one as she brought up her justifications for classifying herself as an ordinary person. “I’ve been careful to not stand out, I’ve avoided dangerous work, and I’ve been working hard to slowly earn and save money. See? I’m an ordinary person no matter how you look at it.”

We all had awkward expressions on our faces as we glanced at each other to discuss our thoughts.

“Well, if you put it that way, you do sound like an ordinary person, but it doesn’t feel right for some reason...” said Touya.

“It’s probably because it doesn’t fit her,” said Natsuki. “She has strong leadership qualities, after all.”

“She’s also very active and decisive,” said Yuki. “In fact, if we hadn’t gotten transported to this world, I think she would’ve started her own company or venture eventually.”

“Oh, that entrepreneur image fits her perfectly!” I exclaimed.

We all nodded in agreement with Yuki. *I mean, I can’t really imagine Haruka taking a fairly normal path in life, like going to college, graduating, and then finding an office job. That’s too normal for her.*

“Is that supposed to be a compliment? Oh well, it doesn’t matter. I’m not sure exactly how many of our classmates are still alive by now, but there’s no reason for us to go out of our way to look for or get involved with any of them. None of you have anyone you want to look for, right?”

“No one comes to mind,” said Natsuki. “The only people I can trust are right here.”

“Same here,” said Yuki. “I mean, I have friends who I hung out with before, but I can’t say that I’m willing to trust them when our lives are on the line.”

“Mm, like we said before, there’s no one else who Nao and I want to look for either,” said Touya.

“Yep, our minds haven’t changed,” I said. “I wouldn’t mind helping out people like Tomi if we happen to bump into them, but that’s all I’m willing to do.”

Well, that’s only if said person doesn’t have a land mine skill. It would be a hell no from me in that case. I brought up the suggestion to avoid and flee from people with land mine skills, and everyone agreed with my idea.

The first place we headed towards once we had arrived back at Laffan was The Slumbering Bear, of course. We would get the best value for our money at this inn for both food and lodging, so our future plans would have to change drastically if we weren’t able to get rooms here for our new, larger party. Luckily, we were able to register two rooms without any problems, which meant we could rest at ease for now. Then again, this inn was a little-known place, and it never seemed like the available rooms were all full, so I hadn’t really been worried.

With that matter of concern out of the way, we headed towards the Adventurers’ Guild next to sell tusk boar parts. When we entered the guild, we saw Diola-san at the counter, and she looked like she was free as usual.

“Hello, Diola-san,” said Haruka. “It’s been a while since we last met.”

“Oh, hello, Haruka-san. You and your party are back already?”

“Mm, luckily, we managed to finish the business we headed out to do quickly, so we returned as soon as we could.”

“By business, you mean that you were searching for people, right? Would the two people behind you happen to be the ones you were looking for?”

Yuki and Natsuki both bowed when Diola looked at them, and then they introduced themselves.

“Hello, my name’s Yuki.”

“Hello, my name’s Natsuki. We’ve grouped up with Haruka’s party, so I hope we’ll get to know each other well.”

“Mm, I hope so as well. Have both of you already registered at an Adventurers’ Guild?”

“Yeah,” said Yuki. “We registered back at a town called Sarstedt.”

When she heard Yuki's explanation, Diola-san nodded to indicate that it made sense to her that they'd come with us to Laffan. "Oh, that town? It's a good thing you came to Laffan, then. Sarstedt isn't a good place to look for work as adventurers." Information about other towns would probably reach her ears naturally due to the fact that she worked here at this guild as a receptionist, so she probably knew what things were like at Sarstedt. Lodging fees were expensive in that town, and there was barely any work available for adventurers there. On top of that, the food also tasted bad, so there was absolutely no reason at all to stay in that town voluntarily.

"Also, we slew some tusk boars on our way back," said Haruka. "Can we sell the boar parts here first?"

"Of course. Please wait for a bit."

We took out the leather bag with the boar parts and handed them over to Diola-san, who then carried them to the backyard by herself and returned after she was done. *Oh yeah, Diola-san sure has more physical strength than I expected. I mean, she carried that leather bag without any difficulty, and it probably weighed at least thirty kilos.*

"Whew, all right. Please wait for a bit until the assessment is complete. So, does this mean that you'll be actively taking on work as a party of five here in this town for a while?"

"Yeah. We're still rookie adventurers, so we're going to take things one step at a time," said Haruka.

"I'm glad to hear that. There are a lot of adventurers who start to mistakenly believe that they can take on more than they actually can once they start earning some money, sadly..." Diola-san's voice had a gloomy tone; she sighed after bringing that up. Adventurers like that seemed to be a huge source of trouble for her, just like the ones who didn't listen to the instructions offered by the guild for herb gathering. Most adventurers had some sense of personal responsibility, but it probably wasn't pleasant for Diola-san to see irresponsible rookies die or retire prematurely from things like injuries.

"On a side note, I've been wondering about this for a while, but those three packs you have look quite nice and convenient to use."

“Oh, I’m glad you noticed, Diola-san,” said Haruka. “I adjusted these backpacks quite a lot while I was making them to achieve that.”

Haruka happily started to explain the functions of the backpacks that she had crafted in order to shift away from the previous gloomy topic. In fact, Haruka went into great detail as she brought up the specific usage and reasons for every single part of the backpacks, and she also claimed that these backpacks were easier to carry than regular cloth sacks and could hold more total weight as well.

“Interesting. Can I try carrying one of them on my back for a bit?”

“Huh? Oh, sure.”

Half of Haruka’s explanation was just boasting about how well-made her backpacks were, but Diola-san seemed like she was very interested in everything Haruka had to say. She stood up and walked over from behind the counter to borrow Haruka’s backpack and placed it on her back. After that, she walked around for a while with the backpack on, took it off once to check how heavy it was, and then placed it on her back again afterwards. She then paused in thought for a while before asking, “This isn’t a magical device, right?” It wasn’t strange of her to think that it could be magical, so that was a natural question.

The backpacks that Haruka had crafted would consume less stamina to carry around compared to satchels or cloth knapsacks that weighed the same, and that was exactly why many countries back on Earth used such backpacks for their armies. After all, if needed, you could carry an amount of supplies equal to your own weight in these backpacks over a long-distance march as long as you went through proper training. In addition, there was a significant difference between expensive and cheap backpacks in terms of how much stamina you would consume carrying one around. Such backpacks might not look very different from each other on the outside, but the difference would be obvious once you actually tried and compared them. A high price didn’t necessarily guarantee high quality, but there was a limit to the quality of cheap backpacks. In regards to the backpacks we had, they were extremely high quality due to the fact that Haruka had performed her best when she’d crafted them, so they were very comfortable and convenient to use.

“Yeah, they’re just normal backpacks,” said Haruka. “I used some sturdy cloth and leather to craft these, but that’s it.”

“I see. Hmm. Would you be willing to sell this to the Adventurers’ Guild, Haruka-san?”

“Huh? Do you mean this backpack?”

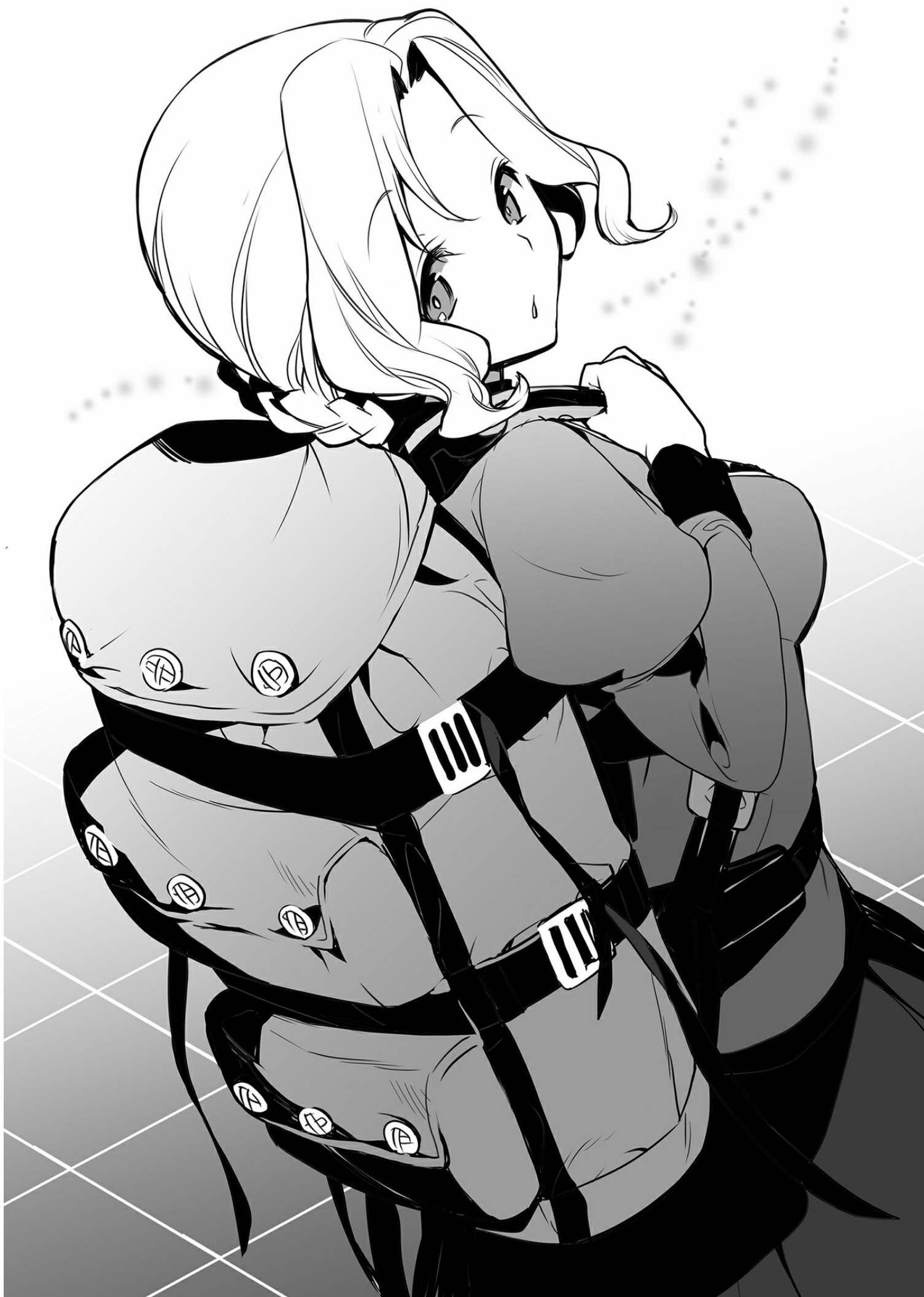
“Well, no, I mean the information about how to craft these backpacks. This is a very innovative design, after all.”

“Um, well, I was actually thinking of crafting these ourselves to sell, since we have more hands to help out with crafting now, so...” Haruka looked at Yuki and Natsuki as she said that to indicate they were the new helping hands.

Diola-san looked like she understood Haruka’s idea, but she shook her head in response. “That’s not a bad idea, but I wouldn’t recommend it.”

“Really?”

“Yes. These backpacks are definitely good enough to sell, of course, but how many will you be able to craft per day? If you’re all going to be taking on adventurer work at the same time, then that means you won’t have much time to craft per day. Also, even if you were to devote all of your time to crafting these backpacks, it still probably wouldn’t be worth it.”



Haruka's Sewing skill was Level 2, and if Yuki managed to copy and learn the Sewing skill from Haruka, then they would probably be able to produce backpacks at a rate faster than the average weaver. However, there would be a limit to the amount that they could produce per day if we took on adventurer work as well, and Touya and I would be useless if Haruka decided to devote all of our time to crafting backpacks for sale.

"In addition, the biggest problem would be that eventually others would copy you. Your backpacks will definitely sell well, but as soon as word spreads, some wealthy merchant will copy your design and produce them at scale to drive you out of the market, you know?"

"Is there no sort of law or system that punishes people for copying products or ideas...?"

"That'd be possible for magical devices that are good enough to be listed in the alchemist encyclopedia, but that's not the case for these backpacks."

Despite the fact that international copyright treaties existed back on Earth, people would still make plagiarized and rip-off versions of intellectual property. Civilization wasn't as developed on this world as it was on Earth, so it would probably be very difficult to obtain things like international or domestic patents.

"Um, wouldn't that also apply to the Adventurers' Guild, though?"

"Well, the guild is actually an organization with a significant amount of power and influence. There are barely any merchants who would be willing to challenge the guild head-on. In addition, the main customer base for these backpacks will be adventurers."

I guess no normal merchant would want to pick a fight with their own customers. Diola-san also mentioned that if Haruka agreed to sell the instructions for crafting these backpacks, then in exchange, the guild would pay royalties for a while, so there was a higher chance that we would earn more in the end from doing it this way rather than crafting and selling backpacks by ourselves.

"Also, if you do agree to this idea, I'd like you to take a few days to teach our weavers how to craft these backpacks. They'll be the ones doing most of the

work.”

This sounded like a good deal based on how Diola-san explained it to us. We could probably trust her to keep her word, and even if we got scammed, the loss of backpack sales wouldn't really affect us that much. Haruka turned around and looked at all of us to see what we thought about this. We all nodded back to indicate we were down for this idea, so she turned back to Diola-san and agreed.

“Okay, that's fine with us. I'll be having Yuki and Natsuki craft these backpacks for themselves as well, so I can just use the same sewing pattern for teaching your weavers, right? It'll take me a few days before I'm ready, though.”

“Of course. I need some time myself to finalize this idea and to gather the weavers who'll be making the backpacks, so this works out.”

Diola-san had a smile on her face as she extended her hand, and Haruka firmly grasped it to seal the deal. On a side note, Diola-san was still carrying the backpack on her back while she was doing this. She was also wearing clothes that obviously weren't meant for heading out of town, so the backpack looked kind of weird on her.

“Oh, right, I still have the backpack on me. I'll return this to you.” She seemed a bit embarrassed, so it appeared that she had noticed that I was looking at the backpack. She swiftly returned it to Haruka. “Oh, good timing. The assessment seems to be complete as well. Let's see, the total amount comes to eighteen thousand eight hundred Rea. Is that acceptable to you?”

“Yes.”

Whew, that's a pretty big haul. We took back the leather bag along with the money that she handed over to us. If Haruka had said no here, then we technically could have gotten back the parts that we had handed over, like the meat, but there hadn't been any problems so far. This was how things usually went when we came to sell things here at the Adventurers' Guild. The guild would also clean the bags that we handed over before they were returned to us, so that was quite nice and convenient. People who wanted to negotiate to get more money for specific things would have to bring the materials to the counter at the warehouse located in the backyard to negotiate during the

assessment process, but we had never done that before. This was due to the fact that we weren't knowledgeable enough to negotiate, so it would probably be a pointless waste of time even if we tried. In addition, we wanted to try and leave a good impression on the guild by trusting them with the entire process.

"Also, there's something I'd like to discuss with you, Diola-san," said Haruka. "What do you think about the idea of renting a house?"

"You mean renting a house to live in? Well, if you plan to make this town your home base as a party of five, then I think it would be a good idea."

According to Diola-san, we would be able to rent a house for anywhere between about five thousand and ten thousand Rea per month, so we would actually be saving money compared to staying at an inn if that rent was split between five people. There wasn't anything like a security deposit required, but we would be chased out of the house right away if we were late with our monthly rent, and we would have to pay for repair fees ourselves if we damaged the house. However, we wouldn't need a guarantor to rent a house in this world, so it was still easier to rent a house than it was back in Japan as long as we could afford our monthly rent payments.

"Also, the amount you need to pay for rent will vary depending on the location, layout, and the size of the house. Do you have any specific preferences?"

"Hmm." Haruka turned around and asked all of us, "What do you guys think? Any ideas?"

"Um, is rent more expensive for property close to the center of the town?" Natsuki asked.

"Yes. Rent is expensive for property near the center of the town and property along the main road. On the other hand, rent is cheaper for property located in areas of the town that aren't as safe as the other areas. Also, it pains me to say this, but rent is fairly cheap for property around the Adventurers' Guild as well."

According to what Diola-san told us, it wasn't that dangerous around here where the Adventurers' Guild was located, but the stereotypical image of adventurers lowered the value of property around this area. That image was far from the truth, since there weren't that many adventurers who would cause

trouble due to the fact that it would affect your rank. However, that did nothing to change the fact that the ordinary person thought of an adventurer as someone who was armed and walked around in dirty clothes. That was kind of an inevitable part of being an adventurer, though. If you didn't have the Purification skill, then you would have no choice but to return to town while covered in blood or dirt.

"Should we aim to rent a property near the Adventurers' Guild, then?" Yuki asked.

"That would be a logical choice for adventurers," said Natsuki.

"We tend to head out of town from the east gate, so it'd be a bit far from here, though..." I said.

"Once all of you climb up in rank, your party will eventually shift to heading out towards the south forest for more dangerous work, right? When that happens, the gate you'll be using will be closer if you choose to rent a property near the guild."

In general, the east forest was suited for rookies, while the south forest was suited for adventurers who had advanced beyond the rookie stage, so what Diola-san had suggested was correct. However, we were able to earn money by slaying tusk boars, so we would continue to head out of the east gate for a while.

"Also, have all of you slain goblins at least once before?"

"Yes, twice," said Haruka. "Well, Yuki and Natsuki haven't yet, however."

"Do you have the magicite from those goblins on you?"

"Oh, um, we didn't retrieve them..."

"I see. Well, I guess that's not really necessary for your party, Haruka-san. Can you hand over your adventurer card to me? Please hand over your cards as well, Nao-san and Touya-san."

We followed Diola-san's instructions and handed over our adventurer cards to her. She then used something that looked like a chisel to engrave a seal on the back of each of our cards before she handed them back to us.

“Congratulations. You are now rookie adventurers.”

“Huh? We weren’t even considered rookie adventurers until now...?” I asked.

“Mm. Well, I’m not really sure if it applies to your party due how much you’ve earned up until now, but you would normally have to retrieve magicite from monsters before you could be considered an adventurer.”

We hadn’t actually retrieved and turned in magicite at the guild yet, but Diola-san told us that we were more than qualified for a promotion due to our achievements so far. It was only a promotion to Rank 1, though, so the conditions for ranking up probably weren’t strict or hard at all.

“The three of you are now officially Rank 1 adventurers. Technically, this does mean that more quests are now available to you, but this might not be relevant to you right now since you’re all earning a decent amount of Rea as is.”

“Hmm. Wait, if Rank 1 adventurers are considered rookies, how do people refer to adventurers below Rank 1?” Haruka asked. “Do they just get called something like unranked or Rank Zero?”

“There’s no set way to refer to such adventurers, but some people just don’t acknowledge new adventurers, and some rude people use the phrase ‘half rookie’ to look down on new adventurers. I personally think there’s a need for adventurers regardless of whether or not they can defeat monsters, so I don’t see a reason to treat new adventurers differently like that, though.”

Anyone could register as an adventurer as long as they paid the registration fee, so it made sense that some people wouldn’t consider someone an actual adventurer if that person couldn’t defeat one of the weakest monsters in the world. Half rookie kind of did fit, but still.

“By the way, how much does magicite from a goblin go for?”

“They go for about 250 Rea apiece.”

That amount was much smaller than I’d thought it would be. Goblins weren’t exactly strong by any means, but I personally felt like you would need a decent amount of courage and determination to slay goblins.

“If that’s the case, then I guess half rookie would actually be a bit fitting...”

“It’s more just that dindels are worth a lot. However, if there are goblin hunt quests available, then an extra reward gets handed out for the successful completion of that quest, so goblins aren’t always bad as a source of income.”

“Well, aren’t tusk boars also worth a lot?”

“That’s just due to the demand compared to the supply. In fact, it’s amazing that your party has managed to slay and bring back materials from tusk boars each time, since they’re normally not an animal that’s easy to find, you know?”

The only material that could be retrieved from goblins was the magicite inside of them, and the value of that magicite would be determined by its quality. Magicite could be used as fuel, so it would get compared to the other types of fuel available. To put it in simpler terms, if one magicite crystal was used to boil about one hundred liters of water, then it would be compared with the price of firewood required to fuel a fire to boil one hundred liters of water. On the other hand, the meat of the boar could be sold directly, so the price wouldn’t be affected by other factors. The difficulty of slaying a tusk boar didn’t matter, but that was just how things worked in the world. As for why we were able to find and slay tusk boars on a regular basis, it was due to the use of my Scout skill and Touya’s sharp sixth sense as a beastman. The average adventurer probably wouldn’t have either of these, so the price of tusk boar materials was fair due to how rarely most adventurers would encounter them. *I wonder why we didn’t retrieve the magicite from goblins, though. Two hundred fifty Rea isn’t nothing, so...*

“Oh yeah, why didn’t we retrieve the magicite from those goblins, Haruka?” I whispered.

“It’s because the magicite in goblins is located in the hippocampus area of their brains,” Haruka whispered. “We’d have to smash their heads open for that, so...”

“Ah, I get what you’re saying.”

The goblins in this world looked like the common type of goblins that would appear in games, but they were technically still humanoids, so we would have to smash their skulls with a sword or slice their heads off before working to get to the magicite. *Yeah, uh, that’s a bit too gross for me right now. I’m not quite*

ready yet. I wasn't willing to do such work myself, and the idea of asking Haruka to do it felt horrible to me as well. It wouldn't bother me if we smashed the skull of a goblin in combat, but I was still quite reluctant about the idea of purposely mutilating a dead body.

"Oh, we've gotten a bit off topic," said Diola-san. "So, do you have a plan for your housing search? I can help you look for a property through the guild if you're looking for one that's in the vicinity."

"Huh? The Adventurers' Guild actually offers services like that?"

"Only for property within the vicinity of the guild. As I mentioned earlier, ordinary citizens tend to kind of avoid this part of town when it comes to property, and the property owners also feel safer when the guild acts as the middleman."

Property owners feel safer if they leave the negotiations with adventurers to the Adventurers' Guild, huh? Most adventurers would be just fine, but I guess there are some troublemakers out there who can't be fully trusted.

"In addition, adventurers tend to shun regular middlemen for real estate transactions, so that's another factor."

"Oh, I see."

Regular middlemen also preferred and prioritized people who had jobs that were more stable than adventurer work. The highest-earning adventurers would earn a huge amount of money, but that didn't change the fact that adventurer work wasn't stable or reliable—or the fact that it came with a high risk of death.

"I guess we'll settle for a property in this area of town," said Haruka. "Do any of you guys have any specific preferences?"

"I'd like a place with a large yard to have plenty of room for training," said Touya.

"I'd like a place with a bath unit if possible, but it's probably not, right?" Natsuki asked.

"Is there property available that has a bath unit, Diola-san...?" Haruka asked.

I would love to have a bath unit as well. Purification was more than enough to stay clean, but I would sometimes get in a mood where I wanted to take a bath just for the sake of taking one. It looked like everyone else felt the same way as I did, since we all looked at Diola-san with high expectations in our eyes, but Diola-san just responded by knitting her brows together.

“A bath unit? Um, that would be impossible for a regular house. Only the mansions of nobles can support bath units. The most you could do for a regular house would be to set up something like a tub in a house that has a large laundry area, I suppose...?”

As its name indicated, the laundry area was where you would wash things. Handwashing tended to be the standard method in this world, so there were also laundry areas in inns that were available to the people staying there, and usually it would just be an open place near a well. On the other hand, people who lived on private property would have to wash things throughout the year, regardless of the season, along with large things like sheets, which meant that some houses would have their laundry area indoors with an earthen floor where water could be drained out.

“I guess that’s the most we can do with a rented property,” said Haruka. “Any other preferences?”

“I’d like a house with enough individual rooms for each of us, and ideally a room that we can use for all sorts of work and to store things in,” I said.

We would need somewhere in the house for Haruka to sew and use her Alchemy skill, and we would also need a dedicated room that was spacious enough for storing food, since we had preserved food that we were currently storing in the warehouse at The Slumbering Bear.

“I’d like a house with a yard as well,” said Yuki. “I hope we can afford the peace of mind to grow some flowers.”

