

story

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art

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To
Another World...

with

LAND
MINES!

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WITH LAND MINES!

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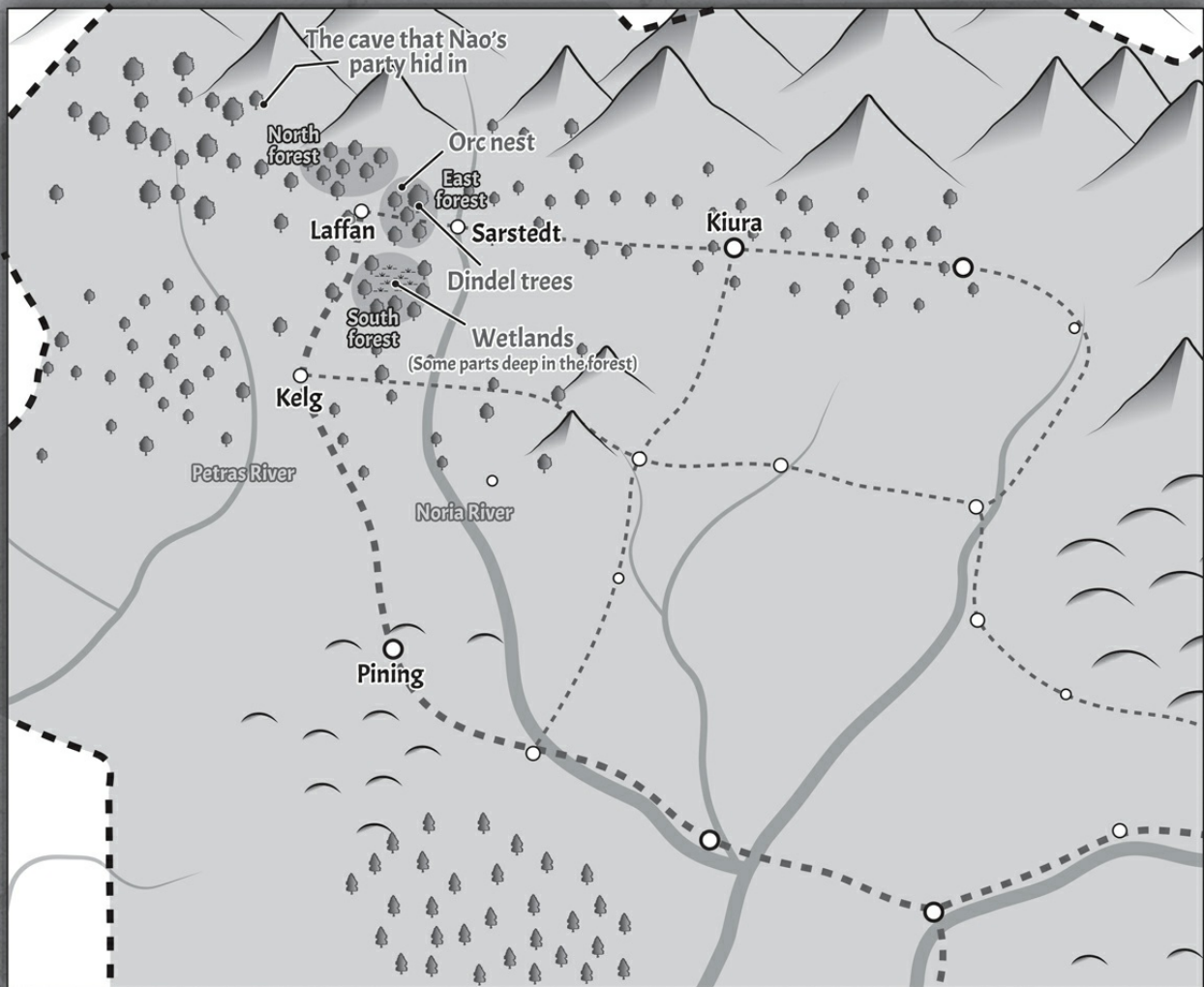
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Prologue

Edith had disappeared along with the coldness of winter, and spring's arrival was drawing near. We hadn't spent much time with Edith, but she had left a strong impression on our minds and hearts, so we all felt melancholic after she had parted with us. As the days became warmer, we tried to clean up the mansion that she had passed down to us, but it wasn't enough for us to shake off a restless feeling. As a result, we decided that in order to move on, we needed to dedicate a small shrine to Edith, and all of us worked hard to clean up the yard before we built a shrine and offered our prayers to her.

However, once we'd found closure through our work on the shrine and were ready to continue with our lives, I realized something: we hadn't really benefited financially from our hard work fulfilling Edith's quest. We had obtained a mansion as a reward, and it was a slightly painful fact that the mansion was larger than our own house. In addition, we had received Edith's old alchemist tools, and the knowledge she had passed to Haruka and the others was valuable—as were our memories of her. However, we hadn't earned very much actual money. The amount of money that we'd earned was decent, but it felt a bit lacking relative to the amount of effort that had been required from us to complete the quest. There was also one other major issue at hand that was bothering me.

"I feel like we haven't made much progress toward our initial goal of obtaining effective ways to deal with undead monsters," I said. "Am I wrong?"

The girls all nodded in agreement, and Haruka was the first to chime in. "No, you're completely right. Holy water isn't a practical method for dealing with undead monsters, and we haven't obtained any other way of dealing them damage."

"I've been practicing my magic, but despite our efforts, all we've obtained is an amulet," said Natsuki.

"Yeah, it doesn't feel significant at all," said Yuki. "It's only a twenty percent

increase in safety overall, so...”

Touya was the only one of us who shook his head at that sentiment rather than nodding in agreement. “Nah, that amulet is super important! It’s like a one hundred percent increase in safety for me!”

“It’s zero percent for the rest of us, though.”

“Ugh! I mean, yeah, Nao, you’re right, but still!”

It had been unintentional on her part, but Edith had helped to prove that undead monsters like shadow ghosts weren’t that dangerous to mages.

“That being the case, Touya’s the only one