Flowers? Oh, gardening? I guess you do need peace of mind for a simple and down-to-earth life. As for me, all I knew about yard maintenance was just how to weed, and that was only because my parents had forced me to weed our yard. I hadn’t cared at all for the flower seedlings that my parents would sometimes buy and plant in the yard at our house. In fact, I’d never understood

why they didn't just plant a fruit tree for fruits to eat or vegetables that were both edible and pleasant to look at.

"I guess that's it for our preferences," said Haruka. "Is there a property that meets all of them, Diola-san?"

"Hmm. So you want to rent a house that has at least five individual rooms along with a large yard and laundry area? Well, since we have a deal with the backpacks, I'll try my best to look for one that fits those conditions, Haruka-san. Can you give me some time to look around?"

"Sure, of course. Thank you very much."

"Thank you very much," we all said.

Diola-san looked a bit doubtful about whether there was actually a house that met all of our preferred conditions, but she still smiled and nodded and said that she would do her best to look for one. We all lowered our heads to express our gratitude, and then we headed out of the guild building.



"This is delicious!" Yuki exclaimed.

Those were Yuki's first words after she took a bite out of the dinner that was served to us at The Slumbering Bear. She spoke from the bottom of her heart, and the unsociable innkeeper actually looked a bit happy when he heard her.

"I mean it," said Yuki. "I can't believe this inn is actually cheaper than the inn we were at before, even with breakfast and dinner included..."

We had split up between different rooms now due to the fact that Yuki and Natsuki had joined our party. Touya and I were staying in one room together, while the three girls were staying together in another room. There weren't any rooms for two available, so both of our rooms were rooms for four. We technically could have registered a single room for six, but it would cost 750 Rea per night. That option would've only saved us 250 Rea per night, but we were easily able to afford the extra expense per day by now. Besides, the difference in cost didn't matter at all if we compared it to the lodging fees for that inn back at Sarstedt. The food offered here at The Slumbering Bear tasted way better as well, so there was nothing to complain about.

“We’ll have to say goodbye to this inn soon if things go as planned for us, though,” said Haruka.

“Well, that’s if Diola-san can find a good property to recommend to us,” said Touya.

“I wouldn’t mind staying here at this inn over a long period of time, though,” said Yuki.

Haruka, Touya, and I all looked at each other and responded with bitter smiles when we heard what Yuki said.

“Hm? Do the three of you not like this inn?”

“No, that’s not what we’re trying to imply,” I said. “The food here definitely tastes better than at other places, but...”

“It’s more about how eating here is basically kind of like going out to eat,” said Touya.

“If we have to continue eating this the entire time, then well, you know...” said Haruka.

Yuki looked like she didn’t understand what we were trying to get at, but it seemed like Natsuki understood, since she nodded to us and then rephrased our opinions to Yuki. “For example, you wouldn’t like being told that you would have to eat the same food at a diner for every meal over a month, right, Yuki?”

“Oh, yeah, that makes more sense. Even if the food is delicious, I wouldn’t really want to keep eating the same thing every day.”

It was a fact that the food in this world tasted like foreign food to us. The food offered here at this inn was still way better than our other options, and I wouldn’t really mind eating one meal per day here, but I would get a bit sick of it if I had to eat all three meals here every day for a while. It would perhaps be asking for too much for some rice and salted Japanese plums, but eating out for a long period of time would definitely make me crave some homemade Japanese food. *I finally understand why some people bring instant food with them on overseas trips. I really do.*

“So yeah, I’m looking forward to your cooking, Haruka!” Touya exclaimed.

“There’s not much in the way of seasoning and spices available, but I’ll do my best.”

“Your Cooking skill can take care of that, right?”

“There’s no way—actually, I’m not completely sure about that.”

I felt like the Cooking skill would actually be able to solve everything based on the food that Haruka had cooked for us up until now. *The food she’s cooked so far with Level 1 Cooking is already delicious enough, so I wonder what’ll happen after she levels up that skill.*

“Oh yeah, was it really okay to make that deal with Diola-san for the backpacks, Haruka?” I asked. “Like, does she have the authority to make those kinds of deals?”

“Oh, did you not know this? Diola-san’s actually one of the higher-ups in the Adventurers’ Guild. More specifically, she’s the vice branch master of the guild in this town.”

“Wait, really?”

She definitely didn’t look like she was a new employee at the guild, but I had thought her position couldn’t be any higher than middle management due to her relative youth.

“Yeah. She said she only managed to get the job due to having connections, but it seems like she’s quite skilled at her job regardless.”

“I guess you would have to be skilled in order to reach the position of vice branch master. Why’s a vice branch master also working as a receptionist, though?”

“According to what she said, it was because there aren’t that many people working at the guild. Laffan is big compared to a town like Sarstedt, but it’s still a town in the countryside.”

That probably meant there weren’t that many adventurers here either. *Now that I think about it, I guess there aren’t that many staff working at the Adventurers’ Guild. If I don’t include the branch master and the staff who specialize in certain tasks like appraisal, then the total number of staff is*

probably in the single digits.

“I see. That makes sense. Oh yeah, what are we going to do from tomorrow onward?”

“Well, we’ve resolved the most urgent issue at hand—finding Yuki and Natsuki—so the general course of action from now on is to work towards the long-term goal of earning enough money to fund a safe and stable livelihood for the rest of our lives.”

Touya and I nodded in agreement, and both Yuki and Natsuki put serious expressions on their faces and lowered their heads to us in a courteous manner to express their thanks.

“I’ve said this before, but let me say thanks once again to all three of you for going out of your way to look for me and Natsuki. I don’t want to think about how our lives would’ve turned out if we hadn’t gotten to reunite with you guys...”

“We really appreciate it,” said Natsuki. “If we’d continued to work alone, then we would have probably had to take on some risks, or we might have continued to stay poor for a long time.”

“We’ve said this before too, but don’t worry about it,” said Touya. “We had something to gain from finding you two, so yeah.”

“Mm, we’re glad to have friends we can trust in this world,” said Haruka.

One of the biggest reasons we had finally decided to rent a house was that Yuki and Natsuki were with us now. It was great to have friends who we didn’t have to worry about in terms of actual land mine skills.

“Besides, I would have regretted it for my entire life if I’d left you two on your own. All right, I guess I’ll spend tomorrow helping you two learn how to craft your own backpacks. Nao, Touya, what about you two?”

“Uh, I guess I don’t really have anything to do aside from training,” I said. “I might go take a walk around town too, but that’s about it.”

We had already taken a break to get some rest a few days before, and there weren’t any urgent matters that I needed to deal with. Even if I ended up with

some free time to myself, the only thing I could use it on at the moment was just a walk around town.

“Well, in that case, I’ll head out too,” said Touya. “There’s something I want to check out. Is that okay?”

“Yeah, that’s fine. All right, we’ll all go off and do our own things tomorrow, then.”

Chapter 4—A Long-Awaited Meeting?

The next day, Touya headed out by himself right after we had all finished our individual training. The girls stayed inside their room to craft backpacks. As for me, I started to practice magic while reading the grimoire on Time Magic that I had obtained the other day. However, my mana reserves were almost empty after a few hours of practice, so I took a break and rolled around in my bed. I wanted to learn to craft magic bags as soon as I could, but at this rate, it would probably take quite a while before that was possible. I technically did have the Magic Aptitude: Time skill, but it appeared that things weren't going to be easy even with that.

“Whew. Oh yeah, this is actually the first time in a while that I've had a decent amount of time to myself.”

I had stayed with Haruka and Touya in a room for three for quite a while, so we'd been together almost the entire time we were in this different world. Life with roommates—even with good friends like them—caused me a tiny bit of stress, so I would've been blasted by absurd amounts of stress for sure if I'd had to live with some of my other classmates as well. In fact, I was fairly sure I would've ended up with a perforated stomach ulcer from stress if that had been the case. On top of that, I'd had to work constantly to earn money with almost no breaks up until now. I'd had no choice but to do so due to how dire things were, so I'd never felt like slacking off, but this kind of lifestyle still tired me out quite a lot over time. If all the NEETs in the world were thrown into similar circumstances, then they would surely end up escaping the NEET life one way or another after a week. Whether or not they would still be alive after that week didn't matter. Either way, it would still be an escape.

“Hmm, I haven't had lunch yet.”

The safest option for food was the dining hall downstairs at this inn. However, it wouldn't really be a refreshing experience due to the lack of a cute waitress. Other people would probably yell at me for being so demanding despite the

fact that I was grouped up and in a party with Haruka, Yuki, and Natsuki, but that was different. All I wanted to do was to get to know more people in this town. I had no ulterior motives. The only acquaintances I had in this town aside from Diola-san were the owner of this inn and Gantz-san from the weapon shop. Things in this world were different from modern society back on Earth, so it would probably be a good idea to try to be more sociable as practice for life after we left The Slumbering Bear to move into a house.

“All right, then.”

There was no way I could get to know more people if I just stayed in my room. I changed into my outdoor clothes and took a gutting knife with me in case I needed it to defend myself, then headed out of the inn. I felt kind of uneasy with having nothing but a knife on me, but it wouldn't feel right to ask someone to become friends with me while I was carrying around a spear. That would straight out be coercion if I did it to an ordinary citizen.

“Now then, where should I head first?”

The Slumbering Bear was located a bit away from the center of the town, so if I headed towards the central plaza, then I would find stalls there set up by merchants along with farmers who'd come from the countryside to sell their produce. That was the most bustling area of town, so I would probably have a decent time even just looking around. *Hmm.* I paused in thought for a while before I decided to head towards the maze of alleys in the opposite direction. I walked down the main road on a daily basis, but the only time I had explored the back alleys was when I'd been looking around for Yuki and Natsuki, and I hadn't had the time to enjoy the scenery then since I'd been in a rush. *Hmm, I guess it'll be pretty fun to enjoy the exotic scenery of this different world while looking for another inn like The Slumbering Bear to eat at. Well, hopefully I'll find someplace similar...*

We had settled on staying at The Slumbering Bear up until now because it was the inn that had been recommended to us in the beginning. However, we had done some research later, and we'd found out that this was the best inn in the vicinity due to the cheaper lodging and the decent food. It wasn't a famous inn by any means, and it wasn't in a good location either, so business wasn't exactly booming, but the dining hall would be packed full of local citizens due to the

fact the food was delicious. In fact, the inn probably made most of its profit from serving meals, and locals probably treated it as more of a dining hall than an inn. We'd once asked the innkeeper why the guard at the gate had recommended this inn to us, and he'd replied that it was probably because the guard's parents lived in a house nearby. *I'm glad it's his parent's house that's nearby. We would probably bump into him on a daily basis if he himself lived nearby, and that would be annoying.*

"Well, this sure is some exotic scenery."

Most of the houses lining the alley were one-story private homes. There were some two-story houses as well, but almost none with three stories. The houses looked like they were made of wood, bricks, and mortar. They weren't as pleasant to look at as buildings located in tourist spots in foreign countries, since those buildings were purposefully built to look nice on the outside, but the houses here looked fairly clean and were decent for sightseeing purposes. The main difference between the area I was in and the kind of tourist spot I had in mind was the lack of potted plants in the windows of each house. I took in the scenery for a few hours as I walked around town, but I hadn't encountered any places similar to The Slumbering Bear. Well, I technically had encountered some here and there, but they all gave off a strong feeling that first timers weren't welcome. I wasn't brave enough to enter those kinds of places alone, so all I did was glance inside for a bit before I resumed my walk through the town. I wouldn't have had the courage even back on Earth, so it was way too daunting in this different world.

"Hmm, do I have no choice but to return to the main road? Oh, wait, what's this?"

A building came into view just as I was considering whether I should return to the main road. This place looked quite fancy from the outside and the front was decorated with some potted plants. It gave off a warm atmosphere and didn't seem like a place that wouldn't be welcoming of first timers. *Yeah, I think I can enter this kind of place. It looks like a nice café—wait, café?* I stopped myself before my hand touched the door when I came to the realization that this place was probably a café. Based on the cafés I had seen back in Japan, it looked like a fancy one too, but I also had to consider the fact that I was in a different world.

This place might actually be expensive and high class, right?

I didn't have much money on me, which was a fairly normal situation for me to be in. Haruka was in charge of finances for our whole group, and we would do things together most of the time, so there was no real need for me to carry my own money. All I had on me was some money from the allowance that Haruka gave me regularly, which was only about five hundred Rea at the moment. She had started this allowance system because she thought Touya and I would feel uneasy about having absolutely no money on us, but the first time I had actually used my allowance money was on that accessory that I'd bought as a gift for Haruka the other day. That was why I didn't have much money left on me at the moment, but I didn't really need more for anything.

The Slumbering Bear would provide us with a breakfast and dinner that tasted fairly decent, and the idea of going out to buy a snack from a stall was way too spooky after that experience we had gone through on our first day with that disgusting stall food. Anyway, if we needed some snacks, we actually had a lot of dried fruits that Haruka bought. Those dried fruits were quite filling by themselves, so there was no real reason for me to challenge myself by trying out food from stalls. It seemed like I would probably need more money for this café, though. Its appearance definitely set it apart from the other places I had encountered so far, so that probably meant the prices were also different—in a bad way.

I slowly drew my hands back from the door and was about to turn around and leave when I suddenly got interrupted by a girl who jumped out of the café. She was significantly shorter than me and looked like a child at first glance, but her ears stood out above her ponytail since they looked a bit sharper than normal human ears.

“W-Welcome! A-Are you here as a customer?!”

“Y-Yeah.”

Oops, I said yes without thinking! I mean, well, there's no way I could actually say no to a beautiful elf girl. She's a loli elf with actual tears in her eyes, and she sounded very desperate when she asked me if I was a customer, so as a guy, I have no choice but to say yes! Sure, I'm an elf myself, and so is Haruka, but that

doesn't matter! There's no limit to the number of beautiful girls who can exist! Okay, I'm glad I got that off my chest. I kind of lost control of myself for a bit since most of the new people I've met recently have been middle-aged men.

"Feel free to come on in!"

The elf's tears swiftly disappeared and were replaced with a beaming smile after I said I was a customer, and I took her offer and entered the café. The interior had a calm atmosphere to it, as I'd thought it would based on how the building looked from the outside, and there were a few tables spread across the room along with a few counter seats as well. There was plenty of space between each table and between each counter seat, so this café looked like a place that was well suited for someone to sit down and enjoy their time in peace. There were also all sorts of decorative plants scattered across the interior, which was very different from any of the dining halls I had encountered in this world so far. *Yep, this looks like a fancy and expensive café!* Five hundred Rea would be enough to pay for a light meal and snacks at a somewhat expensive and fancy café back on Earth, since that amount was the equivalent of five thousand yen, but it probably wouldn't be enough at this café. *It should be enough for a drink at least, right?!*

"P-Please take a seat here!"

The elf appeared to be quite nervous even though she had a smile on her face as she recommended a seat to me, which was one of the counter seats. As soon as I took a seat there, she went behind the counter and stood in front of me to take my order.

"W-What would you like to order?"

"Let's see..."

I was kind of nervous myself due to how fancy and expensive this café seemed as I looked around. Most places that served food and drinks in this world tended to have their menus somewhere on the walls, but I couldn't find a menu no matter where I looked. There were also some places where you could just say you wanted some meat and alcohol, but that was definitely the wrong answer for this café.

"Um, can I have a menu?"

“O-Oh, I’m very sorry! H-Here you go!”

The elf hastily bent down below the counter to reach for something, and she handed me a wooden board that appeared to be the menu.

“Thank you.”

I was able to remain calm due to the fact that the elf was extremely nervous. It kind of felt like watching a kid do their best to help out with their parents’ business or store, which was very heartwarming and soothing. There was a good chance she was older than me, though, since she was an elf. Part of me wanted to continue watching this heartwarming scene in front of me, but it would probably be a good idea to look at the items on the menu first. I needed to find something to order that I could afford. *Let’s see, what’s the cheapest thing available?*

“Huh?”

I felt a bit confused when I looked down at the menu, because it seemed like everything on here was quite cheap. Well, the prices were still more expensive than food at a stall, and the same went for the drinks, but they were in the same range as the prices at dining halls. In fact, the prices were cheap enough that even I could afford to pay for an order with the measly amount of money that I had on me at the moment. I looked away from the menu and slowly took another look around the café. *Yep, there’s nobody else here aside from myself.*

“Um, is there something in particular that you’re looking for?”

“O-Oh, it’s nothing! Well, I’ll have the daily special, please.”

“Okay, one order of the daily special coming right up! Please wait for a bit until your order is ready.”

The elf smiled at me once she heard my order and then headed towards the kitchen, which appeared to be located in the back. *Hmm, this really is strange. Is it normal for a café like this to be empty during lunchtime even with these affordable prices?* The cost for the daily special that I had ordered was five hundred Rea, which was more or less the same as the average cost of a meal at a dining hall. The dining halls that provided food around here all served daily specials at similar prices. Even if there wasn’t an item labeled “daily special” on

the menu, you would get something similar if you ordered a meal or just anything to eat. A lot of people would order food in that way since the meals provided would be decently filling at a fairly cheap price, but the actual food served would often taste kind of bad.

I had actually eaten meals at another dining hall before along with Haruka and Touya. The food we had been provided had been a single plate with some carrots and asparagus covered in salt along with a pile of meat scraps that had included some internal organ parts, plus one huge block of rye bread. All of that food had tasted absolutely horrible. The carrots and asparagus had both tasted weird and were hard to chew, and the meat had possessed a strong, nasty smell. As for the rye bread, it had been extremely sour, along with being very hard to chew as well. It had still been a better meal than the food we had gotten at that stall on our first day in this different world, but that didn't change the fact that it had been a painful struggle to swallow everything down.

After that incident, we'd all decided together that if we were going to eat lunch at a dining hall, then it would be at The Slumbering Bear. It was possible that we might have eventually found a place that served delicious food at cheaper prices if we'd kept searching, but it wasn't worth having to eat disgusting food every time we failed, and we couldn't really afford to waste money eating at expensive places that served delicious food.

Well, today, I had been willing to take a gamble at a new place since I had some free time. This café had seemed like a good choice based on how it looked from the outside, but there was nobody here at all. Even the stall that had terrorized me on my first day in this world had other customers who had ordered food from there. In a way, I was actually kind of curious if the food here was disgusting enough to explain the café being empty at this time of the day. Well, I wasn't sure if the food was going to be disgusting or not, but I was about to find out.

"Sorry for the wait! Here is your daily special!"

"Oh, hmm..."

I had only waited for a short amount of time when the elf came back with a plate that had what appeared to be the daily special on it. The dish looked quite

different from the other ones I had seen so far. There was a cube steak on the plate that appeared to be the main course, and it had a nice color to it that made it look delicious. Next to the steak were four different types of vegetables that were all cleanly cut into the same bite-size pieces. The side dish appeared to be some mashed potatoes mixed with minced meat and vegetables. I was quite impressed by how good the presentation of this dish was. In fact, it looked just as good as the kind of dishes that restaurants back on Earth would provide. The food at other dining halls in this world paled in comparison to this daily special in front of me, since they would all just randomly slap food together on a plate and didn't care about the presentation.

"This looks quite good. All right, I'm digging in."

It was time to find out what it actually tasted like. *Yep, this tastes delicious.* The food had a light taste to it due to the lack of various spices and seasonings, but it still tasted quite good. In fact, it was good enough that I would be willing to return to this café for this dish from time to time. It was hard for me to decide a clear winner between this daily special and the food that the innkeeper back at The Slumbering Bear served. A simpler way to put it was that the food at The Slumbering Bear was simple and rustic, while the food here had more of a refined taste that women would most likely prefer. On the other hand, men who performed physical labor for a living would probably find that this food wasn't hearty enough for them, but this refined taste definitely matched the atmosphere of the café, so it was the right choice to go with.

"How is the food...?" The elf sounded a bit worried as she watched me from behind the counter.

"It's quite delicious, which really makes me wonder why there aren't other customers here."

When she heard my frank opinion, she grimaced and tears appeared in her eyes. She leaned over the counter to cling to me. "A-as a fellow elf, w-would you be willing to listen to my story?!"

"S-Sure, but I probably can't do anything aside from listen."

"That's more than enough..."

The fact anyone who would listen to her would do well enough probably

meant she was in dire straits, since she looked quite relieved when she heard my response. After that, she sighed in relief and poured some tea for two before she sat down next to me and began to tell me her story. She told me that her name was Aera, and she had spent a long time in a large city far away from here working as a cook to train and work towards her future dream of eventually being able to start her own café. However, the only results her training had produced was an improvement in her cooking abilities. Her salary had remained the same the entire time, so she hadn't been able to save up much money. On top of that, the price of land in large cities was extremely expensive, so it was impossible for her to buy a café there with her savings. As a result, she resolved to move here to Laffan with her entire savings. Laffan was in the countryside, so she could afford to purchase a café here.

Well, it wasn't actually a café at first, apparently. The original layout of this building wasn't anywhere near a typical café or restaurant, which meant that she couldn't start business right away. She had set up a meeting with a carpenter to discuss how she wanted the building renovated, and that was when she met a self-proclaimed consultant, who was the cause of her current plight. The consultant had suddenly interrupted her conversation with the carpenter and had started to criticize her plans. He'd gone on and on as he told her all sorts of things that she needed to do in order to succeed, which had ended up being the revised plan that had led to the current state of this café. A plan like that would normally have sounded suspicious to her, but Aera-san told me that it had sounded great to her at the time for some reason, so she'd gone along with everything that the consultant had said and had told the carpenter that this was the revised plan that she wanted, despite the fact that the final plan had far exceeded her initial budget.

The self-proclaimed consultant had requested a consulting fee for his "advice," which had been a hefty amount in itself. After that, he'd completely vanished and had never appeared before her again. Aera-san had finally snapped to her senses a while after this happened and had been stressed out by the fact that she had spent more money than she had initially planned on, but the reform order had already been processed, so there was nothing she could have done at that point. She'd had no choice but to start business three days ago after the renovations were complete, but she had ended up with zero

customers throughout those three days. I was apparently the first customer here who'd come here to order something, which had saved her from the verge of despair.

“It's true that I used up more money than I had planned on, but I thought my cooking abilities would make things work out somehow. However, since I started business, I've ended up with no customers so far aside from you. What did I do wrong...?”

It looked like the pain of her plight had overwhelmed her once again; after she finished her story, she looked down and a small puddle of tears appeared on the ground in front of her. Her ears were drooping and trembling a bit from sadness. After I saw that, I was convinced that only the lowest of scum would be able to tell her that they were going to leave since they had finished listening to her story. I wasn't that kind of scum, of course, so I did my best to squeeze some advice for her out of my small brain.



If I had to point out her mistakes, the first one was that she'd gone along with the self-proclaimed consultant's sales talk. It was way too suspicious, no matter how you looked at it. The interior of this café was vastly different from other places in this world, but it looked normal to me in a way. According to her story, the self-proclaimed consultant's plan sounded good to her "for some reason." *Wait, this sounds like one of my classmates was involved. He probably had a skill like Persuasion or Negotiation and managed to convince her with that.*

This café definitely looked like the result of someone coming up with a plan for a café despite having no actual knowledge of the dining industry and no knowledge of common sense in this world. The food here was delicious and cheap, and both the interior and exterior of the café looked fancy and attractive. It was located in a good spot too, since apparently, a lot of people would pass by this place on their way to work. Some of Laffan's municipal government buildings were nearby as well, so if things went well, this café definitely seemed like it had the potential to meet the demand for lunch from people in this vicinity. All these conditions would lead to a booming business back on Earth.

However, this was a different world, so there was no way that common sense about how things worked back on Earth would also work here without any adjustments. Our party of five couldn't really afford to help out someone else since we had to look out for ourselves first, but I felt extremely bad at the sight of her tears, since it was most likely one of my classmates who had caused her plight. I wasn't personally responsible for any of this, but my classmates were technically still fellow Japanese people. I felt the same way I would whenever I saw news on the TV about how Japanese people had done something stupid overseas and caused trouble for the locals. *I guess I do have some time, so I might as well try to help out.*

"All right. I'd be willing to help you out a bit if you don't mind, Aera-san."

Aera-san looked up at me with her face full of surprise, but she awkwardly looked away as she replied to me. "Huh?! But, um, I barely have any money left on me, and I don't have anything else I can offer as thanks in return for help..."

"Don't worry. I don't think you'll need money for things to work out."

“Really?!”

In her excitement, she suddenly brought her face close to mine, so I nodded and tried to calm her down. “Y-Yeah. Also, you don’t have to worry about giving me anything in return. I’d feel bad about abandoning a fellow elf who needs help, after all.”

I mean, I’m fairly sure that any other guy would react the same way as I did if a cute elf girl got up in their face. My heart raced for a second since I’m not used to cute elf girls at all. As for Haruka, that’s different, I guess. It’s just Haruka.

“First, though, I’d like to ask my friends for their opinions as well. Can I bring them with me and come back tomorrow, Aera-san?”

“O-Of course! I’ll be waiting! I really need any help I can get, please!”

As she frantically bowed her head to me, I promised I would definitely come back tomorrow, and then I left the café to head back to The Slumbering Bear.

“So yeah, that’s what happened earlier at the café that I went to.”

We had all gathered back at the inn later in the day for dinner and I was telling everyone what I’d experienced. The girls all nodded as they listened.

After I had finished telling my story, Haruka put in, “So, you’re saying that you were captivated by how cute that elf girl looked, right, Nao?”

“No, how did you get that idea?! My story’s just a heartwarming one about helping out someone who desperately needs help!” *I can’t believe that she would draw that kind of conclusion. How rude!*

“So you’re saying that you had no ulterior motives at all?”

After a slight pause, I said, “Of course I didn’t.”

“Guilty!” the girls all exclaimed in unison.

“Oh, come on! I mean, yeah, I’ll admit that the elf girl was definitely cute, and I wanted to become friends with her if possible rather than never seeing her again. She’s the first elf I’ve met who’s a native of this different world, after all. But that doesn’t mean I had ulterior motives or anything. Not at all, you know?”

As I was hastily explaining myself to the girls, Touya put his hands on my

shoulders. “Enough, Nao! Don’t make any more excuses!” he exclaimed. “You’re just digging your own grave at this point.”

Dude, I’m not digging my own grave! I really just wanted to become friends with that elf girl, that’s all!

“And?”

Huh? Why do you have such a cold tone in your voice, Haruka? You’re misunderstanding things! However, she just jerked her chin at me as if to tell me to hurry up and explain, so I gave up on my excuses—I mean, I gave up on a detailed explanation and tried my best to be concise.

“Well, I just didn’t want Aera-san to rely on my opinions and ideas alone, so I kind of wanted one of you girls to come with me to contribute ideas.”

“Hmm, all right, that makes sense,” said Haruka. “I have other things to attend to, so can you girls go with him?”

Oh, she doesn’t sound upset anymore. I don’t know what cheered her up, but oh well. Natsuki and Yuki were almost done with their backpack-crafting work. All that was left for them to do was to finish the sewing pattern for Diola-san to bring to the guild artisans, and that was apparently something that Haruka could handle on her own.

“Sure, I don’t mind,” said Yuki. “I’m kind of interested in seeing what the café and loli elf look like myself.”

“I’m willing to go as well,” said Natsuki. “If it was one of our classmates who caused trouble for her, then I would like to do my best to help her out.”

“Thank you both!” I exclaimed. “I wanted a girl’s opinion on how to fix that café’s issues, so this will help a lot.”

I had a few ideas in mind to fix and improve the café, but it was reassuring to have the help and brainpower of two people who were probably more knowledgeable than me in this area.

“I should be done with teaching the guild artisans how to craft these backpacks within two or three days, so that’s the amount of free time you have to resolve that café’s problems,” said Haruka.

“I’ll do my best to finish helping out within that time frame...”

It would be hard to immediately implement improvements, but even getting a start would be more than enough. That café wasn’t a rented property, so business would work out in the long term as long as Aera-san could keep afloat and make a profit.

“Oh yeah, what did you do today, Touya?” I asked.

“Me? I was kind of curious about how Tomi was doing, so I went to help him out a bit.”

“By Tomi, you mean Wakabayashi-kun, right?” Natsuki asked. “The boy who became a dwarf?”

“Yeah. I felt like helping him out if he was doing honest work and working hard.”

I’m surprised that you’re willing to look out for him, Touya. I mean, Tomi isn’t a bad person by any means, so I’m not against the idea of helping him out in our own free time, but...

“What can you actually help him out with, though?” I asked.

“Remember how Tomi has a high Blacksmithing skill level along with the aptitude skill? I think he can succeed here in this world if he can find a blacksmith who’s willing to take him on as an apprentice. That would normally be difficult, but you remember Gantz-san, right?”

“Oh yeah, the owner of that weapon shop where we’ve bought a lot of our equipment,” I said.

We had bought all of our equipment from that weapon shop ever since we first bought a wooden sword for Touya there. Gantz-san seemed unsociable at first glance, but he was actually quite a chatty and chill dude once you got to know him.

“I was thinking about introducing Tomi to Gantz-san if Tomi was actually working hard here in this world.”

“Was he?” I asked.

“Yeah, he was working hard at manual labor jobs. It looked like he had fit in

quite easily since he's able to do a lot of work with the muscle strength he has, but it was only his third day at work, so I'm going to observe him for a bit longer."

"Hmm. He came off as indecisive to me, but it sounds like he's actually made up his mind to survive in this world," said Haruka.

I had thought crafting professions in this world would be similar to how things worked in MMOs, but the reality was quite different. Before you could find work as a blacksmith yourself, you would need to find a professional blacksmith who would be willing to take you in as his apprentice, and it definitely wasn't easy for some random guy with no credentials and a suspicious background to become an apprentice.

"It's true that we've gotten to be on decent terms with Gantz-san, but do you think that's enough that he'd be willing to take on an apprentice based on a recommendation from you, Touya?" I asked.

"I'm not completely sure, but I kind of have an idea ready that's something like a scoring combination of hanafuda cards. It won't lead to a guaranteed win, or in this case success, but it'll do."

"Scoring combination? I guess I kind of understand what you mean," said Haruka. "So, what is it?"

"Well, uh, I'll let you know if it works out, Haruka. It'll be kind of embarrassing if it doesn't."

"I don't really mind, but try not to cause any trouble for Tomi, okay? Based on what you described, he's working hard to make his own livelihood, so keep that in mind."

"Of course. I get it."

Hmm, I'm kind of curious about what exactly that metaphor about a scoring combination of hanafuda cards refers to.

"Okay, let's go over our individual schedules for tomorrow," said Haruka. "I'll be at the guild teaching how to craft backpacks, Touya will be looking out for Tomi, and the rest of you three will be in charge of that loli elf, right?"

“I’d like to raise an objection about the choice of words ‘be in charge of a loli elf,’ but yes,” I said.

“Objection overruled. All right, let’s all do our best tomorrow as usual. Let’s resume eating our dinner.”

“Okay,” we all agreed.

My objection had gotten overruled as usual, and we all finished our dinner afterwards.



“Is this the café you were talking about, Nao?” Natsuki asked. “It definitely looks like the kind of café that you’d see back on Earth.”

“Mm, it looks like a fancy place with a good atmosphere that you could find anywhere in a residential area back in Japan,” said Yuki.

“Right? Let’s head in first,” I said.

I opened the door and led the way in. It looked like the café was empty as usual.

“Welco—oh, Nao-san!”

Aera-san was standing at the counter and looking a bit depressed, but a beaming smile of happiness appeared on her face as soon as she saw me. She hopped over to where I was and grabbed my hands.

“You actually came back like you said you would! Thank you. I’m so happy to see you again!” She looked up at me with tears in her eyes as she said that. I thought I heard some voices behind me mutter the word “Guilty,” but that was probably just my imagination.

“Of course I came back. I would never dream of breaking the promise that I made to you that day. You can rest at ease now.”

“R-Right, I’m sorry.”

“Allow me to introduce my friends. This is Natsuki, and this is Yuki.”

“Nice to meet you,” said Natsuki.

“Hello,” said Yuki. “Oh yeah, what’s up with the way you’re talking, Nao? It

sounds a bit weird and gentle for you, similar to how a guy hitting on a girl might talk.”

“Huh?! What on earth do you mean?! I take exception to that!” *Sure, I guess I kind of talked like how I would to calm down a child, but still. Should I change the way I talk to her?*

“Um, I don’t mind if you talk the way you usually do.”

I thought to myself for a bit and then nodded at Aera-san. “Hmm, I wasn’t consciously trying to talk differently, but okay. Sorry in advance if I come off as a bit rude talking like I normally do.”

“Don’t worry about it. We’re about the same age, after all.”

Oh, really? Well, I guess that makes sense. Or rather, she’s probably older than me, since she’s gone through culinary training and saved enough money to start her own business.

“So yeah, Yuki and Natsuki are two of my friends in our party of five people. The other two are a beastman and an elf, but they couldn’t come here today since they had other business to attend to, although they might visit on another day if they have some free time.”

“Oh, there’s another elf in this town? I’d like to meet her if possible. I haven’t seen any elves in this town up until now...”

“Oh yeah, I haven’t seen any other elves either.”

According to what Aera-san told me, you would always see a few elves if you just walked along the main road in the town where she had learned to cook. On the other hand, that number was zero here in Laffan. Aera-san was the first other elf I had encountered up until now.

“Well, I’ll bring them with me when we all have some free time. For now, let’s focus on discussing how to get your café business back on track.”

“Right! Um, so, what should I do?” Aera-san tilted her head in thought.

I pointed at Yuki and Natsuki. “Can you serve them lunch to start things off? A serving for one should be enough.”

“Okay, understood! It’ll take me some time, though. Is that okay?”

“Oh yeah, it’s still early in the morning. Sure, no problem. Take your time.”

“All right. Please wait for a bit.”

Aera-san bowed to me and then headed towards the back. After she disappeared into the kitchen, Yuki gave me a look that had some kind of implication behind it.

“Well then, she sure is a cute girl, isn’t she?” said Yuki.

“Mm. She looks like she’s younger than us, and she seems like the type of girl who you’d want to protect or help out,” said Natsuki. “Do you like those types of girls, Nao-kun? Are you a lolicon?”

“I can’t believe you would accuse me of being a lolicon! Believe me, I really don’t have any ulterior motives!”

Sure, I won’t deny that I think Aera-san is cute, but that’s not what made me want to help her. Well, okay, I’ll admit that it’s one reason. I mean, come on, what kind of guy wouldn’t be interested? In fact, I’d say it would be weirder for a guy to have no interest in a girl like Aera-san, yeah. Besides, she’s probably older than me, so she’s most likely not a loli.

“L-Let’s focus on coming up with ideas to help Aera-san’s café get back on track! Does anything come to mind for either of you?”

“Oh, I see how it is,” said Yuki. “All right, then.” Yuki sounded like she still had more to say, but she went along with my suggestion and looked around the café. “Well, this café does have a nice atmosphere.”

“Mm,” said Natsuki. “It also looks like it’s been thoroughly cleaned, so it feels like a café that’s suited for people who want to come and relax while having some tea.”

“Oh yeah, I’ve been to one other café in this world.”

I had visited a café together with Haruka and Touya before we departed for Sarstedt to look for Yuki and Natsuki. The prices on the menu there had been a bit expensive, but it had seemed quite popular and busy. That would probably be the ideal example for Aera-san to follow, but the location of this café was somewhat of a problem. Aera-san’s café was a place that a decent number of

people would probably visit if they wanted to enjoy some time at a café with a calm, pleasant atmosphere, but the problem was getting to be well-known and popular enough for that. There weren't many methods of advertisement available in this world, so it would be a difficult task.

"Um, where's the menu located?" Natsuki asked.

"It's not anywhere on the walls. Aera-san just handed me a wooden board that seemed to be the menu."

"Hmm, I see..."

It was fairly normal to be handed a menu at places like this back in Japan, but it was quite unusual compared to other places in this world. Natsuki looked like she wasn't sure what to say after she heard my reply. Being handed a menu meant that you could take your time deciding on your order, which was a good thing in itself, but...

"Sorry for the wait! Please feel free to try out the food!"

"Oh, the presentation is quite good," said Yuki. "I'll take a bite first."

Yuki took a bite from both of the dishes before she passed them over to Natsuki.

"Yeah, they're both delicious," said Yuki. "They're better than average by quite a lot, I think."

Natsuki took a bite from both dishes as well. "Mm. I'm not completely sure, but I bet this is some of the best-tasting food in this town," she said. She passed the dishes along to me.

The girls had both had breakfast recently, so it made sense that they couldn't finish all of this. I had no choice but to finish the rest by myself. The dishes were different from what I'd had here yesterday, but they were still delicious. On their own, the ingredients weren't exactly strong-tasting, so perhaps the final product tasted good because of Aera-san's skillful use of fragrant culinary herbs or something like that.

"Also, can we have a look at the menu?" Natsuki asked.

"O-Of course!" Aera-san dashed back behind the counter and brought a menu

board back with her to hand over to Natsuki. “Here you go!”

“Hmm, I see. All right, for now, let’s sit down and have a discussion. Does that sound okay, Aera-san?”

“Of course! I’ll go prepare some drinks for everyone! What would you like?”

“Anything will do—actually, can we all have a pot of this moussek tea? Does that sound okay to both of you, Yuki, Nao?”

Huh? I’ve never heard of that kind of tea before. Natsuki probably had a good reason for choosing it, though. Yuki nodded in agreement, so I decided to nod as well.

“Okay, please wait for a bit.”

Aera-san dashed back to the kitchen once again, and we all sat down at a table to wait for her to finish preparing the tea. After a while, she returned with the tea, and once she had sat down, Natsuki initiated the discussion.

“All right, the first topic of discussion will be why there are no customers. The answer to that question is simple, though.”

“R-Really?!”

“Yeah. I think you would’ve noticed this yourself right away if this wasn’t your own café, Aera-san, but the exterior of this café looks too fancy and high class.”

“Yep.” Both Yuki and I agreed with what Natsuki had said.

Aera-san paused in thought for a moment and then exclaimed, “Oh, right!”

This was something that had crossed my mind earlier when I was taking a walk around here. The area around this café appeared to be a regular residential neighborhood, not one where rich people lived. It also wasn’t an area full of activity and traffic like the main road. What that meant was that the people who would normally pass by here would probably think based on the exterior that this place was a fancy and high-class café where the prices of items on the menu would fluctuate based on market prices. I would have avoided this café myself if I hadn’t felt like it was similar to cafés I had seen before back on Earth.

“Now that I think about it, that’s definitely true. I was happy that my café

ended up looking like a clean and fancy place, but I would have hesitated to enter a place like this myself with the wages that I was getting paid while training as a cook.” Aera-san looked down and sounded a bit depressed after she said that, especially since this was something that you would normally notice right away. “Knowing this doesn’t change anything, though. I don’t have any money left to move to a different place, nor do I have any money left to order a complete renovation of the exterior...”

“You don’t actually need that much money to fix this problem, Aera-san,” said Natsuki. “You just need a way for customers to know the prices of items on the menu right away.”

“Yeah, exactly,” said Yuki. “You could probably just set up a menu display outside and that’ll do just fine.”

Back in Japan, eating establishments that were located on or above the second floor in multi-tenant buildings would often use this method, so it was something we were all quite familiar with. Those displays tended to have pictures of the dishes along with their names and prices, which helped you decide whether to eat there or not. Without those displays, the chances of first-time customers entering eating establishments located on higher floors would be much lower. Yuki made all sorts of gestures to help explain what kind of display board we were talking about as she told Aera-san about this. Aera-san nodded along and seemed to cheer up as she heard Yuki’s explanation.

“Oh, if that’s the case, then I could probably just ask the carpenter who performed the renovations to make that kind of display board!”

“If you’re willing to take some time out of your day, then you could ask for a blackboard to use as a display menu and change the items on it with chalk every day,” said Natsuki. “You could add on a picture and a description of the daily special to attract customers that way.”

“Oh, that’s a good idea!”

The daily specials that were served at dining halls in this town never came with a description, so in a way, it was a gamble every time you went to a new place. We had never won that gamble so far aside from at the dining hall of The Slumbering Bear. I was fairly sure that at least a few people would be willing to

give this café a try if they thought the daily special sounded delicious based on a description on a display board outside.

“All right, that should probably get a steady flow of customers coming into your café, but...”

“Yeah! Thank you very much for the advice!” Aera-san had a beaming smile on her face as she bowed to Natsuki.

It didn’t seem like she had heard the last word Natsuki had said, however. Natsuki shook her head before she continued her sentence. “But I’m fairly sure this won’t work out in the end.”

“Huh?” Aera-san’s smile froze in place once she had heard the rest of Natsuki’s words. “W-Why’s that? Customers will come to my café if I put a blackboard outside, right?”

“Yeah, you’ll get customers. However, that doesn’t necessarily mean you’ll be able to turn a profit.”

“Huh? What?” Aera-san tilted her head in confusion.

Yep, very cute. I’m glad that Natsuki came along with me. I wouldn’t have been able to break the harsh truth to Aera-san by myself. Well, I’d probably still have said it in the end, but it would have been mentally painful to do so.

“The price for each serving of this daily special is five hundred Rea, correct?”

“Yeah! I’m quite proud of this dish! I’ve come up with different variations of color palette and ingredients for each special!”

“Mm, that sounds amazing. This is the first time I’ve seen such a great dish in this town.”

“I’m glad to hear that!”

Aera-san had a smile on her face and sounded very happy when she said that, but that smile was probably going to freeze in place again quite soon after Natsuki’s next words.

“Can you make a profit out of serving these daily specials, though?”

She averted her gaze from Natsuki as she replied. “If I manage to serve a lot,

then maybe...?”

“How many servings are you talking about here?”

“Well, it’ll have to be at least one hundred servings before I can make a profit. It’s a high-volume and low-margin system, though! I’m focusing on one dish to offer delicious food at cheap prices. Even if the profit margin for each dish is tiny, it’ll add up eventually and turn into a decent profit if I manage to serve a lot!”

“Is that what you were told?” Natsuki asked.

“Yeah!”

“You were tricked.”

“Huh?! Did I get lied to?!”

“No, it’s not actually a lie. However, that system only works at a large enough scale. You mentioned that you’d start profiting after at least one hundred servings. However, how many seats are available here in this café?”

“Um, there’s a total of twenty-six seats.”

The tables were set up so that there was plenty of space between each one, so there were only four tables with five seats each. There were also six counter seats, which added up to twenty-six seats in total. The capacity of this café was quite low compared to the scale that Aera-san was going for.

“That means you’ll have to completely fill this café with different customers at least four times during lunch to make a profit,” said Natsuki. “That’ll take at least two hours if we go with the estimate that each customer will stay here for about thirty minutes. Two hours might sound okay on paper, but you’re the only one working at this café, right, Aera-san?”

“Yeah.”

“You won’t need to spend time preparing the daily specials if you prepare them ahead of time, but can you really handle cooking complicated dishes along with carrying them to each customer, managing the payment process, and cleaning up afterwards all by yourself?”

Aera-san responded with silence. Eating establishments that operated on a

high-volume and low-margin system were places like beef bowl shops and burger chains, but that only worked because they were fast food places that were quick, as their name indicated. The food would be ready very quickly, and the customers would be able to finish their food quickly as well. Customers could also just take the food with them to eat at another time or place. All of that allowed fast food chains to maintain a high table turnover rate, but the atmosphere of this café was the complete opposite of that. This wasn't a place where you could order takeout. It was more like a place for a customer to sit down and take their time while enjoying their lunch. If Aera-san really wanted to aim for a high-volume and low-margin business, then she would have to squeeze in more tables and change the layout to a place that was less attractive for staying for a long period of time and more suited for eating without needing to sit down.

"You could make a profit in other ways, such as by offering drinks, but the tea you served us took a few minutes to prepare, right? You might be able to prepare food and drinks at the same time to a certain extent, but I feel like it'll be quite difficult to keep up."

"Um, what if I just hire people to help me out?"

"If you're going to hire people to work here, then you'll need to turn an even bigger profit to make up for their wages. It wouldn't necessarily matter if you couldn't make a profit as long as you were the only person working here, but you absolutely need to make a profit if you're going to hire people. Can you manage to prepare two hundred servings of your daily special for lunch every single day? That'd be a total of four hours based on the conditions that I stated earlier, but four hours is too long for lunch. Even if you do manage to sell two hundred meals, how much will you actually profit? It sounds like it won't be much if you're aiming for a high-volume and low margin-business."

Aera-san responded with silence again, but she looked like she was on the verge of tears.

"N-Natsuki, that's enough for now! Aera-san looks like she's about to cry!" Yuki exclaimed.

"Yeah, what you said is all correct, but go easy on her, please!" I exclaimed.

Aera-san had received a brutal mental beating from Natsuki, and it looked like the tears welling in her eyes were about to burst out at any moment. Natsuki had been calm this entire time and had never raised her voice while she talked, but the fact that everything she'd said was rational and correct only served to make it even more painful to hear.

"Is that so? I think it's pointless to go easy if she really wants to improve the financial situation of her business, though."

Natsuki's words were correct once again, and I wouldn't mind going along with the conclusion that a café had to close down because the owner's outlook was too optimistic—if it was someone I didn't know and wasn't involved with in any way, but that wasn't the case here. I felt extremely bad since Aera-san had been tricked into this situation by one of our classmates, and her childlike appearance only served to make that guilty feeling even worse.

"I mean, yeah, but your point about how Aera-san's current business model won't work is perfectly clear," I said. "You understand that as well, right, Aera-san?"

"*Sniffle*, y-yeah."

"Also, if you've noticed that many problems, then you do have a plan for fixing them, right, Natsuki?" I would have felt like crying just like Aera-san if Natsuki had told me to give up because there weren't any solutions.

"Well, yeah, I do have a few ideas, but they're just based on the superficial knowledge I have as a regular high school student, you know? It's easy to criticize, but—"

"Even if that's the case, I'm sure we can come up with something good in the end if we discuss things together. I truly believe this!" *Or rather, please let me believe this. I don't want to believe that I brought someone else along just to deal the finishing blow to Aera-san's dreams.*

"Hmm, okay. In that case, the first thing to do would be to set up a display board outside of the café for sure. However, the price of the lunch menu items should be increased as well. If we take the atmosphere of this café and the taste of the food into consideration, then the current price for the daily specials is way too cheap. The price should be something that can result in a profit after

at least twenty servings, with the ideal being profit after ten servings.”

“That’d mean the café wouldn’t need to be packed full to make a profit during lunch, right?” Yuki asked. “It’ll allow customers to enjoy the atmosphere of this café and take their time with their meals. I also think that’s a good goal to aim for.”

“How does this sound to you, Aera-san?” I asked.

Aera-san paused in thought and then named the price she had in mind. “It depends on how many servings I end up having to make, but I should be fine if I can earn a profit of at least one hundred Rea per serving.”

A hundred Rea per serving was cheaper than I’d thought the price would be. If she offered this kind of delicious food at that price, then the end goal of a relaxing café where customers could savor their time was definitely feasible once more people become aware of this place.

“That’s one thing you can adjust. You could set a limit yourself and write something like ‘Limited to forty servings during lunch’ on the display board, and adjust it depending on the table turnover rate and the number of customers each day.”

A business model of high volume and low margins would require mass production to turn a profit, and the profit ratio would be lowered by the fact that you would have to consider waste in that calculation. On the other hand, if you went with an exact number of sales as a goal and managed to reach that goal, then you wouldn’t end up with a loss even if the cost ratio increased a bit.

“If you lower the table turnover rate, then you could also profit from offering drinks and side dishes to customers,” said Natsuki. “The profit ratio for drinks is generally high, right?”

“Yeah. I use good-quality tea leaves for this moussek tea, but all I have to do to prepare it is pour some boiling water over the leaves, so the margins are good. I can preserve the tea leaves as well, so I don’t ever need to discard them.”

“Mm, this tea does taste quite good.”

It looked quite similar to black tea in color and had a good smell and a slightly

sweet taste. It didn't have any bitter or pungent undertones, so it was a light tea that would be easy for anyone to drink. On top of that, the price was only thirty-five Rea, which was cheaper than the tea at the café that I had gone to the other day, although it was still more expensive than the tea offered at regular dining halls. However, you wouldn't be able to find such good-tasting tea at those places.

"I also think it would be a good idea to reconsider what kind of customer base you're aiming for and adjust your menu based on that," said Natsuki.

"Customer base..." Aera-san muttered those words before she went deep into thought. She probably hadn't thought about this issue up until now since she had just gone along with that self-proclaimed consultant's ideas.

"If I were the owner of this café, then I definitely wouldn't serve alcohol during lunch," I said. "I'd serve alcohol during the evening, but I'd go with a limited supply of expensive beverages. I'd also increase the price for food during the evening."

"Um, I'm fairly sure there are almost no places in this town that don't serve alcohol. What's the reason behind your first suggestion?"

"It's because people who drink during the day are all bad people!"

Aera-san responded with an awkward smile after she heard the way that I had confidently stated that. "Um, surely that's just a biased opinion, right...?"

"Well, yeah, I'm sure there are also good people out there who drink during the day. However, you've seen and heard how loud people get when they drink during the day at dining halls, right? If people like that come to your café, then that'll ruin the atmosphere that you've spent so much money to create, Aera-san."

She had been tricked into this, but that didn't change the fact that the end result looked good in itself. *I mean, at this point, you might as well put the nice interior to use and just try to succeed as a café that offers a high-class atmosphere and experience for a comparatively cheap price.*

"I-I see, that makes sense! That's a great idea, Nao-san!"

"On top of that, even if you increase the amount of alcohol that you serve,

some of it will go bad on days with fewer customers, right?”

“Oh, yeah. Ale in particular goes bad quite quickly.”

“Mm. Also, one last reason for my suggestion is that I’m kind of worried about you, Aera-san.”

“Huh?”

“If you serve cheap alcohol here, then that’ll result in people getting absolutely drunk, right? It might be fine later once you hire some people, but I just thought it’d be dangerous for you since you’re by yourself at the moment, Aera-san.”

“Nao-san...”

She looked at me with joy in her eyes, but our little moment got cut short when Yuki raised her hand and continued the conversation.

“Attention! I think it’d also be a good idea to set up a display board inside the café and write the menu on it,” said Yuki. “That’ll save you time since you wouldn’t have to bring the menu to customers each time, Aera-san.”

“O-Oh, right, that’s a good point.”

“In that case, it might be a good idea to look for a slightly elegant display board with decorations to match the atmosphere of this café,” said Natsuki.

“Oh, then—”



We continued to discuss our opinions and gradually came up with a rough business policy outline to follow. First off, the customer base that this café was going to target would be the people who lived around here and were either women or employees of the municipal government. The only drinks that Aera-san would offer here would be soft drinks, and there would be an increase in the amount of expensive sweets on the menu in order to make a profit. Dining during the evening would be limited to people who had reserved seats beforehand, and a special full-course meal would be provided for the customers during that time.

“Will this really work out, though? I’m somewhat confident in my abilities as a

cook, but I'm not that confident when it comes to haute cuisine..."

"It'll be fine," said Natsuki. "The food you served for lunch was quite delicious, and the people who'll reserve seats for dinner will be people who really enjoyed the lunch."

"Yeah, Natsuki's right," I said. "You might not be able to compete with the cafés located along the main road yet, but you can definitely beat them once your café becomes more popular and better-known."

The food served here was delicious and also cheap, so all that was left to do was to advertise it and spread the word. In fact, there was a good chance that Aera-san would end up being unable to handle things by herself due to an overwhelming number of customers.

"Hmm, I think it'd be a good idea to try to target customers in the morning as well," said Yuki. "It feels like a waste not to since it sounds like a lot of commuters pass by here on their way to work."

"By targeting commuters, do you mean offering something that they can purchase to eat as takeout?" I asked. "Does anything come to mind, Aera-san?"

"Takeout? Hmm. Give me a minute."

Aera-san headed back to the kitchen. After a while, she came back with some round objects that were wrapped with thin slices of meat. I sliced one object open and ate it, and it seemed like the inside was packed with mashed potatoes. The closest thing that came to mind was a Japanese potato croquette, except that this one had an outer layer of meat instead of batter. It tasted quite good, so I was fairly sure that commuters would be willing to buy one or two on their way to work. Based on the happy looks they had on their faces, it appeared that Yuki and Natsuki had enjoyed these croquettes too.

"This is called poste. I served them on plates this time, but they're usually wrapped in leaves and sold like that. They go for about ten Rea each."

"Hmm, this is quite delicious. I've never seen this food before, though," said Yuki. "Is it common?"

"I'm not completely sure. I saw plenty of places that sold this back in the town where I was training as a cook, but..."

“Well, I haven’t seen it before in this town,” I said.

“It wasn’t sold in the nearby town of Sarstedt either,” said Natsuki. “That being the case, this’ll probably sell quite well.”

“Yeah, it probably will. This might make your morning a bit busy, but how does selling poste in front of your café early in the morning sound to you, Aera-san? I feel like people would be quite willing to try it out since it’s only ten Rea apiece, and it might help attract more customers for lunch as well.”

“Hmm, okay, I’ll give it a try!”

Aera-san sounded and looked very excited. She clenched her fists, but Natsuki had more to say once again.

“Can you make variations on this? I think people will get sick of it eventually if it’s the same each day.”

“Variations? Uh, I could change the taste of the meat and the potatoes a bit, I guess...?”

“That’s not a bad idea, but something different would be ideal. You could create cutlet sandwiches if you had a thick, rich sauce to use, but...”

“A thick, rich sauce? I don’t know what you mean by cutlet sandwiches, but would inspiel sauce work?”

“Inspiel sauce? What’s that?” Yuki asked.

“Oh, right, you’ve probably never heard of it, Yuki-san. It’s a sauce commonly used by elves—right, Nao-san?”

Wait, you’re asking me, Aera-san? I mean, there’s only one way I can answer.

“Sorry, I’ve never heard of it either.”

Aera-san tilted her head; she seemed puzzled by my reply. “Huh? Really? I thought every elf household used this sauce. Would you all like to have a taste? I brought some with me from my parents’ home initially, but I used ingredients that were easy to obtain around here to create my own, so it’s a bit different from how the sauce tastes back home. Please wait for a bit.”

She went to the kitchen and brought a small plate back with her. On top of

that plate was some liquid that looked a bit thick and blackish. That thick consistency made it resemble the kind of sauce that I liked. We all scooped some up with the tips of our fingers and had a taste.

“Delicious...” said Yuki.

“Mm. It’s got a deep and rich taste,” said Natsuki.

“Damn, this is really delicious!” I exclaimed.

“Really? I’m personally a bit unsatisfied with how this sauce turned out. There are a lot of ingredients that I can’t obtain here, so the one my mom makes back home tastes way better. Well, the sauce I make wouldn’t come close to the one my mom makes even if I did have the same ingredients, though.”

Aera-san definitely looked like she was a bit dissatisfied with the sauce, as she had stated, but as far as I was concerned, the taste was much better than some of the sauces that corporations back in Japan made after a lot of research. I wasn’t sure if everyone in this world would like this sauce, but it was a kind of taste that people would love from the bottom of their hearts if they liked it at all. It was a bit sweet, but it had a mellow, slightly tangy taste, and it also had a fragrant fruity smell that passed through your nose quite smoothly. It seemed as though there was some mix of spices giving it a rich flavor that was quite unique, but that uniqueness would probably be a bit off-putting for some people. Even so, this was one of the best condiments that I had tasted since I had been transported to this world.

“Do you have a lot of this sauce in stock, Aera-san?” Natsuki asked.

“No, because I only use it for my own meals. I wouldn’t be able to use it all even if I made a lot.”

I felt like it would be great if she used it in the food that she served to customers, and I asked her why she didn’t do that. She replied that it was because this sauce was a condiment that only elves used. It was similar to something like homemade pickles, so she didn’t think that it was something she could sell.

“I think this would definitely sell quite well, Aera-san,” said Natsuki.

“Yeah, you should try to sell this!” exclaimed Yuki.

“If this tastes good to you two even though neither of you are elves, then I guess that’s true...?”

Aera-san looked like she was still a bit doubtful, but she ended up nodding in response after she heard how confident Yuki and Natsuki sounded when they recommended the idea.

“Would you be willing to teach us how to create this sauce, Aera-san?” Natsuki asked. “I’d like to have some for my own personal use, unless the recipe is a secret.”

“Oh no, it’s not a secret at all. Every elf household—I mean, most elf households know how to create this sauce.”

Oh, she probably rephrased her choice of words to be considerate of my feelings. It doesn’t really bother me, though, since I’m technically a fake elf.

“The first thing you’ll need to create this sauce is to prepare some inspiel sauce base.”

“There goes that idea, I guess...”

Ugh! That sounds the same as the old question of which came first, the chicken or the egg!

“Oh, don’t worry—I’ll share some of my sauce so you can make your own.”

“Thanks, Aera-san!” Yuki exclaimed. “That makes our time here today totally worth it!”

“Oh, no, I should be the one thanking all of you for taking the time to help me out, so I don’t mind offering this in return. I was also very glad that you all enjoyed my inspiel sauce.”

Aera-san truly looked happy as she smiled at us. It was probably due to the kind of urge you’d feel to share your homemade pickles or miso with someone if they praised them.

“Once you’ve prepared some inspiel sauce, the next thing you need to do is to marinate fruits or vegetables of your choice. You don’t need to cut them up into small bits, but the final product will be done sooner if you do, so I would recommend it if you’re in a hurry.”

“When you say ‘of your choice,’ do you mean any fruit or vegetable will work?” Natsuki asked.

“Yeah, anything grown from a plant. Each household has their own preferences, and mine would just throw in vegetable scraps, so you don’t have to think too hard about your choice. There are some households out there who use nuts, but I wouldn’t recommend it. The final product will taste quite good if you succeed, but it’s much more difficult to succeed with nuts.”

I had thought this inspiel sauce must be complex, but it was actually way more random than I had expected. It was hard to believe that there were so many ways to get this delicious end result.

“I would recommend using the skins of fruits instead, since they’re usually parts that you’d throw away, and they’ll improve how the sauce smells. After that, you can add some spices of your choice. You don’t have to add too much, but it is important since it directly affects the flavor of the sauce.”

“Uhm, is the sweetness of this sauce from fruits?” Yuki asked.

“No, the sweetness is from potatoes. The sauce will become sweet if you add a lot of them. The sauce I made is on the sweet side, but there are households that make non-sweet inspiel sauce. There are a lot of different variations to the taste and flavor.”

Similar sauces that I knew about would include date palms for a sweet flavor, but it appeared that potatoes were the key to the sweetness of inspiel sauce.

“Potatoes? Oh, does that work by converting starch to sugar?” Yuki asked.

“If it’s easy to create more inspiel sauce, what do you think about the idea Nao-kun brought up earlier of selling cutlet sandwiches, Aera-san?” Natsuki asked.

“It’ll take me about a week, but creating more inspiel sauce is easy in itself. However, the problem with using this sauce for dishes to serve here is that the taste will vary each time.”

According to what Aera-san told us, she would just throw in whatever fruits and vegetables were available at the time of the year when she was making more of the sauce, so that would result in different flavors throughout the year.

That was a good thing for personal consumption since it would be harder to get sick of the sauce that way, but it would be somewhat of a problem to have such large variations in dishes at an eating establishment. On top of that, there was also a problem with certain fruits that affected the smell of the sauce. The skins of such fruits would be fine for personal consumption, but they might not work for dishes to be served to customers.

“I would have to stock up a large amount of those fruits right now due to their higher cost when they’re not in season, but I don’t have much money left on me right now. If I was back in my hometown, I could just go into the woods to gather some myself...”

“Oh yeah, fruit is quite expensive,” I said. “Especially if you have to buy it at market price.”

Even fruits that were in season right now weren’t cheap at all. The cost of fruit back in Japan was considered relatively expensive compared to most places on Earth, but the fruits in this world seemed to be even more expensive than that. If Aera-san was going to use fruit to make a large volume of inspiel sauce, then it would definitely cost a decent amount of money.

“Would dindels work, Nao-kun?” Natsuki asked. “I remember you saying that dindel season was about to end, however.”

“Well, I think it’s still possible to gather them for a bit longer. What do you think, Aera-san?”

“Oh, dindels? I used to go out and gather them back in my hometown from time to time. They were quite delicious!”

She had a blissful look on her face, as if she had recalled how the dindels had tasted the last time she’d had some to eat. That wasn’t what I was asking about, however.

“No, I was asking if you could use dindels for inspiel sauce.”

“Oh, so that’s what you meant. Yeah, you can, and they make the sauce very delicious. However, the dindels sold in this town are quite expensive, right?”

Yeah, they’re expensive, and a great source of money. Thanks for the income, dindels!

“There are some dindel trees in the forest near this town, so you don’t have to buy them from the market. In fact, I gathered some myself just a few days ago, so I’m fairly sure there are still plenty of them left. What do you think about the idea of going to gather some ourselves, Aera-san?”

“Um, are you sure? I don’t think I’ll be that useful in combat...”

“Nao, do you mean to go with just the four of us here?” Yuki asked. “Are you sure we’ll be okay without Haruka and Touya?”

Aera-san sounded a bit uneasy at my idea, and Yuki voiced her doubts as well, but the only monsters in that area were just goblins. Goblins were no threat to us with my magic and Natsuki’s abilities with a spear. *I guess we could get into deep trouble if we encountered something like a wipe bear without Touya around, but there’s no way we’ll encounter one, right? I hope I’m not jinxing myself...*

“Y-Yeah, it should be fine, I think.”

“We should probably check with Haruka first,” said Natsuki.

Huh? Wait, do you not trust me? That’s kind of depressing to know. However, their concerns were perfectly valid, so we came to the conclusion that Aera-san would close her café for just one day tomorrow and go with us to gather some dindels—if Haruka actually approved of my idea. After we had settled that, Aera-san and Yuki went together to place an order for a display board with the carpenter who had done the café renovations. Yuki went along with Aera-san in order to explain in detail about the display board and to build connections with the carpenter. Before she left, Yuki said, “If the carpenter gets to know me as a acquaintance of Aera-san, who had paid him a huge sum of money recently, then he’ll probably be more willing to give us a discount when we ask him to help with renovations on our own house.” I was quite impressed by her resourcefulness.

We had all gathered at the inn once again in the evening and reported to each other about what we had each done during the day.

“Inspiel sauce, huh? Does it taste good?” Haruka asked.

“Yeah, it seems to be something that’s commonly used in elf households,” I

said. “I think Otafuku Okonomi sauce would be the closest thing to it in terms of taste, but the inspiel sauce is a bit sweeter and has a fragrant smell from spices.”

“Whoa, really?! That means we might be able to have proper fried pork cutlets!” Touya exclaimed. “I didn’t want to eat pork cutlets that were just seasoned with salt, after all!”

“It sounds like the taste of the sauce can differ a lot depending on the mix of ingredients that you use, so we can rotate different flavors for different meals,” said Haruka. “It’s strange that the sweetness of the sauce comes from potatoes, though.”

The potatoes that Haruka was talking about were regular potatoes, not sweet potatoes. There were plenty of different kinds of potatoes available in the market, and Aera-san had told us that we could use any kind for the sauce.

“The sauce probably creates that flavor by converting starch to sugar, but if that occurs in a short period of time at room temperature, then maybe there are enzymes at work that we don’t know about,” said Haruka. “Or perhaps it’s yeast at work?”

“Didn’t Aera-san say that the process would continue just fine even if you randomly threw spices in, though? She said that fruits and vegetables get broken down after about a week,” said Natsuki. “I wonder if it’s different kinds of bacteria working together?”

“Spices? Oh, maybe the spices suppress the activity of the bacteria,” said Yuki.

Packing something in salt would suppress the activity of putrefactive bacteria and make long-term preservation possible.

“There are bacteria that are still active even under those conditions, though,” said Haruka. “In any case, the unknown bacteria that helps make the inspiel sauce definitely seems to be quite strong.”

“Mm. Even koji mold takes anywhere from two to three days to convert steamed rice into koji rice. On the other hand, all you need to do for inspiel sauce is prepare water and maintain room temperature to convert starch into sugar over half a day,” said Natsuki. “After that, you can just leave it alone and

it'll break down most plants, so it is quite amazing.”

“It’s possible that room temperature just happens to be the favorable environment for that bacteria, but if it actually existed out in nature, then I feel like it’d cause great damage to farm crops,” said Haruka.

“There are probably some conditions that need to be fulfilled first before that bacteria becomes active,” said Yuki. “Maybe it’s an anaerobic bacteria, or it needs to reach a certain population level before it starts being active.”

“If the end result is a sauce so smooth that you don’t need to strain it, then there’s a possibility that it’s cellulolytic fungi,” said Haruka. “Some of the harder parts of vegetables would normally remain even after the rest of them got broken down.”

“So that means there’s probably a mix of different bacteria that work well together, right?” Natsuki asked.

“Yep, most likely,” said Yuki. “If that’s true, it makes more sense that the inspiel sauce base is the first thing you prepare.”

The three intelligent members of our party had started a discussion that was quite hard for me to understand. The only thing I knew was that amylase would turn starch into sugar, so I was quite lost when it came to what the girls were talking about.

“Can’t we just handwave it and call it magic, since we’re in a fantasy world?” Touya asked. “All we need to know is that we can make a delicious-tasting sauce now, right?”

“Whew, I can’t believe you actually said that out loud, Touya!” I exclaimed.

I had kind of expected this from Touya, though. That pragmatic attitude would ruin the point of the discussion that the girls were having, and they all gave Touya slightly exasperated looks.

“Touya, it’s also important to think about how things actually work, even when it comes to magic,” said Haruka.

“Well, I can’t use magic, so that’s not relevant to me. I’m going for the all brawn and no brain life!”

“You’re giving up on intelligence, Touya?!” Yuki exclaimed.

I was quite taken aback by Touya’s decision, and Yuki sounded like she was surprised as well. However, it was actually an okay choice for our party composition. Touya’s role in our party was being our frontline tank, so it would be better for him to train his body over his mind.

“Oh well, I guess that’s fine,” said Haruka. “We should probably go gather dindels for making our own inspiel sauce. I’ll still be busy tomorrow, though. What about you, Touya?”

When Haruka looked at him, Touya paused in thought and then shook his head. “I’ll also be busy for a bit longer. I’ll probably be done by the middle of the day tomorrow, but yeah.”

“If I knew this was how things were going to end up, then I would have placed an order for Yuki and Natsuki’s chain mail right away when we got back here from Sarstedt...” Haruka sounded like she slightly regretted the decisions she’d made after we had returned to Laffan. The initial plan had been to deal with Yuki and Natsuki’s equipment at a later time, since we were basically taking a break for a while. “I guess I can lend my chain mail to Yuki, but Touya’s chain mail wouldn’t fit Natsuki, I don’t think.”

The tallest person in our party was Touya at a height of about 180 centimeters. I was a bit shorter than Touya, while Natsuki was about 165 centimeters tall. Haruka was even shorter than Natsuki, and Yuki was the shortest at about 155 centimeters tall. However, there was a significant difference in girth between me and Touya, and the same applied to the girls. That meant it wasn’t possible to share equipment based on height alone. The chain mail was also customized for each person, so Touya’s chain mail definitely wouldn’t fit Natsuki. *There’s also a difference in terms of the breastplate area, but I probably shouldn’t mention that.*

“What if I hand over my chain mail to Natsuki and wear Touya’s chain mail instead, Haruka?” I asked. “I think that might work okay.”

“Hmm, I’m not sure about the idea of having everyone wear equipment that doesn’t fully fit them, but I guess we can give it a try.”

I tried out Touya’s chain mail, and it made me realize once again that there

was a huge difference between us in terms of things like shoulder width and how muscular our chests were. The chain mail felt a bit too big for me, but it wasn't to the point where it would slide off. *Hmm, I should probably tie this chain mail up with some strings since I can't do any swift movements like this.*

"Nao's chain mail actually fits me perfectly," Natsuki said after she had tried it out. I was taller than she was, but my chain mail probably fit her due to the fact that, as an elf, I was slim; she didn't need that much space in the chest area either. Let's leave it at that.

"This chain mail feels a bit tight for me, especially around the chest area," said Yuki.

"Is it too tight to bear?" Haruka asked.

"Nah, not really. I can probably bear with it for about a day."

It looked like Haruka's chain mail didn't fit Yuki due to the fact that Haruka was much more slender than she was. Yuki's chest definitely looked like the chain mail was exerting a lot of pressure on it. *I'll probably get in trouble if I point that out, though, so I guess I'll leave the rest to Haruka.*

"As for weapons, you managed to learn the Staff Fighting skill, right, Yuki?"

"Yeah, I learned it earlier this morning during training."

"Touya's sword is of higher quality, but it'll probably be impossible for you to swing it around, right?"

"Nah, there's no way she could wield my sword even if she had the skill for it, especially due to the height difference."

"Yeah, there's no way! Touya's sword is way too heavy!"

There was a difference in height of twenty-five centimeters between Touya and Yuki. Touya's sword was also made to be used with the physical strength of a beastman, so it was quite heavy. It would be quite an interesting and fantastical sight to see Yuki swing that sword around, but it was probably impossible due to its weight.

"In that case, I guess you'll just have to use some stick-shaped weapon as a staff," said Haruka. "Be careful out there, okay? I'm counting on you, Natsuki."

“Gotcha—wait, why did you say that to Natsuki instead of me, Haruka?” I asked. “I’m more experienced, right?” *Like, sure, Natsuki’s stronger than me just in terms of her skills, but she’s only participated in combat once so far.*

“I’m counting on Natsuki to be the calm and rational one. You’re going to hunt some tusk boars as well, right? Play it safe and don’t be reckless.”

“All right, I’ll keep that in mind. Aera-san will be with us as well, so I can’t be reckless either way.”

Haruka brought up the words “Prioritize self-care!” that she had made me repeat after her on our first day in this different world, and I nodded solemnly in agreement.



“Whoa, I didn’t know there were such tall dindel trees near this town...”

We met up with Aera-san the next day in the morning and managed to arrive at where the dindel trees were located without any trouble. I was used to the sight of these dindel trees by now, but they were apparently much larger than Aera-san had expected them to be. Her mouth was wide open in amazement as she stared at the canopy high above.

“Are these dindel trees taller than the ones you’ve seen before?”

“Yeah. It’s probably because they’ve been left alone in their natural state.”

I asked Aera-san what she meant by that, and she explained that dindel trees would stop growing and end at a reasonable height if you pruned them. Elves were good at climbing trees, but it was still easier to gather fruits from a small tree compared to a tall one, so the trees that elves would gather fruits from would be pruned for that purpose.

“I can probably gather some dindels myself if the trees are this close to town—wait, is it okay for me to gather dindels, Nao-san?”

“Adventurers are allowed to gather these dindels, so it’s probably fine for you to gather some yourself too. However, wipe bears sometimes appear around this area, so I would recommend hiring a bodyguard if you’re going to come gather some by yourself.”

Aera-san paused in thought after she'd heard my words. "Hmm, that's a bit dangerous. I can handle goblins by myself just fine, but..."

I was surprised to hear that she only considered wipe bears a bit dangerous. I had almost died during my first encounter with a wipe bear. *I guess it kind of makes sense, considering how her gear looks like it's been used for quite a long time, and she does seem like she can fend for herself just fine. She'd probably be able to make a living as an adventurer even if she failed as a cook.*

"All right, let's climb this dindel tree, Nao-san. Yuki-san, Natsuki-san, will the two of you be waiting at the bottom?"

"Mm, I definitely can't climb this tree," said Yuki. "Will you two really be okay?"

"Climbing this tree looks dangerous to me..." said Natsuki.

"It's true that this dindel tree is a bit tall, but it's not a problem. Right, Nao-san?"

"Yeah, we'll be fine since we're elves. Just wait down here for us at the lowest branch."



Aera-san climbed with skill and grace. I had kind of expected that since she wasn't a fake elf like me. She managed to reach the top of the dindel tree in no time and nodded with a satisfied expression as she looked around at the nearby branches.

"These dindels look like they're on the verge of being out of season, but they'll do just fine for the purpose of making inspiel sauce. Let's gather as many as we can!"

"Yeah. However, be careful not to fall off, okay?"

"Don't worry, I won't! It would be shameful for an elf to fall from a tree!"

She clenched her hands together in a fist pump pose as she said that. *Please don't let go of the tree with both hands, Aera-san. The very sight of it scares me.*

"Also, I must say, this backpack is quite convenient. The fact that you can have both of your hands free while carrying it will definitely help with gathering

dindels.”

Aera-san had told us that she would be fine with a cheap bag to carry on her back, but Yuki had somewhat forcefully made her carry one of our backpacks instead for safety purposes.

“Yeah, this type of backpack has helped us a lot in our lives as adventurers. The Adventurers’ Guild will also start selling these backpacks in the near future.”

“You mentioned that the other elf in your party made these backpacks, right? I’m very impressed.”

We continued to chat with each other as we gathered dindels, and I stopped once there were no dindels left within my reach since it felt like we had gathered enough.

“Aera-san, this should be enough, right?”

“Really? I feel like we can gather a bit more, though...”

Whoa, don’t turn around like that on the tip of a branch to reply to me! It’s really scary! I got spooked in all sorts of ways when you did that!

“It won’t be efficient to continue gathering dindels here. There are other trees that we can go to gather dindels from, so let’s move over to one of them.”

“All right. In that case, let’s climb down.” As soon as she’d said that, she hopped down lightly without hesitation.

What?! I yelped in surprise when I saw that, but she continued to hop down from branch to branch with great ease. “Seriously? There’s no way I can do the same thing...”

If the place I was standing was only about twenty to thirty meters above the ground, then I would be able to perform the same feat. However, if I was asked to do so from way higher, then I would definitely reply with a no. I could feel my body shake in fear at the very idea.

“I’m going to take it safe as I climb down even if it takes me more time...”

Haruka’s words of “Prioritize self-care!” came to mind as I carefully climbed down the dindel tree. Because of that, it took me a while to get back to where

Yuki and Natsuki were. Once I got there, I saw that Aera-san was moving the dindels from her backpack into Natsuki's backpack. She probably planned on completely filling all three of our backpacks with dindels.

"Aera-san, we're going to hunt some tusk boars as well, so we're going to need some space for boar parts," I said.

"Huh?! O-Oh, um, could you use my bag for that instead?"

"Nah, your bag isn't large enough."

Aera-san was a petite person, to the point that she almost looked like a child, and the size of her bag fit her stature.



What this meant was that her bag definitely wasn't large enough to hold over one hundred kilograms of meat. However, surprisingly, Yuki and Natsuki were the ones who ended up refuting my opinion.

"Nao, we can also put meat in our leather bags, can't we? Natsuki and I can help carry them with our hands," said Yuki. "That way we won't need to put meat into the backpacks, right?"

"Mm, it'll probably work out if we just separate them like that," said Natsuki.

Really? I can understand Yuki, but I didn't expect a serious-minded person like Natsuki to agree to Aera-san's idea as well. I guess that's just how powerful the allure of sweet things is. Well, I would have agreed myself if we were doing this before I ate enough dindels that the appeal wore off.

"Hmm, are you all sure about this? The bags will end up quite heavy if we hunt down a big tusk boar."

There was a big difference between carrying a bag that weighed twenty kilos on your back and carrying it in your hands. The latter would be way more difficult and painful, of course.

"We'll do our best!" the girls exclaimed.

I grudgingly nodded in response after I heard that confident statement from all three of them. "Is that so? In that case, I'm fine with it, I guess."

There was a good chance that we would end up having to throw away some of the meat, but not fighting back was probably the best choice when faced with three girls who were obsessed with sweets. *I hope so, at least.*

Chapter 5—A Strange Sauce and Our Own Home

Our boar hunting went smoother than I had expected it to go, so we were able to finish hunting and return to Aera-san's café before it was time for lunch. The biggest factor in that was definitely Aera-san's presence. Yesterday, she had told us that she didn't think she would be useful in combat, but that was just her being modest. I only needed to help with locating the tusk boars with my Scout skill, and she took care of the rest. She easily slew the boars with her bow and mastered the art of gutting them in a short period of time.

"Let's put the meat in the magical cooling device first."

Aera-san led us to the kitchen, where a large magical cooling device was located. It appeared to have the same functions as a fridge back on Earth, and "fridge" also happened to be a simpler term for this device.

"This thing is very convenient to have! Well, it'd be somewhat useless if I was going to have to create a lot of dishes for a high-volume and low-margin business model, but yeah..."

At first, she sounded quite happy as she talked about the fridge, but she turned away from us at the end and looked slightly depressed as the thought of her original plans flashed across her mind. The fridge's height and width were both about two meters, and its depth appeared to be one and a half meters. It was definitely an expensive magical device, and the fact that it was so large also meant that it came with significant maintenance costs. What that meant was that if you couldn't put the device to full use, then there would just be extra costs for no good reason. *That's what I think, but...*

Natsuki and Yuki tried to cheer her up. "Nah, it's not useless at all, Aera-san!" Yuki exclaimed. "If you're going to add sweets to the menu as well, then you'll definitely need this fridge!"

"You can probably make fresh Japanese sweets with this fridge, so it'll give you an edge over your competition," said Natsuki.

Aera-san unexpectedly showed some interest. “I-Is that so? Wait, what are fresh Japanese sweets?! I’ve never heard of them before, but they sound delicious based on their name alone!”

“O-Oh, you haven’t heard of them before?”

“Yeah. It appears I have much more to learn! Would you be willing to teach me how to make them?” Aera-san sounded quite excited to learn.

Now that I think about it, the sweets I ordered at the café that I went to the other day were just baked sweets that were simple in flavor and easy to make. They were definitely a bit different from the kind of desserts I expect a café to serve.

“O-Okay, I can teach you how to make them when we have some free time,” said Natsuki.

“Really? Promise?”

“Yeah, I promise. Can we get back to the inspiel sauce for now?”

“Oh, right! The first thing we’ll need is a jar to hold the sauce, so let’s go out and buy some jars!”

“Didn’t you have to go get the display board that you ordered today, Aera-san?” Yuki asked.

“Oh, I forgot about that! What should I do...?”

The display board that she and Yuki had gone to order yesterday was ready for pickup today, apparently.

“Hmm, well, I can go get the display board by myself. Can I also ask our other party members to come over while I’m at it?”

“Oh, if you don’t mind, then that would be great, Yuki-san!” said Aera-san. “I’m looking forward to meeting another elf!”



The store where Aera-san took Natsuki and me was located at an out-of-the-way place far from the main road.

“This is the store that I bought my tableware and utensils from.”

“I didn’t know there was a store here...” I said.

This store would be almost impossible to find if you didn’t know where it was, and it only dealt in pottery and porcelain of different kinds. Tableware and utensils made out of wood were the most commonly used type in this world, so it made sense that this store wasn’t located along the main road.

Right after we entered the store, Aera-san said to the clerk, “Hello. I’d like to purchase some jars, preferably sturdy ones for practical use.”

“In that case, these jars here would probably be the ones that you’re looking for.”

The clerk then guided us to an area where many jars were lined up on display. The biggest jar looked like it was about fifty centimeters in diameter, while the smallest ones looked like they could fit in the palm of my hand.

“I think I’m going to need at least two of the biggest jars here if I’m going to use inspiel sauce for dishes at my café. Can you help me carry the jars back, Nao-san?”

“Sure, I don’t mind. We’ll buy a jar for ourselves as well—wait.” I stopped myself. “Natsuki, do you have money on you right now?” I whispered.

“Huh? Yes, but not that much,” she whispered back. “I only have the money that I earned back at Sarstedt.”

“Ugh. Haruka’s been in charge of managing our money up until now, so I only have a small amount of allowance on me right now.” *I hope we can afford the jar that we need for our own use. It shouldn’t be that much for a household use jar, right?*

“Hmm, a jar of this size should do, shouldn’t it?” Natsuki pointed at a jar that looked similar in size to a bottle that could hold about three to four liters of liquid. If it was completely full of sauce, it would probably be enough to fill ten regular-size sauce bottles.

“Excuse me, what’s the cheapest jar available in this size?” I asked.

“Oh, that would be this jar. The shape is a bit distorted, but it shouldn’t cause any problems for actual use.”

I looked at the jar that the clerk was pointing at and compared it to the other ones available, and it was definitely a bit distorted in shape. However, it wasn't like the other jars had refined shapes either. They all looked like simple products that weren't made with a ceramic mold or on a wheel.

Natsuki picked up the jar and lightly tapped it before she nodded with satisfaction. "What is the price of this jar?"

"This jar costs six hundred Rea."

Hm? That's cheaper than I thought it would be, given that the products here all seem handmade. The price of the jar happened to be something that I could afford, since Haruka had replenished my allowance yesterday.

However, before I could buy the jar, Aera-san stopped me and asked the clerk, "Um, we'll be buying that jar together with these other large ones, so would it be possible for us to get a discount?"

"Hmm, sure. How does a total of three thousand Rea sound?"

Aera-san nodded right away and swiftly paid that amount. "That sounds fine. Here's the money." She hefted one of the jars and turned to us. "All right, let's return to my café. Can you carry the other large jar for me, Nao-san?"

"S-Sure."

We heard the clerk's words of thanks as we left the store. "Thank you for your purchase!"

Aera-san walked ahead of us, and Natsuki and I followed; each of us was carrying one jar.

"Um, Aera-san, how much should we reimburse you?" Natsuki asked. "I don't know what a fair price is, but would six hundred Rea be enough?"

"Oh, don't worry about it. Consider that jar a gift from me. Three thousand Rea is cheaper than the market price for these two large jars combined, so the clerk must have tacked on that smaller jar for free. It's probably because I spent a lot of money at that store the other day."

She had mentioned earlier that all of the tableware and utensils she used at her café were from that store, so she had probably spent a large amount of

money at that time.

Natsuki looked at me with a perplexed expression on her face after she heard what Aera-san had said. “Is it really okay...?”

If I recall correctly, Aera-san’s in deep financial trouble right now, so we should pay for our own jar, but I’m not sure if she’ll accept our money...

“Besides, you took me to gather dindels today. The price of that jar is nothing compared to how much dindels would cost if I had to buy them myself, so I’d feel better if you would accept my gift.”

We both thanked Aera-san for the gift after she had explained her reasoning.

“In that case, thank you very much for the gift,” said Natsuki.

“Thanks for the gift, Aera-san,” I said.

In the end, we’d obtained a jar for free.



Haruka and Touya were already at the café when we returned. Yuki was there too, and there was a display board next to her that looked like the ones you’d commonly see back on Earth along with a menu board to use inside of the café for customers. Both of the boards looked quite well made and didn’t seem at all out of keeping with the café’s atmosphere, so they would definitely fulfill their purpose well.

“Nice to meet you, Aera-san. My name is Haruka.”

“Hey, I’m Touya! Let’s get along!”

“Hello, it’s nice to meet you both. I want to express my thanks for the help I’ve received from your party members so far.”

“Don’t worry about it. I’m sorry that Touya and I weren’t able to help out since we were busy with other things. The inspiel sauce will be of great use to us as well.”

“I’m glad to hear that. In that case, let’s start with making the inspiel sauce base.”

We lined up the jars that we had bought and brought back with us, and then

Haruka used her Purification spell to clean them. After that, Aera-san went to the kitchen and brought back a jar larger than the ones that we had bought. It looked like the jar was eight-tenths full of inspiel sauce, and Aera-san divided about one third of that between the two large jars that she had bought. She then poured half of the remaining sauce into the jar that we were going to use.

“Will this really be enough sauce for your own use, Aera-san?” Yuki asked. “It looks like there’s only a little bit of sauce in your two jars.”

Aera-san nodded with a smile on her face as she answered Yuki’s questions. “Yeah, this is enough. You can still make more inspiel sauce with a small amount remaining; it’ll just take a bit longer. If you do that, then I would suggest slicing the ingredients as thin as you can get them before you throw them in.”

This really seems like a fantasy phenomenon to me, but I guess it kind of makes sense if I compare it to the amount of koji mold required to make koji rice.

“The next thing to do is to add in fruits, which will be dindels this time. It’s really a luxury to be able to throw in the entire fruit instead of just the skin!”

“Yeah, they’d be expensive if you had to buy them,” I said. “Are we going to use all of the dindels that we gathered today?”

We had filled three backpacks full of dindels. It was quite a lot in total, but the jars were probably large enough to fit them all.

“Oh no, that would be an absolute waste—I mean, the taste of dindels will overwhelm the sauce, so about two thirds, or rather one half of what we gathered should be enough!”

“Is that so? Is it really not because you think it’s a waste, Aera-san...?”

“Yes, of course! It’s to balance out the taste of the sauce!”

“Yeah, definitely!” exclaimed Yuki.

“Mm, that sounds right to me as well,” said Natsuki.

Whew, they both went along with what Aera-san said. You two just want to eat more dindels, right?

“Well, you helped gather at least half of the dindels, Aera-san, so I don’t really

mind, I guess..." I said.

"Yeah, that's right! We'll also need some desserts to go with fried pork cutlets!" exclaimed Yuki.

"Mm. Do we just have to chop up the dindels and throw them in, Aera-san?" Natsuki asked.

"Yeah. Wash the dindels first and remove the stems before you start to chop them up, and then throw it all in along with the skins."

Natsuki swiftly took some dindels out of our backpacks and started to work on them right away, as if she wanted to do so before I could possibly change my mind. The girls ended up being in charge of chopping up the dindels, while Touya and I were in charge of washing the dindels and carrying them over to the girls. Aera-san was the fastest one among them, which was to be expected due to her general experience with cooking. Her handling of a kitchen knife was so skillful and so fast that I couldn't follow it with my eyes. Haruka and then Yuki were next in terms of speed, which was probably because they both had the Cooking skill. Natsuki was last, but she was only a bit slower than Haruka and Yuki. However, I heard Natsuki mutter the words "I can't believe I'm slower than Yuki of all people. This actually feels a bit humiliating..." which was probably because Natsuki had originally been way better than Yuki at cooking back on Earth.

"All right, this should be enough. The next thing to do is to thoroughly mix the dindels into the sauce."

Aera-san started to mix the sauce at the bottom of her jars with the chopped up dindels, and the juicy fruit was crushed, resulting in a liquid that looked a bit like ketchup. It didn't resemble the initial inspiel sauce at all. The two large jars were basically full of dindel juice combined with the skins of the dindels.

"You can skip this step if you don't have time, but the inspiel sauce will be ready sooner if you thoroughly mix it like this. Most households just slowly add ingredients over time, though, so it's not relevant in that case."

We were using a small amount of sauce this time in order to make much more inspiel sauce, but Aera-san had told us that you would normally just let vegetables and fruits sit and soak up the sauce, so it would be okay to just leave

it alone and wait for the sauce to finish on its own.

“The next thing to do is add any vegetables of your choice. We can just use the vegetables that I have in stock. There are a lot left on the verge of going bad since no customers came to my café, ha ha...”

Aera-san looked a bit depressed as she delved into self-deprecation again. *It's a bit scary hearing you like this, Aera-san.* There were a lot of wooden boxes of vegetables in the kitchen when we went to fetch them, and we all helped carry them over. As Aera-san had said, the vegetables were on the verge of withering, which was definitely a result of her initial high-volume and low-margin business model.

“Chop up the vegetables and make sure you balance them so that you don't add a lot more of one vegetable compared to others. I don't think any of these vegetables have gone bad, but pay attention just in case.”

“Is it really okay to use up all of these vegetables?” Natsuki asked. “Shouldn't we measure ratios first?”

“Nah, you don't need to. It'll work out even if you just add them based on a rough estimate of what feels right. However, it would be a good idea to be more careful if you're going to add vegetables that have a strong smell.”

We performed the washing and chopping process together once again. There was no such thing as a food processor in this world, so everything had to be done by hand, and Haruka was starting to show signs of fatigue. On the other hand, Aera-san looked like she was still perfectly fine and hadn't slowed down at all despite having chopped up the most vegetables of anyone. *I guess that's to be expected from a professional cook.*

“I'm amazed that you're able to maintain that speed, Aera-san,” I said.

“Well, it's just a result of how harsh training was when I was practicing as a cook. I would often have to do tasks such as peeling potatoes for half a day. Chopping things into small pieces is way easier compared to that.”

I had heard stories about how harsh culinary training was even back on modern-day Earth, but it appeared that training was even harsher here in this world. Back on Earth, there were all sorts of machines and cooking equipment

that cooks could use to help themselves out, but most of those tools didn't have an equivalent here in this world.

"But you still wanted to become a cook despite how harsh training was, right?" Natsuki asked.

"Yeah. I would sometimes cook for my friends back when I was in my hometown, but I wanted many more people to try out my cooking one day. It was my dream to eventually start my own café. I worked hard to improve my cooking abilities and achieve that dream and slowly saved up money. The very thought of achieving my dream one day enabled me to put up with how harsh my training was. It took me quite a long time before I was finally able to start my own café, but..."

We all fell silent once we had heard Aera-san's backstory. *Who the hell deceived this nice and hardworking person?! I can't believe there was someone that shameless among my classmates!* We looked at each other and nodded. We were all on the same page. It would trouble our conscience forever if we didn't succeed in helping Aera-san get her eating establishment business back on track.

"I had no idea what I should or could do until a few days ago, so I'm really glad that you happened to come across my café, Nao-san."

I lost my composure when Aera-san turned around and smiled at me with traces of tears in her eyes. "O-Oh, yeah, we're glad that we got to know you as well. Right, guys?"

"Yeah. The food that you serve here tastes delicious as well, Aera-san," said Yuki.

"You've taught us how to make inspiel sauce too," said Natsuki.

"Oh, I'm really glad to hear that."

We continued to work on making the inspiel sauce even after we had heard about Aera-san's struggles up until now, and all of the jars appeared to be about eight-tenths full once we had used up all of the vegetables that had been in the wooden boxes.

"Good work. We're almost done. The next thing to do is to add some

potatoes.”

We went to the kitchen once again to get some wooden boxes of potatoes and carry them over. The potatoes looked like the type that were used to create mashed potatoes. They were quite cheap and easy to obtain, so they would often be eaten as a staple food in place of bread.

“Slice and chop up these potatoes as well. Also, the sauce will get sweeter as you add more and more potatoes into the mix. If you want to get the same taste as my sauce, I would suggest using a total of about five potatoes.”

It was apparently okay to just decide the amount of potatoes based on your own preferences and the amount of fruit that you had added earlier in the process. We didn’t yet have a preferred flavor for inspiel sauce, so we just followed Aera-san’s advice and went with five potatoes. Her jars were much larger than our jar, so she had to slice and chop up tens of potatoes for hers.

“The next thing to add is some herbs. We can just add the herbs that we gathered earlier today in the forest. Once again, you can add as much as you like, but depending on your preference, it would be a good idea to hold back on the ones with strong smells.”

We randomly ripped apart the herbs with our hands this time instead of using knives, and then we threw the herbs into the jars. As before, we had no idea what the right balance was, so we just followed Aera-san’s example. Our goal was to create some inspiel sauce that matched the taste of Aera-san’s, so it was fine this way.

“The last thing to add is some spices and condiments. Add just a little bit of salt, and don’t add too much of the other ones either. The inspiel sauce will be ruined if you add too many strong flavors.”

“What happens if you accidentally add too much?” Yuki asked.

“If that happens, then you’ll have no choice but to create even more inspiel sauce to dilute it. I accidentally dropped a condiment bottle into a jar full of inspiel sauce once, and my mom scolded me very harshly for that, ha ha.”

Aera-san had a bitter smile on her face as she recalled that memory, but she also had a nostalgic tone to her voice. Most dishes could just be thrown away if

you messed up while making them, but making more inspiel sauce required the sauce base itself, so it wasn't something that you could throw away even if you messed up. With that in mind, it would probably be a good idea to divide up our own inspiel sauce and store some away in case we messed up with the base sauce.

"All you need to do after adding some spices and condiments is to mix it thoroughly and then leave it alone afterwards. The sauce will be done and ready for use after about a week. You can speed up the process if you want by mixing it from time to time during the wait."

Aera-san took out a wooden spatula and attempted to mix the sauce inside the large jars, but it appeared to be difficult for her.

"Ugh, it's quite thick at this point..."

When Touya saw that Aera-san was having a difficult time with mixing the sauce, he said, "Oh, Aera-san, I can help you do it."

Aera-san looked between Touya and her own jars, and it seemed like she had come to the conclusion that it would be very difficult for her to mix the sauce for both jars. "Um, well, if you don't mind, then that would be great, Touya-san." She handed over the wooden spatula to Touya.

Touya took the spatula and lightly mixed the sauce from the bottom of the jar. It didn't really look like a sauce yet, though. It looked more like a chopped salad at this point.

"Aera-san, is this really the right way to make inspiel sauce?" I asked. "It doesn't look anywhere near a sauce at the moment."

"Yeah, this is the right way. It looks like this now, but it'll start to draw moisture out of the fruits and vegetables once you leave it for a night. It'll look more like a sauce after about three days. For a very smooth sauce, it'll take about a week if you mix it from time to time."

"It'll really only take one week for this to become a proper sauce...?"

Preserving food in salt would draw out a lot of water overnight, so it made sense to me that moisture was part of the process of making inspiel sauce. However, I was still baffled by the fact that it would only take one week to

create the tasty sauce that I had tried out yesterday. *Just how powerful are the fungi at work here? Perhaps the black inspiel sauce base was the bacteria, or something like a slime—never mind, that’s enough guessing. I’ll probably lose my appetite for this sauce if I pursue this thought.*

“You can finish making this inspiel sauce within a few days if you mix it more often. This is all you need to do to make inspiel sauce. You all did a great job!”

“We should be the ones saying that to you,” said Haruka. “All right, I guess now it’s my turn to teach you.”

“Oh, it’s finally time for the cutlet sandwiches!” Aera-san had a look of excitement in her eyes as she leaned forward towards Haruka.

“I hope the cutlet sandwiches meet your expectations. Let’s go work in the kitchen, since we can’t make them out here.”

“Okay, I’m looking forward to it!”

Haruka forced out a laugh when she saw how excited Aera-san was, and then they went together to the kitchen. The kitchen wasn’t wide enough for everyone to stand together, so the rest of us watched from a corner.

“All right, the first thing we’ll need is fat for frying, so let’s extract some from the meat,” said Haruka.

“Right, we can just extract the lard from the fatty parts of the meat.”

Aera-san and Haruka prepared a large pot and started to put in fatty cuts of boar meat. Tusk boar meat contained a lot of subcutaneous fat, so the pot filled up very quickly. Aera-san was especially proficient at this process, as was obvious from how cleanly she managed to separate just the fat from the meat.

“Oh, wait, aren’t pork cutlets fried in lard really bad for your body?” Touya asked.

“Yeah, for me, vegetable oil is what comes to mind when I think of fried food,” I said.

“Some people use lard instead. I remember reading about how it’s because it’s not as sticky due to being solid at room temperature,” said Natsuki. “I’m not sure whether it’s good or bad for your body, though.”

“I mean, it contains a lot of cholesterol, so...”

“Well, I personally wouldn’t believe someone who uses a lot of vegetable oil and claims that it has no cholesterol to imply that it’s healthy,” said Yuki.

“That zero cholesterol statement would be technically true for certain types of oils, but I can’t say the same for the other claims,” said Haruka.

In the end, whether or not something was good or bad for your body depended on the amount that you ate. In a lot of cases, even food that was good for your body could have negative effects if you ate too much of it, especially food that got advertised as diet food. The worst case scenario would be if someone ate only that diet food and nothing else. It would result in severe damage to their health, but most people would probably stop before they got to that point.

“You seem to be quite used to this, Aera-san,” said Haruka. “All right, this should be enough.”

“Yeah, I’ve had a lot of experience with cutting meat. Are we going to use all of this? It’s quite a large amount.”

“Mm, we are. Heat up the pot to start melting the fat.”

“Okay.”

Aera-san lifted up the pot and placed it on something that looked like a stove, then she started it up. *Is that a magical device?* I had thought that wood-burning stoves were the most common type of stoves in this world, but it appeared that Aera-san had spent a lot of money on her cooking equipment as well. It was either that or just a result of her being swayed by that self-proclaimed consultant’s talk.

“The next thing to do is to cut some thick slices of meat,” said Haruka. “What part of the boar would you guys prefer?”

“The tenderloin!” Touya exclaimed.

“I’d prefer spare ribs, I guess,” said Yuki.

“You also preferred the loin, right, Nao?”

“Well, I don’t really have a specific preference, but that would be it if I had to

pick one cut.”

Bite-size spare rib cutlets were good as well, but it was the thick slices that would truly feel like proper pork cutlets to me. *Hmm, the very idea sounds like a luxury to me now. Is it because I've gotten used to wanting to save money?*

“I guess we can prioritize using meat from the loin along with other parts of the boar. Can you cut the loin to about this size and thickness, Aera-san?”

“Okay.”

Once the two of them had sliced a couple cuts of meat, they tenderized and salted them.

“Let's use some batter since it's quick and easy. Do you have any eggs in stock, Aera-san?”

“Well, I do, but this'll make it more expensive to make if I'm going to serve it as a dish on the menu.”

“You can use flour and water instead if you want, but using eggs will make it more delicious. It's up to you.”

Eggs in this different world were quite expensive compared to how cheap they were back on modern-day Earth. On a side note, the eggs at hand here were jabbs eggs. I had told Touya about those jabbs after I'd found out the truth about the eggs myself. It had been the kind thing to do, after all. I'd been quite happy to see his reaction; his mouth had been wide open from shock. He'd gotten over it quite quickly, though, so that joy hadn't lasted too long. *Yuki probably knows because she has the General Knowledge skill. Oh, I can probably surprise Natsuki with this information when I get an opportunity, though. Ha ha!*

“Oh yeah, what are they talking about in regards to batter, Natsuki?” I asked. “This sounds different from what I know about making fried pork cutlets.”

“It's a liquid made from mixing eggs and flour. If I recall correctly, your household started with panko bread crumbs along with flour soaked in an egg mixture, right, Nao-kun? There are households out there that start with a mix of flour and milk or a mix of egg and panko bread crumbs as well.”

“Yeah, that's right. So what you're saying is that batter serves the same

purpose as panko bread crumbs for frying food?”

“Mm. I don’t use batter myself, but I’ve heard about how beginners often mess up when using it.”

Based on her choice of words, it sounded like Natsuki didn’t really like batter. I personally didn’t have any specific preference as long as the final product tasted good.

“Aera-san, do you also happen to have some bread in stock? Bread that’s a bit hard would be preferable.”

“Yeah, I do. In fact, I have plenty left over since no customers have come to my café...”

Haruka fell silent for a moment after she had heard Aera-san’s self-deprecating joke, but it appeared that she decided to ignore it, since she simply handed over some bread to Natsuki. “...Can you crumble the bread, Natsuki?”

Natsuki nodded back and started to make panko bread crumbs in silence, and Haruka sprinkled those crumbs all over the meat after Natsuki was done.

“Interesting. Now do you just put this into a pan of hot oil?”

“Yeah. It’s not that difficult to cook as long as you pay attention to the temperature of the oil. I’ll start and show you, Aera-san.”

Haruka placed the panko bread crumbs into the oil and checked the temperature before she added the fat as well, which resulted in the delicious smell of the lard permeating the air along with a sizzling sound.

“It should be ready for frying once the sound changes to more of a crackling sound. Do you want to try frying the meat yourself, Aera-san?”

“Sure!”

Haruka stepped aside to make space for Aera-san and watched as she started to fry the pork cutlets. Aera-san seemed to be a bit cautious at first, but after she finished frying a few pieces, it looked like she’d gotten the hang of it.

“Okay, the pork cutlets are ready. You can just pour sauce over them, or you can place them between slices of bread to create cutlet sandwiches,” said Haruka. “It would be nice to have something else to go with this, though.”

I wanted to eat the freshly fried pork cutlets right away, but it would probably be bad in terms of nutritional balance. We had dindels to eat as dessert, but it would be great if we had some salad to go with the meat.

“In that case, I’ll make some more dishes. We happen to have some fresh internal organs we can use, after all.”

Did you really have to bring up internal organs when I was thinking of salad, Aera-san? I mean, you’re not at fault or anything, but a vivid image of some salad made of internal organs came to mind when you said that because of how powerful those words were.

“Fresh internal organs...?”

Yep, I figured Haruka would feel the same way I did. Haruka had an expression on her face that showed slight hints of disgust due to how scary those two words were by themselves, so I brought up more details to alleviate those feelings.

“Aera-san collected some offal during our hunting session today,” I said.

“Oh, I see. Can I watch as you prepare your dish, Aera-san? I don’t really know how to properly prepare offal, so it would be a great learning experience.”

Offal basically meant the same thing as internal organs, but offal would give off a much different impression; it sounded more like something edible.

“Sure, I don’t mind. It would be a good idea to learn how to prepare offal if you’re going to go out hunting for meat quite often. Most people avoid offal due to how fast it goes bad, but that doesn’t matter if you just eat it fresh.”

Aera-san went over to the fridge and took out the hearts, livers, kidneys, and tongues of the boars we had hunted earlier. She then lined them all up on a cutting board, and it was quite a grotesque sight to see. A different choice of words wouldn’t change how they looked, after all.

“All right, let’s begin.”

At first glance, the scene in front of me looks like a child with a smile on her face slicing through a heart, and I’m pretty sure anyone would scream “Yikes!” if they heard that description. Yeah, I’m going to stay right here, far away from

the butchering show.



“Okay, the dishes are ready!”

In the end, Touya was the only one who stayed with me in the corner of the kitchen while Natsuki and Yuki went over next to Haruka to watch how Aera-san prepared the offal. Aera-san’s experience as a professional cook definitely proved itself, since we didn’t have to wait long at all until she was done. The dishes that Aera-san had made were a vegetable soup and some stir-fried offal along with grilled meat.

“Whoa, they all look delicious!” Touya exclaimed. “I’m going to try out the fried pork cutlets first!”

Aera-san handed over a jar of inspiel sauce to Touya, and he poured some of the sauce onto the pork cutlets before he took a bite.

“Whew, tashty!”

Don’t speak with your mouth full, Touya. I get what you’re saying, but still. I was looking forward to trying out the food as much as Touya was, however, so I followed his example and tried out the pork cutlets first.

“Mm!”

The pork cutlets were crispy and chewy, and they also had a sweet taste from the inspiel sauce that mixed together with the juices from the meat as I bit into them. It was a heavenly combination of deliciousness. The meat itself was also delicious and way better in quality than the ordinary pork that I’d had back during my time on Earth. I felt like these cutlets would end up even more delicious if, instead of batter, Aera-san had used coarse panko bread crumbs to make them crispier, but that wasn’t really a complaint. Haruka had used leftover dry bread this time instead of panko bread crumbs, so they’d ended up being quite soft. However, it looked like both Haruka and Aera-san enjoyed the taste of these pork cutlets, so the average person in this world would probably enjoy them as well.

“You place these fried pork cutlets between slices of bread to create cutlet sandwiches, right?” Aera-san sandwiched a pork cutlet between two slices of

bread, took a bite, and then voiced her opinion. “Mm, I think it’ll go quite well with some slightly soft bread and something additional to give it a mix of flavors.”

What else was included in cutlet sandwiches? Cabbage and lettuce, right? I think there were some variations with mustard in them as well.

“I’m sure this will sell well! I’ll try serving some of these cutlet sandwiches myself once the upcoming batch of inspiel sauce is ready. I’m not sure what to price them at, though...”

“What will the cost of the ingredients end up at, Aera-san?” I asked.

“Hmm. It depends on what part of a boar I use, but if I use the cheapest parts of a boar for cutlets of this size, I think I can lower the cost to about 150 Rea.”

Fifty grams was probably the right amount of meat for the size that Aera-san was talking about. Meat in this world seemed like it was more expensive than meat back on Earth. Tusk boar meat would be cheap if you could get it at five Rea per gram, but that was for meat that still had the fat and bones. The amount of meat that you could actually use after removing the other parts would be much smaller.

“I think cutlets would end up delicious no matter what part of the boar you use, though,” said Yuki.

“Yeah, definitely!” Touya exclaimed. “This is the first time I’ve had pork cutlets made from the ribs, but I love how they just melt in my mouth!”

“I can’t say I agree about that,” said Natsuki. “I enjoyed the other ones, though.”

Aera-san and Haruka had made cutlets from various parts of the tusk boar. Touya seemed to enjoy the pork cutlets made from the ribs, which had a lot of fat on them, but it was apparently too much fat for Natsuki. Yuki and Haruka both nodded after Natsuki had voiced her opinion, so they probably agreed with her. As for me, I wouldn’t mind having a rib cutlet once in a while, but it wasn’t something I would want on a regular basis. *Hmm, actually, what if you boil the ribs first and remove the fat before frying them? That might end up delicious if it’s cooked to be soft and tender.*

“I think it would be best to just buy a whole tusk boar’s worth of meat and use the good parts for more expensive dishes on the menu,” said Haruka. “You need a decent amount of fat to fry pork cutlets, after all. What do you think about this as a professional cook, Aera-san?”

“Unfortunately, that’s not a realistic option. Hoarding meat will give you a bad reputation, and butcher shops won’t sell whole animals either.”

There were very few regions in this world that raised livestock, and Laffan wasn’t located in one of them. What that meant was that butcher shops in this town would get their meat from game slain by hunters and adventurers like us. As a result, supply would fluctuate all the time, so if a butcher shop sold a whole animal to a single person, they would quickly run out of meat to sell to other customers. It was only possible to order a whole animal with ease back on Earth due to the existence of supply chains, and because more people raised livestock.

“Well, we hunt tusk boars quite often, so we could supply you with a whole boar if needed, Aera-san,” I said.

“Really?! That’d be great! I’m willing to pay more for the meat than a butcher shop would! I’ll pay for the internal organs too!”

Oh, right, she can serve fresh offal as well if we supply her with boar parts. The offal dishes that Aera-san had cooked were all delicious, so I was fairly sure that she would be able to profit off of a whole boar.

“What do you guys think about this idea?”

“Sure, I don’t mind,” said Touya.

Touya agreed with my idea right away, and so did Yuki and Natsuki; they both nodded in response. Haruka nodded as well, but she also voiced doubts about whether or not we could keep up a stable supply. “I don’t mind either, but you know we’re not going to hunt tusk boars forever, right, Nao?” she asked. “Do you have any backup ideas for when that happens?”

“Don’t worry, I can manage! Cutlet sandwiches will be one of the main attractions on the menu, but if customers stop coming because I don’t have any meat in stock, it’ll just mean I didn’t work hard enough!” Aera-san confidently

declared that and clenched her fists to pump herself up. It seemed like she was confident that her cooking abilities would be more than enough to retain customers after people started coming and tried out her food at least once.

“I see. In that case, this should be enough help from us, right, Aera-san?”

“U-Um, actually, I still feel a bit uneasy, so...”

Please don't look at me with imploring eyes, Aera-san. I can feel Haruka's judging gaze on me when you do this.

“Well, it wouldn't hurt to help her out for a few days, right?” I asked. “We can get back to adventurer work after the chain mail for Yuki and Natsuki is done, I think.”

We had planned on placing an order for Yuki and Natsuki's chain mail either today or tomorrow, and we would have to wait at least a day even if there was some chain mail in stock that was close to the right size for them. It would take even longer if there wasn't any. With that in mind, I felt like we had the time to help out Aera-san for a few more days. It wasn't like our financial situation was so dire that we couldn't even afford to stay at an inn. After I had brought up that idea, I was quite surprised to see that Natsuki and Yuki seemed to be leaning towards agreement. Touya didn't seem to really care, and Haruka looked like she was considering the costs and benefits of my idea.

“Hmm. Well, I'm willing to say yes if you're willing to continue teaching us how to cook other sorts of dishes in the future, Aera-san,” said Haruka.

Aera-san agreed with Haruka's proposal right away. “Really?! I'd be more than willing! Thank you very much!”

It sounded like a good deal for both parties in this case. Aera-san had knowledge that we lacked, like how to prepare offal, and the reverse was also true. I was more than happy with this deal as well since it would mean that I would get to eat more types of delicious food. However, there was just one problem.

“Won't it take a while before the inspiel sauce is ready—”

“I'll do my best to mix the sauce as much as I can! It can be ready in two days if I use the remaining sauce that I have in stock!”

Aera-san told us that it would be possible if she just took the sauce she had left over from today's pork cutlets, added it to the large jars, and mixed them often. However, it would be quite a hard task for Aera-san to mix that large volume of sauce with her physique. In the end, we had Touya do his best to mix the sauce before we left Aera-san's café. Thanks to Touya's efforts, the sauce looked like it was getting quite close to liquid form by the time we had to leave.



We visited Aera-san's café together once again three days later, but Touya wasn't with us this time. Earlier this morning, he had suddenly told the rest of us that he was going to help Tomi and had gone his own way. I didn't have any complaints about that, but Touya had been just rolling around in our room doing nothing for the past few days, so I felt like he had intentionally run away for the day. *Oh well, I'll find out the reason eventually.*

"Now then, check this out!" Yuki exclaimed. "I decided to make some things for the occasion, since this is our first day helping Aera-san out with her café!"

Today was going to be the first day that Aera-san was open for business after all the changes, so the morning takeout meals weren't going to be available right away, but we had helped finish all the other necessary preparations. It was around that time that Yuki placed a bag on a table to show us something. It looked like Aera-san was the only other person who was surprised at this aside from myself. Haruka was her usual calm self while Natsuki reacted with a resigned look and sighed.

"What exactly did you make, Yuki...?" I had a bad feeling about this, but I ended up asking Yuki anyway.

She had a big smile on her face as she reached into the bag and pulled something out of it. It was a cute white apron with frills on it. "The first thing I made is this apron! I made one for each of us, including Aera-san!"

"Wait, don't tell me there's one for—"

"Oh, nah, there isn't one for you, Nao. Sorry! Did you want to wear one?"

Yuki had a teasing look on her face as she smiled at me, but I firmly shook my head in response. "Of course not. There's no way I would want to wear one."

I had thought at first that this was the reason why Touya had abandoned us today, but it seemed like I was wrong.

“Don’t worry, Nao. I said no to that idea.”

“Oh, I’m really grateful, Haruka!” *Whew, that was a close call!* I firmly grabbed Haruka’s hands and shook them to express my thanks.

“I personally thought you would’ve looked quite good in this, but Natsuki said no as well, so I abandoned the idea,” said Yuki.

“I’m really grateful to you too, Natsuki!”

“Don’t worry about it,” she replied to me with an elegant smile.

I shook Natsuki’s hands as well. Yuki was technically right that there was a chance I would look good in the cute apron since I was an elf now, but that was a sight that I didn’t want anyone to see.

“Aprons by themselves felt a bit too tame to me, so I decided to throw this into the mix! Check out this maid outfit!”

The next object that Yuki took out of the bag was, as promised, a black maid outfit. I wasn’t a connoisseur of maid outfits by any means, but it looked like a dress with a long skirt and sleeves. It was quite different from the type of maid outfit that I would have expected to see at a place like a maid café. *Is the apron meant to go with it to complete the maid look?*

“I barely managed to stop her from going with a mini-skirt design...” Natsuki sounded very exhausted when she mentioned that. *Oh, I guess this is the reason for her resigned look earlier.*

“All right, let’s try them on!” Yuki exclaimed. “You come with us too, Aera-san!”

“What? Huh?”

Aera-san didn’t seem to fully understand what was going on, but Yuki gave her a push on the back to urge her to follow along as they headed towards the stairs that led to the second floor. Natsuki and Haruka both had exasperated looks on their faces as they followed behind Yuki.

“Stay where you are and wait for us, okay, Nao? Don’t peep!”

“What makes you think I would do that?!”

Yuki brushed off my complaint with a laugh and went up to the second floor with the other girls. They came back shortly afterwards, and I was greeted by the sight of their maid outfits.

“Whew.”

The girls definitely looked like maids now with the aprons on top of the black dresses. Natsuki and Yuki were both quite good-looking, and so were Haruka and Aera-san due to being elves, so they were all truly a sight for sore eyes. Yuki looked quite confident in herself, while Haruka looked calm as usual. On the other hand, Natsuki looked like she felt a bit embarrassed due to what the word maid would make people think back in Japan. Aera-san had no knowledge of that subculture, so she just looked like she was interested in the clothes themselves; she was pinching different parts of the outfit.

“Hmm, these clothes seem to be quite well made. The stitching seems to be of good quality as well.”

“Oh, I made these clothes myself,” said Yuki. “I’m good at sewing, so I gave it a try.”

“Really?! You made these clothes in just two days?! That’s amazing!”

“Natsuki and I helped as well,” said Haruka. “These clothes are quite cute, don’t you think?”

Haruka smiled and sounded quite proud after Aera-san expressed her surprise, and she spun around on the spot to show off the outfit that she had helped sew. I had thought she was just her usual calm self, but it appeared that she was actually proud of her work. I kind of wished the girls had made regular clothes first instead of these maid outfits, but they told me that they had made these as practice. I had made aprons before as part of home economics lessons back in school, so what they said about practice made some sense to me, but I felt like the maid dresses that they were wearing underneath the aprons were evidence that they were already proficient enough at sewing clothes.

“Were these maid outfits really necessary, though?” I asked.

“Yeah, it’s part of the differentiation strategy for Aera-san’s café,” said Yuki.

“None of the dining halls in this area have uniforms for their staff, right?”

“Oh, that makes sense.”

If that was the type of strategy they were going for, then uniforms sounded like they would be necessary.

“So yeah, put this on.”

“Huh?”

I was very confused when Yuki handed me a bag, but she ignored my confusion and continued, “Your uniform is inside.”

“I have to wear a uniform too...?”

“Think about the main target customer base for this café. Between men and women, which demographic do you think it is?”

“Well, I guess this café is aimed more towards women...?”

“Right? That means there’s no reason not to have you work as a waiter. I wanted Touya to work as a waiter too, but he went off to go help Tomi today.”

Ugh, so this is why he ran away today! I knew there was something strange about his sudden change of plans!

“W-Wait, don’t tell me...”

“Oh, don’t worry. I was thinking of having you wear the same maid outfit as us, but Haruka and Natsuki didn’t approve, so I ditched the idea.”

Haruka and Natsuki both nodded deeply when I turned around to face them.
My saviors! Thank you so much for showing me mercy!

“All right, go put this uniform on!” She gave me a push on the back.

“O-Okay...”

I had no choice but to go along with Yuki’s idea at this point, so I went to go change clothes. Once I returned, I saw that Yuki was drawing pictures of the dishes on the display board menu. She had somehow managed to draw pictures with realistic shading despite just using a piece of white chalk. It looked somewhat like three-dimensional chalk lettering. The illustrations all looked quite amazing to the point that I felt like just having this display board outside

would be more than enough to attract customers.

“Oh, you’re done? Not bad! You look quite good,” said Yuki.

“Yeah, the uniform suits you, Nao-kun.”

“You look cool, Nao-san!”

“Mm, it looks like we went with the right design for you, Nao.”

“I-Is that so?”

I felt a bit flattered by the praise from all of the girls. The clothes inside the bag that Yuki had handed to me were a white shirt, slacks, and a vest. There was no tie, but these clothes had a dark color palette that sort of resembled a bartender’s outfit.

“All right, it’s time to open for business,” said Haruka. “Go attract some customers, Nao.”

“Only me...?”

“Don’t worry, I’ll watch over you from behind.”

“P-Please, Nao-san!”

I wasn’t asking Aera-san to come with me, since she needed to do the cooking, but I would have felt quite relieved if Haruka had helped me out. I looked at Haruka in the hopes that she would save me, but she just responded with a wave and a smile. I sighed when I saw that, and then I picked up the display board that Yuki had drawn pictures on and took it outside with me. It was just about noon, so there were plenty of people walking by. I set up the display board in a place that was easy to see, then stepped out into the street and attempted to talk to the women who were walking by. I took note of the young women who fit Aera-san’s target demographic and did my best to persuade them to visit the café.

“My lady, would you happen to have decided on what kind of delicacy you will be having for lunch? If not, I would highly recommend exploring the items on the menu of this café right here.”

“O-Oh, okay...”

I repeated that line with a smile to every young woman who passed by the café, and it resulted in a lot of customers. *This is easier than I thought it would be. Is it because I'm wearing this new uniform that's not common at other eating establishments in this area? Or is it because I'm an elf? It definitely isn't my words, since I'm not the type of person who can confidently hit on girls. I can feel my brain short circuiting right now.* There were some people who hesitated to enter due to the fancy exterior of the café, but that hesitation seemed to disappear as soon as they saw the pictures that Yuki had drawn on the display board. *Wait, doesn't that mean I wasn't needed...?*

I had my doubts about whether I was actually contributing anything, but I continued to do my best to attract customers. I went back into the café after I had managed to attract a decent number of people. Aera-san's café wasn't a place that was going to earn a profit from table turnover, and there weren't that many seats available either, so there was no point in trying to attract too many customers. It was more important to serve the customers with care, and in fact, that was the motto that the girls had come up with for the café.

However, Aera-san had originally planned to operate this café by herself, and the girls were helping her out as well, so there wasn't really anything for me to do. The most I could do was to chat periodically with the customers who were enjoying their meals and their time here and attempt to persuade them to order the more expensive items on the menu such as the sweets. I wasn't forcing them to do so, though. I simply followed Yuki's instructions and repeated the lines that she had told me to say in situations like this, so I was quite surprised at the number of customers who actually ordered those expensive sweets. It was probably because of the extraordinary atmosphere that this café had. It was like how people would be more willing to buy expensive goods at amusement parks or how people would pay for food at festivals that didn't really taste that good and wasn't worth the expensive price. *I think everything's worth the price here, though, especially compared to the café that I went to the other day.*

On the next day, Aera-san started to sell poste and cutlet sandwiches as takeout food, and business was soon booming. A lot of people probably tried them out due to the cheap prices and the fact that the food was a new and

unusual delicacy, but there were plenty of people who appeared to have heard from the customers yesterday about how good this café was, so the takeout food ended up selling out in a short amount of time. I didn't need to attract any customers during lunch hours either, as there were plenty of people who entered the café on their own initiative. In fact, I ended up having to go tell customers that the café was full instead. It would probably be better from a profit perspective to increase the number of seats in the café, but that would ruin the atmosphere that the café was going for. It needed to be a place where Aera-san could serve customers with care and not in a rush. All we had to do was to help provide her with an opportunity to prove herself to customers, and the rest was up to her.

Three days later, it appeared as though Aera-san had gotten used to the new business model for her café and was able to handle things by herself, so our assistance ended at that point.



“So, is Aera-san’s café doing well?”

We had all gathered in my room after our last day of helping Aera-san out with her café. Touya had returned at the same time we did, so we’d started to chat with each other about what had happened during these past few days.

“Yeah, probably. We basically didn’t have to do anything during this last day,” I said. “How did things go for you, Touya? You abandoned us and went to ‘help out’ Tomi, right?”

“O-Oh, y-yeah, things went quite well! I helped produce some concrete results!”

There were hints of panic in Touya’s voice as he replied to my pointed words and took out an object to show us. *Hm? A metal plate and a separate handle?*

“Is that a shield? Actually, no, hmm...”

“Oh, is it a shovel?” Yuki asked.

Touya grinned in response and snapped his fingers. “Yep, it is! It’s a portable shovel!” He attached the handle to the metal plate.

“Oh, yeah, it does look like a shovel now, though it’s a bit small,” I said.

The metal portions were similar in size to a single paperback book, but there was space to press your feet down on it, so it did seem like it would be useful for digging holes.

“I initially wanted the type of folding shovel that they use in the Self-Defense Forces back in Japan, but the technology to make it isn’t available in this world, so I went with a prefab design instead. This type of shovel was used in the Imperial Japanese Army, apparently.”

It looked useful, but it didn’t seem to be any different from a normal shovel, aside from the fact that you could detach the handle.

“Is this the result of the idea that you said you had ready the other day?” I asked. “You said you were going to try to recommend Tomi as an apprentice to Gantz-san, didn’t you?”

Touya had said he would be willing to recommend Tomi due to the fact that he had been working hard these past few days and because of the fact that he knew what Tomi’s personality was like. However, from Gantz-san’s perspective, Tomi would just be someone who one of his customers brought to him out of nowhere.

“Do you really think this mere shovel will be enough to convince Gantz-san?”

“It’s not just a shovel, Nao. Shovels are actually quite amazing. Haven’t you heard stories about how shovels have a history of being used to kill people?”

“Oh, interesting. Wait, that’s not relevant to the topic at hand, though.”

It was true that Gantz-san’s shop sold all sorts of weapons and armor, but I was fairly sure that he didn’t sell shovels as weapons.

“Well, yeah, I’m going to talk about how good this is for digging.”

“Aren’t there other similar tools out there that can perform the same tasks as a shovel, though?”

“You might think that, but that’s actually not true. Tools like plows have existed for a very long time, but shovels in their current form only came into existence recently.”

Touya explained that the point he was trying to make was that the pointed end of a shovel was the key here, since it allowed its user to exert their weight on it with their feet and scoop up earth to carry around.

“I guess this type of shovel could sell quite well if tools with a similar shape don’t already exist in this world.”

The shovel that Touya had helped create could be used for construction work, and it seemed like it would also be handy to have as an adventurer. Tools for digging holes were important for things like going to the bathroom, setting up camps, and getting rid of waste after gutting an animal carcass. It was possible to get the job done with a hoe as well, but hoes weren’t exactly easy to use by any means.

“Well, whether or not this shovel sells is important, but the most important thing was to show Gantz-san how hard Tomi worked at making it. I think Gantz-san recognized that, since he took Tomi on as his apprentice.”

“Oh, Tomi actually became Gantz-san’s apprentice?”

“Yeah. Tomi was quite happy about it. I got some experience with blacksmithing myself along with this shovel, so things worked out quite well, right?”

Touya had produced results beyond what I would have expected from him. It was really surprising to me, given that he had mentioned he was aiming for the all brawn and no brain life. I was almost certain that he had just dodged us because he hadn’t wanted to be forced to attract customers for Aera-san’s café in that uniform like I’d had to, but apparently, I was wrong. The girls looked at the shovel and nodded; it seemed like they were also impressed by the results that Touya had produced. Touya had always been the type of person who didn’t mind looking out for others, so it made sense that he would take this problem seriously.

Natsuki had some kind words about Tomi’s good fortune. “Well, I’m glad to hear that Wakabayashi-kun managed to get a stable job,” she said. “Oh, right, he goes by Tomi now.”

Haruka nodded and agreed with her. “Yeah, I’m glad as well.” However, she brought up the other factor that we needed to take into account. “I don’t mind

helping classmates out if possible, as long as they're not our enemies."

"Mm, mutual support can only happen as long as the classmate doesn't have a land mine skill," said Natsuki.

"Yeah, land mine skills are a big reason why we should be cautious about searching for our other classmates," said Yuki.

"There's a good chance they'll cause trouble for us even if we just bump into them," said Haruka.

We all looked at each other and sighed at the realization we had to be on our guard against our classmates. So far, we'd had one positive and one negative experience with classmates, with Umezono and Wakabayashi, respectively. Well, there were probably at least eight other classmates we had encountered so far, and there were Tanaka and Takahashi as well, although we hadn't encountered them in person. If we included all of them, then over ninety percent of our encounters with classmates had been negative so far. That meant the risk of searching for anyone else was way too high. On the other hand, there was also a chance that everyone who had land mine skills was already dead by now, which would leave only people who were safe to interact with, but that was not a risk worth taking.

"Oh yeah, Diola-san mentioned that she had managed to find a few houses that we might want to rent," said Touya. "She told me that we could come over to check with her once we all had time."

Touya brought up that message from Diola-san as if he had just remembered it out of nowhere. It seemed that Diola-san hadn't forgotten to help us look for real estate while we had been busy helping out Aera-san with her café.

"Oh, nice, I'm looking forward to having our own home," said Yuki. "I've dreamed about this before."

"It'd be great if we could have our own house built and designed to our liking instead of renting one, but we can look forward to that in the future instead," said Haruka.

"Nah, there's no way people at our age could possibly afford to pay for a newly built house," I said. "Right...?"

“There might be someone out there who can afford one since we’re in the countryside,” said Haruka. “At our age, we’re considered adults in this world, after all.”

Seriously? Anyone like that must be really successful, then. The fact that we ourselves had had the equivalent of ten million yen just a week ago meant that such a goal actually didn’t seem impossible to me. That amount of money had been gone in no time after we’d bought new weapons and armor, though. We would have to continue to purchase new weapons and armor throughout our lives as adventurers, so the goal of purchasing our own home would remain unrealistic for quite a while.

“All right, in that case, let’s all go to the Adventurers’ Guild tomorrow,” said Haruka.

We all agreed to Haruka’s suggestion. “Sure!”

The next day, we waited until Diola-san had some free time, and then we all went together to check out the property that she had found for us. She had three plots for us to check out, so we followed her as she guided us around and explained the features that stood out for each plot.

The first plot that Diola-san showed us was a spacious chunk of land that was at least five or six times larger than the land that The Slumbering Bear was on. The plot itself was almost completely overgrown with grass and weeds, but it was otherwise basically empty. Well, there was a building located in the corner of the lot, but it looked like a mere warehouse.

“This house here has a large yard, so there’s plenty of space available for swinging around swords and spears whether by yourself or during sparring.”

“Um, Diola-san, it’s true that this yard is large, but I don’t see anything else here...” I said.

“Hm? There’s a building on this plot as well. You can see it, right?”

“I mean, yeah, but that building looks more like a warehouse to me than a place for someone to live in.”

“There used to be a large mansion on this plot, but without any inhabitants, it

gradually fell into ruin, so it ended up being demolished. Abandoned houses can become gathering places for outlaws and ruffians, after all.”

Abandoned houses were a serious problem back in Japan as well, but the nature of that problem was different. They were a problem because, given how small individual plots were, it would cause trouble for nearby houses if an abandoned house collapsed. I had heard stories about how delinquents would gather at places like abandoned hotels, but I hadn’t heard any stories about thugs living in abandoned houses. I wasn’t sure if it was because homeless people in Japan were concentrated in the cities or if it was because of the police being diligent, though.

“Diola-san, this yard definitely does fit the conditions that we brought up, but the ‘building’ here doesn’t come anywhere close...”

Diola-san nodded in response and went into further detail about why she had chosen this plot as a candidate for us. “Mm, the building over there isn’t included in the rent cost. The owner of this plot said that you can have that building demolished if you want.”

“So you’re saying we can pay for our own house to be built on this plot?”

“Yes. That way you can have a house custom built to fulfill all of the conditions that you wanted. On top of that, the rent for this large plot is a mere two gold coins per month!”

One gold coin was worth one thousand Rea, so that meant the monthly rent for this large plot was two thousand Rea. That seemed cheap to me, but I had no idea what the average rent was in this area.

“However, the owner said that if you decide to build a house and then move out at some later point, you’ll have to agree to leave the house as is.”

“I mean, if that does happen, it’s not like we would go out of our way to demolish a house just because we were leaving, so...”

It would be a waste of money to pay for demolition fees, and the owner of this plot would probably be happy to obtain an asset in the form of a house. However, Natsuki shook her head once I had voiced that opinion, so it seemed like she had a different understanding of how housing worked.

“That’s not how it works, Nao-kun,” Natsuki whispered. “Back in Japan, if you rent a plot, then you normally have the obligation to restore it to its original state if you’re going to end the rent contract, which includes demolishing buildings if they weren’t on the plot originally.”

“Is that how it works back in Japan?” I whispered back.

“Yes. There are some cases where such houses are left behind as furnished property, but most of the time it tends to be a nuisance for the plot owner. An occupant would normally only move out if a problem came up, after all.”

There would be no reason for the occupant to move out if the house was comfortable to live in and had nothing wrong with it. If it was a building that was used to run a successful business, then there would be no reason to close shop either. If the occupant moved out because the house had deteriorated with age, then it would be better to demolish it. If it was used to run a business that didn’t make a profit and went bankrupt, then it would be hard to find new occupants, especially with other furnished property out there in the market. Then there were property taxes for buildings along with maintenance fees, and it would be an expense for the owner of the plot if they had to pay for demolition fees as well. What that meant was that such buildings tended to be a nuisance for landowners.

“However, if the plot is located in a residential area, then a reduced tax rate gets applied as long as there’s a building on the plot,” Natsuki whispered. “In those cases, it’s not always worth demolishing the building if there is one.”

“It sounds like things are quite different in this world, though,” I whispered back.

I had no idea what the standard type of taxation system was in this different world, but I was fairly sure it wasn’t as complex as the ones in modern countries like Japan back on Earth. The only fee we had paid so far that could really be called a tax was just the entry toll of one large silver coin at the city gate. On the other hand, perhaps tax was already taken out of the money we were paid at the Adventurers’ Guild or included in lodging fees at inns.

“Hmm, it’s true that we can have a house built and customized to our liking here, but I’m not sure if we can afford to pay for a newly built house,” said

Haruka.

“Yeah, exactly. Diola-san, how much would it cost us for a newly built house that fits the conditions that we brought up?” Yuki asked.

Diola-san covered her mouth with the back of one hand and paused in thought for a moment before she responded. “Hmm, well, if you cut down on unnecessary expenses, then the cost will probably end up at around one hundred large gold coins.”

“There’s no way we can afford that!” Yuki exclaimed.

“Mm, that’s not a realistic amount for us,” said Natsuki.

Although Yuki and Natsuki immediately shot down the idea of paying for a newly built house, I paused in thought, as did Touya and Haruka. One hundred large gold coins was the equivalent of one thousand gold coins, and we’d happened to have that exact amount of money recently before we had spent it on purchasing new weapons and armor. It was partly thanks to the fact that we had managed to cash in on the demand for dindels at a good time, but it wasn’t an amount of money that was impossible for us to earn and save up. Diola-san knew about this since we had been exchanging most of our goods for money through her, so that was probably part of the reason that she had shown us this plot. I looked at Touya and Haruka after we were done thinking to ourselves and we all sighed in unison.

“Diola-san, can we hold off on a decision for now?” I asked. “We’d like to see the other plots first.”

“Mm, that amount of money isn’t something we can agree on right away,” said Haruka. “Let’s go to the second plot.”

“Huh?! Wait, you’re putting this on hold instead of rejecting the idea, Haruka?!” Yuki exclaimed. “There’s no way we can afford it!”

“That’s not necessarily the case. Either way, it’s still close to a no. Come on, let’s get going.”

“U-Uh, okay...”

Yuki had a very perplexed look on her face, but Haruka urged her to put her

concerns aside as we followed Diola-san to the second plot.



“This plot here is a place where the mistress of a noble once lived. It’s a smaller plot compared to the first one, but it has a nice-looking two-story mansion along with a beautiful yard. Well, the garden used to be beautiful.”

“Huh, really? This yard looks like it’s in a way worse state than the one on the first plot,” said Touya.

“Yes. You’ll have to clean up and take care of this overgrown yard if you want to see how it was in its original state. It’s in an especially bad state due to the fact that trees had been planted here before.”

Left alone for a long time, a regular yard would only have overgrown grass, but in a yard with trees, fallen leaves would result in leaf mold, which would accelerate the growth of weeds even further. In fact, the trees here were so large and overgrown that I couldn’t even see the mansion from where I was standing. The view in front of me was a yard that had basically transformed into a forest.

“Diola-san, can we go inside to check the mansion?” Haruka asked.

“Are you sure you want to go inside?”

“Huh? We can’t tell what it’s like without going inside, right? It’s true that I don’t really want to have to make a path through this forest to get there, but we can just cut our way through, right?”

Touya had a sword on him, so we could just have him lead the way.

“Are you sure you want to go inside?” She repeated the same words; she didn’t seem to be willing to open the gate.

“Uhm, is there a reason why you don’t seem to want to go inside, Diola-san?” Haruka asked. “Is this plot haunted or something?”

“The rent for this plot is five gold coins per month.”

“Okay, I think I know what you’re talking about based on the rent alone, but what exactly happened on this plot...?”

“As I mentioned earlier, the mistress of a noble once lived here, and it’s a long story, but all that you need to know is that it’s currently a vacant plot.”

“No, I mean, can you tell us the details—”

“It’s a long story.”

“What happened—”

“It’s a long story! That’s all you need to know, okay?”

“Okay...”

Diola-san was still smiling as she told us not to inquire further, but she had a very scary look in her eyes at the same time. *There are probably some nasty secrets here if a noble was involved, so it sounds like a bad idea to pry further.*

“So, Diola-san, I get that this plot has a, uh, history, but have any of the previous occupants suffered serious harm from living here?” Haruka asked.

“No, not really. Occupants of this plot tend to get sick often, but that’s about it.”

“That’s a pretty big problem, isn’t it?!”

“Rest assured, no one has proven a correlation between living here and getting sick.”

“That’s not reassuring at all! Would you be willing to live here, Diola-san?”

“Well, uh, I believe in the supernatural, so...” She shook her head.

She believes in the supernatural, huh? I guess that makes sense, since magic does exist in this world. It wouldn’t be strange at all if things like lingering malice and ghosts exist too.

“If that’s the case, then please don’t show us haunted plots, Diola-san. This is a *no* from us.”

“Mm, I figured. I’m glad I don’t have to go inside the mansion myself. Let’s go to the third plot.”

Diola-san swiftly walked ahead of us. It seemed like she hadn’t been serious about recommending this plot to us. *Was it just part of something like a quota that she had to fulfill?*



“Compared to the first and second plots, the amount of space available here is somewhere in the middle. The house located on this plot is a one-story house, but it’s decently large. It might require some repairs since it’s a bit old, though.”

Haruka stared at Diola-san. “Would this plot happen to be haunted as well?”

Diola-san just shook her head with a forced smile. “No, this is a normal plot. The house on this plot belongs to a man who lived here from when this town was still a village, so there’s a field here too, as you can see. However, the owner is elderly now, so he moved to a smaller house located closer to the center of the town.”

According to Diola-san, the plot here was quite spacious due to the fact that it used to be on the outskirts of the village before it was incorporated into Laffan as the village became a town. In the past, there had been similar plots in the vicinity, but as Laffan had continued to grow, those spacious plots had gotten split into smaller ones to build houses on, so plots as large as this one were quite rare nowadays.

“The rent for this plot is twelve gold coins per month, but I think it meets most of the conditions that you all requested.”

Haruka grimaced and said, “That’s quite expensive...”

I had no idea what the market rates for rent were like, but it still seemed expensive to me compared to the cost of staying at The Slumbering Bear for a month. Even places in the countryside back in Japan would tend to be cheaper than the equivalent of this cost.

“Let’s take a look inside the house first, Haruka,” said Yuki.

“Mm. We’re here to check out property, after all,” said Natsuki.

“True. All right, can we go inside to have a look, Diola-san?”

“Of course. Let me open the doors.”

Diola-san opened the doors for us and we entered the house together. We split up and went our own ways as we looked around. It looked like there

weren't any parts of the house that had rotted away, which made sense considering that it was less humid here in this different world than in Japan. However, I noticed areas that looked like they had been damaged by leaks, and it probably wouldn't be possible to set up a bath unit in the laundry area since it wasn't spacious at all. As for individual rooms, there were four, along with a fifth room that was larger than the others. There was also a large shed that we could store things in. The biggest problem I had with this house was the fact that the kitchen was small and in bad condition. It probably looked worse than it normally would to me because I had recently seen how Aera-san's kitchen looked, but I still had my doubts about whether or not it was possible to cook a decent meal here.

We all took our time to look around the plot and gathered in front of the house once we were done. Once everyone had arrived, we all looked at each other. None of us was wearing a positive expression.

"What did you guys think?" Haruka asked.

At first, I hesitated to answer, but I ended up giving my honest opinion. "Not good, I guess..." I wouldn't mind living here if I had to, but if someone asked me if I actually wanted to, I'd have to say no.

"Nah, there's no way I'd want to live here," said Touya.

"If possible, I wouldn't really want to either..." said Natsuki.

Touya had voiced his thoughts frankly despite the fact that Diola-san was here with us, and Natsuki had agreed with Touya, although she wasn't as blunt as he was. Yuki remained silent with a bitter smile on her face, but that smile itself was enough to tell me that she didn't want to live here either.

"I feel the same way Natsuki does," said Haruka. "The rent's a bit too expensive. Don't you agree, Diola-san?"

"Hmm, well, it's probably due to the owner's nostalgia. He probably thinks this property is worth a lot more since for him it's a place full of good memories."

That made sense. Real estate agents would give a fair and realistic evaluation of a property, but the actual owner of the property would value it more

because they'd concentrate on its positive qualities and ignore its negative qualities.

"Are there no other plots available, Diola-san?" Haruka asked.

"Well, in the first place, there aren't that many spacious plots in this area. This isn't an area where rich people live, so most of the plots and houses here are small. This plot right here would be valued at less if there was a similar plot located nearby, but..."

It seemed like the rent for this plot was expensive because of the fact that there was no competition on the housing market from similar plots in the vicinity. I felt like the value of the plot would still drop over time if it remained unoccupied, but the fact that the rent was this high probably meant the owner of this plot was in good shape financially.

"Hmm. Can I discuss this with my party members for a bit longer, Diola-san?" Haruka asked.

"Of course. It's not an easy decision, after all. Also, you don't have to rent this plot. If needed, I can show you a regular-sized plot as well."

"Thank you. I'll keep that in mind while we discuss things."

We all walked a bit away from Diola-san and huddled together to decide what to do.

"What's the plan?" I asked.

"I'm not sure," said Haruka. "The first plot that Diola-san showed us didn't have a house on it, and the house here on this third plot isn't in good condition, so..."

Out of the three plots, the house on this third plot was our only realistic choice in terms of a house we could live in, however.

"We didn't get to check the inside of the mansion in the second plot, but what if we do our best to fix it up?"

"What do you mean by that, Yuki?" I asked.

"Exorcism, I guess...?" She rested her chin on one of her fingers as she brought up that ridiculous idea.

“Would you happen to actually be a shrine maiden or a nun, Yuki...?” Haruka asked.

“Well, no. None of my relatives are affiliated with religion either. I think Natsuki would look good dressed as a shrine maiden, though.”

Oh, that’s true. Haruka’s hair color has changed since she became an elf, but Natsuki still has the same black hair as before, so traditional clothes like a shrine maiden’s would look quite good on a Japanese beauty like her.

“Me? I don’t have any ancestors who were priests or shrine maidens either. Well, I have some relatives from a branch family who have Shinto connections, but I’m not directly related to them.”

“That’s still better than me, isn’t it? I’m not sure it’ll have any effect on ghosts or spirits in this world, but I can try making a shrine maiden outfit if you want to give this a try.”

I feel like Yuki would fit better as the fantasy kind of shrine maidens who show up in anime. Like the kind of shrine maidens who use onusa wands to smack things.

“Come on, Yuki, are you forgetting about Haruka?” Touya asked.

“Haruka? I’m not sure if a shrine maiden outfit would look good on an elf. Actually, it might...?”

Japanese clothes might actually look quite good on Haruka. In a way, they’d be perfect for her, since her chest is flatter now.

“No, that’s not what I mean! I’m talking about Light Magic! She can use the Purification spell for its proper purpose!”

“Oh! Wait, that’s what the Purification spell is intended for?” said Yuki. “It’s not a spell for cleaning things?”

“Mm, I forgot about that too,” said Natsuki. “It didn’t cross my mind due to how useful that spell’s been for other purposes.”

I can’t believe Touya of all people was the one who reminded us. It’s true that Purification was originally meant for purifying evil creatures like the undead.

“What are your thoughts, Haruka?” I asked.

Haruka answered with a no when I asked her if she could perform an exorcism with the Purification spell. “The spell works for that purpose, but I probably can’t pull it off with my current abilities. If it was that easy for someone of my caliber to exorcise whatever might be haunting that mansion, do you think it would have been left alone until now? It used to be the mansion of a noble, and surely a noble could hire someone who can use the Purification spell.”

“Oh, that’s a shame,” said Yuki. “I was hoping we could live in a noble’s mansion, but oh well.”

That seemed to be the reason that Yuki had suggested this idea in the first place, and it was a dream that I could relate to.



“All right, let’s summarize our options,” said Haruka. “We can give up on a large yard and just rent a different house, we can look in a different area that has higher rent on average, we can just continue to live at an inn, or we can save up money to pay for a newly built house at the first plot that was shown to us. These are the options that come to mind. What do you guys think?”

“Mm, that sounds about right,” said Natsuki.

We all nodded in response to the options that Haruka had brought up.

“I still want to live in a place that has a yard,” said Touya. “We’ll have to go outside of town for training every day if we can’t do it in a yard, right?”

“Yeah, it’s not like we can just do training on the road either.”

“Mm. Do you all agree with Touya’s opinion?”

The rest of us all nodded to indicate that we agreed. Daily training was an absolute must for all of us, so this was something that we couldn’t compromise on.

“Our original reason for wanting to rent a house instead of living at an inn was so we could do things like alchemy that we can’t do at an inn, right?” Yuki asked.

We had discussed our options and agreed on the idea of renting a house in order to have space for alchemical tools, books on magic, and a kitchen of our own to cook our meals. All of that would be impossible if we continue to live at an inn.

“Mm. The desire to eat delicious homemade meals and to practice our skills is a good source of motivation, so it would be ideal to have our own home,” said Haruka.

“In that case, our remaining options are all ones that’ll cost a hefty amount of money,” said Natsuki. “How much money do we actually have on hand at the moment?”

We would have to spend a lot of money regardless of whether we settled on renting a large house in a high-class residential area or paying for the construction of a new house, so Natsuki’s question was a good one. However...

“We don’t have much left on us since we just placed an order for chain mail for you and Yuki,” said Haruka.

“S-Sorry...”

“We couldn’t pay for it since we didn’t have much money ourselves...”

Yuki and Natsuki looked like they felt bad about the fact that we’d basically paid for their chain mail, but they didn’t have to.

“Nah, don’t worry, it was a necessary expense,” I said. “I’d rather not risk you two getting injured due to not having chain mail.”

“Yep, Nao’s completely right,” said Touya. “Besides, it’s still cheaper than my chain mail was.”

Natsuki’s physique was about the same as mine, while Yuki was smaller than me, so that meant the cost of their chain mail had ended up being cheaper. Chain mail was made by joining small metal rings together, so the cost of materials and the amount of time required to make a mail shirt would scale with the size of the wearer, which meant that the price would also scale with the size of the shirt. In fact, the difference in price between different sizes was big enough that the cost of Touya’s chain mail had been greater than the combined cost of Yuki’s and Natsuki’s.

“Wait, doesn’t that eliminate all of our current options...?” I asked.

“Yes, for now,” said Haruka.

“Does that mean all we can do for the time being is just save up money, Haruka?”

“That’s the only choice we have. I’d recommend that we save up to pay for our own house, though.”

“The idea of having a house built and customized to our liking sounds very attractive to me as well, but wouldn’t it be a slight waste of money?” Natsuki asked.

“Well, I wouldn’t mind going with the rent option if there was a good property available, but...”

I wasn’t sure if this was the right way to phrase it, but the “evil” god had

probably chosen Laffan as our starting town because it was a town in the countryside that was peaceful most of the time. What that meant was that there weren't that many adventurers in this town. Most of the people who lived here were ordinary citizens who had settled down. There were a lot of immigrants who had moved to Laffan throughout its development, which meant most of the citizens owned their own property. There wasn't really a large market or demand for rental property that had a yard and a house. Property that was aimed at nobles and rich people would sometimes open up due to all sorts of circumstances, but that kind of real estate wasn't realistically affordable for us.

"So yeah, if we want a house that meets all of our conditions, then we'll have to pay for one to be built," said Haruka. "If possible, I'd like to buy the first plot that was shown to us for that purpose instead of renting it."

"You want to buy the land, Haruka?" Natsuki asked. "Isn't real estate low in liquidity? I feel like it would be better to have cash assets on us instead. It's not like we're going to settle down in this town, right?"

"Cash assets would only be the right choice if there were a banking system in this world. Also, we're still low-rank adventurers, remember?"

Natsuki paused in thought for a moment before she nodded back. "Oh, I get what you mean. The low liquidity of real assets will actually be good for us in that case."

"Real estate can't be physically stolen, so if we purchase the plot itself, then we can still sell it as a plot of land with a house even if we decide to move out of Laffan," said Haruka. "If we build a house on rented land, then we would lose out on the entire value of the house."

"Yeah, since we would have to pay for demolition ourselves under most rental contracts," said Natsuki.

"In addition, purchasing land will be a way to show that we've spent a lot of money."

"Oh yeah, there's a high chance that we look like we have a lot of money on us," I said.

Each time we had gone out to gather dindels, we had brought a lot back to the Adventurers' Guild, so people who knew the value of dindels could easily guess how much profit we had made. The truth was that we'd sunk most of our money into purchasing weapons and armor, but we wore our chain mail under our clothes, so the only piece of equipment we had that stood out was my spear.

"Uh, what do you mean exactly, Haruka?" Touya asked.

Touya didn't seem like he fully understood what we were talking about, so Haruka explained things to him. "To put it in simple terms, we might get attacked and robbed if we seem like we have money on us, so we should spend our money on something that's obviously expensive. If possible, I'd like to purchase the land first, even if we have to continue living at an inn for a while."

"Well, the rent for that first plot we were shown today was only two gold coins per month, so wouldn't it be better to pay for a house to be built first?" I asked.

"The owner of the plot probably won't sell the land after we have a house built on it. After all, the owner will get a house for free once we stop renting the plot."

"Oh, right."

"Let's go ask Diola-san about this before we discuss it further."

We went and approached Diola-san, who was walking around a bit away from us. Haruka stepped forward and asked, "Diola-san, is the first plot that you showed to us today up for sale instead of rent?"

"Sale? The owner only mentioned wanting to rent it, so..."

"For reference, can you tell us what the market rates are for purchasing property?"

"Well, if you want to purchase property in that area, then four hundred gold coins should be enough, but it depends on whether you can find someone who's willing to sell their land."

That price seemed fairly cheap to me, but that was partly because I was used

to the high cost of land back in Japan, so it wasn't a good comparison. In any case, the value of a fairly large house would probably end up being greater than the value of the land itself. That meant the owner of the first plot had nothing to lose by renting out the land for cheap if it would result in them eventually getting a house for free.

"Diola-san, can you help us negotiate with the owner of the first plot that you showed us today?" I asked.

"Negotiate? Well..." Diola-san frowned in response; she didn't seem very excited about that idea. Acting as a middleman wasn't her primary responsibility at the Adventurers' Guild, so it made sense that she wasn't eager to take on the job, but...

"Oh yeah, Nao, we've made quite a lot of dried dindels recently, haven't we?"

Diola-san's eyebrows twitched and perked up when she heard those sudden words from Haruka.

"Yeah, we made a lot, all for ourselves. Dindels are an expensive fruit, so they would be well suited as gifts."

"Mm. I suppose we could give them to people who have helped us out—you know, as an expression of our gratitude."

It was very obvious bait, but it seemed like Diola-san was willing to bite. She forced a smile on and brought up another suggestion. "U-Um, Haruka-san, I can't guarantee any results, but I could try my best to negotiate with the owner of that plot!"

When she saw Diola-san's obvious change of heart, Haruka grinned—and then toyed with Diola-san further. "Oh, you don't have to force yourself, Diola-san. We can try to look for real estate that might be up for sale in other areas on our own, so..."

"Well, that is true, but it's cheaper in this area compared to the average market rates! Purchasing a plot of land in this area would be a great choice, I think!"

"Is that so? In that case, would you be willing to help negotiate a good deal for us?"

“Sure, of course! Leave it to me!”

“We’ll need a while to raise the money to purchase that plot, so feel free to take your time with the negotiations. A final deal for a price cheaper than market rates would be satisfactory, but the amount of gifts I’ll be willing to shower you with will depend on how far you can haggle down the price, if you know what I mean.”

“I’ll do my absolute best!” Diola-san smiled and slapped her own chest in response to express how confident and earnest she was about this.

Side Story—Diola, Land Speculator

“My time has finally come! The tides of change have arrived!”

A few years had passed since I had started working at the Adventurers’ Guild. I’d been dispatched to this branch because Laffan was my hometown. My life and work as the vice branch master was the same day in and day out, and my salary remained the same as well. However, hope had finally reached out its hand to me after all this time.

“I need to make sure I succeed no matter what!”

If Haruka-san’s party settled down in Laffan, then that would mean that I could eat dindels on a daily basis! Well, that was important too, but most importantly, it would result in future high-rank adventurers living in Laffan. That in itself would directly affect the salary of the people who worked at the Adventurers’ Guild. The pay structure here was divided between the salary that you would get paid depending on the results that you had produced and a bonus that would be given out depending on the results that the guild had produced as a whole.

By results, I mean the number of completed quests at a branch and the total amount of handling charges that were collected on transactions with adventurers when the Guild purchased materials from them. Haruka-san’s party hadn’t taken on any difficult quests yet, but they had brought in an overwhelming amount of materials to the Adventurers’ Guild. As a result, they had contributed quite a lot to the guild already. If they kept this up, then the amount of profit that the guild earned on them would only continue to increase. In addition, if a difficult quest happened to be brought to the guild, then the availability of competent adventurers would make a huge difference. It was up to the adventurers whether or not they would be willing to take on a quest, but I wouldn’t be able to attempt to convince someone if they weren’t in this town.

“This must be my reward for never forgetting to pray at the temple! I’m sure

of it!”

At least once a week, I would visit the temple of Advastlis that was located on my way to work to offer a prayer to the god, and I had also donated a small amount of money to the temple. Some time ago, while I was in the middle of praying, I heard some casual words in my mind that went “You might meet some naive rookies soon, and if you do, then help them out for me, okay? Good things will happen to you if you do,” which, at the time, had made me doubt my mental health. However, I was fairly sure now that those words had been a divine message from Advastlis. *I’m glad I decided to listen to those words despite how suspicious they were!*

“Time to start looking through information on real estate!”

I went and took out the documents that had information on real estate in the vicinity of the guild and started looking through them to see if there were any candidates that fit the conditions Haruka-san’s party had brought up. However, I ran into one problem. There was nothing here that would fit those conditions! I had read through the documents carefully, looking for anything that met even a single condition, but nothing even came close. I’d had a feeling that it would go this way before I had even started, since I knew it would be hard to find a property in this area that Haruka-san’s party would be interested in.

The town of Laffan could be roughly divided into three major areas in terms of the value of the land. One area was the old town district, while another was the new town district, also known as the commercial district. The area with the most valuable land was the nobility district, which housed the municipal administration as well. In most cases, the guild would show adventurers property located in the old town district. This area was where Laffan had grown from a village to a town, so it had existed from the very beginning. Back when Laffan had first become a town, there had been spacious plots of land along with farm property and fields available, but a lot of former farmers had sold their property as land increased in value with the gradual expansion of the town. They had used that money to purchase new property located in the new town district. The land that they had sold had gotten divided into smaller parts, which had led to the construction of rows on rows of tiny houses. That meant there were only a small number of large plots remaining these days.

“I could probably find a property in the nobility district that would fit the conditions that Haruka-san’s party brought up, but...”

The rent for property in the nobility district would be much higher than in other areas of town, but it was probably something that Haruka-san’s party could afford with their earnings. However, they hadn’t yet accomplished something significant enough to qualify for renting a property in the nobility district. They would probably be fine after at least a year at their current rate of progression, but I had no choice but to exclude property located in that district at the moment.

“Well, if stigmatized property is okay, then there are some candidates.”

The first stigmatized property that had crossed my eyes was a plot with a haunted mansion. The plot and mansion themselves would fit the conditions that Haruka-san’s party had described, but that didn’t change the fact that this was a stigmatized property. It seemed like the owner had used his connections to force the guild to include this property every time we showed real estate to adventurers, so I had no choice but to include it as well. The noble who owned this property appeared to be desperate to get rid of it as soon as possible, but that probably wouldn’t be happening anytime soon since it was easy to find out that this was a stigmatized property with just a little bit of research.

The next property that crossed my eyes was another that a noble had jammed in as part of the quota. It belonged to a noble family that had been mired in financial trouble and wasn’t able to continue maintaining it anymore, so it was an empty plot with no mansion. The plot itself seemed to be available for rent at a cheap rate, but that wasn’t due to generosity on the owner’s part by any means. The former noble probably planned to come up with some ridiculous reason to kick out whoever rented the land after they had paid for the construction of a house. It was difficult for a commoner to fight back against a noble, after all. There was some text in these documents that asked the guild to hide the fact that the owner was a noble while convincing someone to rent the property, but there was no way I was going to do that. If I did such a thing, then Haruka-san’s party would surely leave this town forever.

“These two properties stand out really badly from the rest...”

Both of them looked good at first glance, but each would likely cause the occupant trouble in the future. *All right, I guess I'll go check them in person to see the exact problems.*



“Branch master, I’m coming in!”

“Whoa, what?! Oh, it’s you, Diola. What brings you here all of a sudden?”

When I entered his office, the branch master was looking at the ceiling and spacing out with his legs on the table. It looked like he had been doing his job properly, though, so it was hard for me to complain. *Oh well.* I went over to a corner of the room to pull out a wooden box and started to check the contents.

“Hey now, that’s technically my personal possession.”

“Is that so? Doesn’t this just belong to the guild since it was left right here inside the guild building? If this really is one of your personal possessions, then I can go contact your wife and ask her to come pick it up for you.”

“Ugh! Come on, don’t blackmail me like that!”

He cowered at my words and then sighed as I continued to look through the contents of the wooden box. There were all sorts of equipment and tools inside the box that he had used before he had retired from adventurer work. He probably hid them here because his wife would dispose of them if she found them at home.

“I mean, it shouldn’t be a problem for me to use the contents of this box since you left them here, right?”

“Fine, fine. You can use them as long as you don’t sell them. What do you need?”

“I’m going to go check out a haunted mansion, so I was looking for an amulet that’s effective against the undead. Do you have anything like that?”

“An amulet? My party only had cheap tools for that purpose since we had a mage in our party who was highly skilled in Light Magic. Well, there’s something in that box over there that could be of use to you.”

I looked in the box that he had pointed at and saw something that looked like

an amulet. However...

“Um, this amulet doesn’t look like it’ll be very effective...”

“I told you that it was cheap, didn’t I? It’s not completely useless, but don’t count on it being effective.”

“Can I borrow it?”

“Sure, go ahead. Take it with you.”

“Thank you very much.”



The first property that I headed towards with the cheap amulet in my hands was the haunted mansion.

“This mansion really does look haunted from its exterior appearance alone...”

It felt like evil spirits could leak out of the woodwork at any moment. I knew what this mansion had originally looked like, so I was quite shocked to see how much it had changed.

“I should probably at least check what it looks like on the inside, since I’ll have to describe it to Haruka...”

As soon as I touched the gates with the hand that had the amulet in it, the amulet crumbled to dust and was blown away on a sudden gust of wind.

“Okay, this is a huge no. I need to do my best to discreetly lead Haruka-san’s party away from the idea of renting this place...”

Just how cheap was this amulet, branch master?! I had hoped that it would be possible to purify the mansion, but it appeared to be an impossible task. There were two temples in this town devoted to different gods, and the chief priest of the temple of Belfaug was someone with a trustworthy personality, but his magical abilities weren’t that good. On top of that, he was quite old. On the other hand, the chief priest at the temple of Advastlis was quite talented, but he was still young, and it would probably be difficult for him to handle an exorcism of this difficulty.

“Ugh, I need to find at least one decent property that I can show to Haruka-

san's party. My dignity is on the line here."

My salary was on the line as well.

★★★★★★★★

"Coland-san, would you happen to be at home?"

I went to visit an acquaintance in the new town district who used to live in and still owned a property in the old town district. I had decided to visit him after I had looked around the old town district and found a property that looked decent, which happened to be the one that he owned.

"Oh, hello, Diola-san. Is there some reason you were looking for me?"

"In fact, there is. I wanted to ask if you would be willing to rent out the house in the old town district that you own."

"Oh, that house? Hmm. It's hard for me to say no if you're asking me for a favor, but..."

"You see, there's a promising party of adventurers that I've been looking after. Would you be willing to help me out here so that I can try to convince them to stay in Laffan?"

"Oh, is that so? That's quite rare of you to look after specific adventurers. Are they that talented?"

"At the moment, not quite, but I'm sure they'll become great adventurers in the future, so—"

The negotiation ended up lasting a few hours. Most of it was just chatting about unrelated topics, but patience with such chatter was necessary to succeed at negotiations. In the end, I managed to get a yes out of him, but that was the end of my success. I went to negotiate with a couple of other landowners afterwards, but none of them agreed to rent out their property. The only one who had said yes was Coland-san. Those other landowners had never sold or rented their property at all, so I'd been aware before I set out that the chances of convincing them were quite low, but it was still disheartening.

"Now that it's come down to this, what if I just throw together a list of plots—actually, that would take too much time. Hmm, what if I use guild funds to

construct a training ground? Would that fulfill the large yard condition that Haruka-san's party brought up?"

If that was enough to resolve the large yard issue, then it would open up many more options in terms of the number of plots that I could show them. It wouldn't be that hard to obtain a plot of land near the guild through negotiations. It would also be possible to squeeze some funds out of the guild's budget through the branch master since training grounds would also be useful for the guild itself.

"It all depends on how Haruka-san's party reacts to the plots that I show them. I guess I'll keep this in mind just in case."

I ventured forward a few days later with very few cards up my sleeve to negotiate with Haruka-san's party.



I was quite surprised when Haruka-san locked her eyes on the first plot that I showed them and expressed a desire to buy the plot itself, especially since it seemed like she had seen through me and picked up on the owner's hidden motives. However, if I could successfully conclude the negotiations with this noble, then it would almost be guaranteed that Haruka-san's party would settle down here in Laffan. This noble was not an easy person to successfully negotiate with, but the rewards would be great if I succeeded. *I need to do my best for that reason—and for the sake of dindels!*

"Ms. Diola, what brings you here today?"

"Your Eminence, Baronet of Reed, I am here today on behalf of the Adventurers' Guild to inform you of a decision made by the guild. From today onward, the Adventurers' Guild will not act as the middleman for the property that you own in the old town district."

"Why is that so...?"

The baronet's eyebrows twitched and trembled after he had heard my words, but I continued with a smile on my face. "The Adventurers' Guild exists to look after the interests of adventurers. Thus, we cannot act as middlemen for a transaction that will go against the interests of adventurers. I believe I do not

need to explain more than that.”

“Ugh—but why inform me now, after all this time?”

“There seems to have been a misunderstanding, Baronet. We at the Adventurers’ Guild had only agreed to act as the middlemen at your request. We have done our best to recommend the property to potential tenants, but none of them were interested in renting it, and I believe that will continue to be the case in the future.”

“Does that mean the Adventurers’ Guild has no intention of cooperating with me?”

“That would be one way to phrase it. Henceforth, please look for a tenant on your own. I believe it will be a difficult task, however.”

“Ugh, do I have no choice but to ask other real estate agents...?”

I smiled at the baronet as he groaned in response and told him my business here was concluded, then left his mansion. *All right, that’s my first move.*

“The second move is to go have a ‘chat’ with those other real estate agents.”



The baronet arranged another meeting a few days after my initial talk with him.

“Would it be possible for the Adventurers’ Guild to resume acting as the middleman for my property?”

“Hm? Baronet, if I recall correctly, you were taking this matter up with other real estate agents instead, were you not?”

“Yes, I did. However, all of them told me that they had no potential tenants who were looking to rent a property in the old town district.”

Yeah, that’s because I got to them first. However, it wouldn’t have really mattered even if I hadn’t.

“That’s the truth. We at the Adventurers’ Guild have no prospective tenants either, so the guild’s decision will not change.”

“Do you not see how much I, a noble, am lowering my head to ask for help?”

Huh? Your head's upright with the sun shining full on it; it hasn't sunk down at all. You don't have to lower your head all the way down to prove that you're sincere, but at least lower it halfway. Also...

"Hm? Do you intend on emphasizing your baronet status here? If that's the case, then—"

"Oh, no, forget what I just said. *Cough!* It's just that it would be somewhat inconvenient for me to not utilize that plot. Is there truly nothing that you can do to help me?"

"Hmm, well, I could help act as the mediator if you have any intentions of selling the plot. Selling the plot wouldn't cause any issues for the seller or the buyer, correct?"

"Well, not exactly. It would cause an issue for me. It would be inconvenient for a noble like myself to have only one small mansion, if you take my meaning."

"Of course, baronet. However, would you be able to maintain a large mansion even if you managed to get your hands on one? I have heard rumors about how you've taken out loans recently, so..."

"Of course I can maintain a large mansion! I'm a noble! As long as I can get my hands on a mansion, then—"

You have no clear plan for the future and you're not working either. All you're doing is getting deeper and deeper in debt to keep up appearances. I don't think you can afford to cling to that pride in your situation, but oh well.

"Is that so? I wish you the best in your endeavors. Good day, Baronet."

"Wait, I'm not done!"

I probably only need to make one or two more moves to corner him. I've prepared a lot more than that, but perhaps I won't need them.



"There are a lot of people who have been wailing about wanting their money back recently. Would you happen to know anything about this, Ms. Diola?"

A few more days had passed before the baronet arranged a meeting with me

once again.

“Huh? I have no idea what you might be talking about, Baronet. Couldn’t you just ignore your creditors like you always do?”

“Well, you see, they all told me more or less the same thing: that they would sell the debt to other nobles if I didn’t repay the loans, so...”

“Oh, that does sound like it would be quite troublesome for you, baronet. You wouldn’t be able to ignore your debts if it was other nobles who had the rights to those loans, after all.”

He was a mere baronet. If problems with his conduct became public, then he would fall further into ruin and end up being demoted to the rank of knight, or possibly even stripped of his title completely so that he would end up as a commoner. Those were very realistic outcomes if he defaulted on debt that he owed to other nobles.

“Are there any other nobles in this town who can actually afford to buy debt from merchants?” asked the baronet.

“Well,” I said, “I have no knowledge of that matter, but perhaps there is one who saw a clear merit in purchasing that debt.”

“...Tsk.”

“If needed, I could write a letter to my aunt about this, Baronet.”

“O-Oh, n-no, you don’t have to!”

“No? She might be able to help you out if she knew about your current circumstances.”

I smiled at the baronet, who had panicked and hastily wiped the sweat off of his bald head.

“Damn heartless vixen...” he muttered.

You do realize I heard that? Well, I’m not going to deny it.

“It looks like you won’t require my help, then. Good day, Baronet.”

“W-Wait, hold on! You mentioned before that you could help act as a mediator if I wanted to sell that plot, right?!”

“What plot would you happen to be talking about, Baronet?”

“The one I own in the old town district! What else would it be?!”

The baronet slammed his fist on the table in front of him. He seemed quite agitated. I purposefully nodded as slowly as I could, pretending I had finally realized what he was talking about.

“Oh, that plot? Hmm, well, it shouldn’t be a problem if you wish to sell it. Would you like to leave it in the guild’s hands? We cannot guarantee when a buyer will appear, though.”

“Th-That would be inconvenient for me! Try to get it sold as soon as possible!”

“There is nothing we can do about that if there isn’t a buyer who wants the plot. What is the price that you wish to ask?”

“Four hundred gold coins. You already have a prospective buyer ready and waiting, don’t you?”

“Things would go much smoother if that were actually the case. The guild will be willing to resume this middleman role if you are willing to sell the plot for two hundred gold coins, baronet.”

“That’s ridiculous! Everything that has happened to me recently feels like it’s worked to your advantage! There’s no way that every merchant would just suddenly refuse to lend me money! Three hundred and eighty gold coins!”

“In regards to your plot, I believe it is probably your own fault given that you went around asking other real estate agents. Rumors about your financial troubles probably spread as a direct result. How about 210 gold coins?”

“...Is another noble involved in this turn of events? Three hundred and fifty gold coins.”

“Nobles will seize any chance to get rid of their rivals, so perhaps that is the case. The Adventurers’ Guild branch here in Laffan is quite small, so we do not have much funding. Two hundred and thirty gold coins.”

I continued to haggle with the baronet for a while, and we ended up agreeing on a price of two hundred and eighty gold coins. However, the baronet’s face

was completely flushed with anger at the end, so it seemed like I had cornered him a bit too thoroughly. *I guess I'll have to stay on alert to his next moves to make sure he doesn't harm Haruka-san's party.*

My fear of retaliation ended up being unnecessary, however. A few months later, the Baronet of Reed fell into complete ruin and was removed from the ranks of nobility. I had not expected the baronet to cause his own downfall due to that plot of all things.

Afterword

Hello, Itsuki Mizuho here. Thank you very much to those of you who decided to purchase the second volume of *To Another World... with Land Mines!* after having purchased the first. I wouldn't think there's anyone out there who would purchase the second volume without purchasing the first, but if there is and you happen to be reading this in a bookstore, then I would greatly appreciate it if you would be willing to purchase both volumes! Hmm? What if there aren't any copies of the first volume in stock? Well, I'll still appreciate it even if you only purchase this second volume!

Now then, I wanted to begin by mentioning that this second volume has a lot of additional episodes and side story content compared to the web novel. Did you notice? I also made slight changes to the actions of some characters in specific scenes, but I made sure that the main events of the plot were the same, so it might have been hard to notice if you skimmed a bit. In a way, I could say that the changes were successful if this volume felt more or less the same to the people who have read the web novel version. But that doesn't mean the web novel version was bloated with unnecessary text, right?

Moving on, have any of you played a tabletop RPG before? The character creation system varies from game to game, and I tend to require a lot of time to decide what choices to make in systems that offer a lot of different options. I often end up taking all sorts of skills just because they're available, and I sometimes end campaigns with skills that I haven't used a single time. There were also times when I've created a character that was way too specialized and unable to do other things outside of that specialty. If I had to categorize the characters in my story between the two examples I just brought up, then the former applies to Nao's party, while the latter applies to Yoshino's party, which shows up in a side story episode. If there were people like Yoshino's party in modern-day Earth, then they would be quite out of place, but their choices weren't exactly bad, since they're in a different world where danger could creep up on them at any point in their daily lives. Well, I can't say that for sure at the

moment; only time will tell. All I can say for now is that the only way to find out what happens to Yoshino's party is if more volumes of this series get published, ha ha!

I would once again like to take the opportunity to thank my illustrator, Nekobyou Neko-san, for drawing cute and beautiful art for this series. Thank you very much for coming up with great character designs based on my ambiguous instructions. Yuki ended up very cute! I would also like to thank my editor H-san, who is stepping down from being in charge of this series. It's thanks to you that I was able to debut as a commercial writer. Thank you very much for all the help that you've provided me up until now. I'm also looking forward to working with my new editor, K-san. I also want to express my thanks to my proofreader, who, in addition to helping me correct typos, pointed out discrepancies with the setting that I myself hadn't noticed as the author. I truly appreciate it. Last but not least, I would like to thank all of the readers who have followed and read this series. I look forward to meeting you all again sometime in the future.

Itsuki Mizuho

The person who basically pushed Yuki aside and jumped into Haruka's arms was Natsuki.

The scene in front of me with Haruka and Natsuki hugging each other was the very definition of a touching reunion, but...

A touching reunion?



“Haruka!”

“Natsuki!”

To
Another World...

with **LAND**
2 MINES!



They're out today to search for their ideal home.

“Um, Diola-san, it's true that this yard is large, but I don't see anything else here...” I said.

“Hm? There's a building here on this plot as well. You can see it, right?”

“I mean, yeah, but that building looks more like a shed to me than a place for someone to live in.”

Diola



A vibrant manga-style illustration featuring several anime characters in a dynamic, floating pose against a bright blue sky with soft clouds. In the foreground, a blonde girl with long hair and blue eyes, wearing a purple and white outfit, holds a red strawberry. To her right, a girl with long brown hair and blue eyes, wearing a black and white military-style uniform, also holds a strawberry. Above them, a girl with long white hair and a black and white outfit is visible. In the background, two smaller characters are floating. The overall scene is energetic and colorful, with floating green leaves and small white sparkles.

story

Itsuki Mizuho

art

Nekobyou Neko

To
Another World...

with

LAND
MINES!

2

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To Another World... with Land Mines! Volume 2

by Itsuki Mizuho

Translated by Yen-Po Tseng Edited by Shakuzan

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Ebook edition 1.1: May 2022

Premium E-Book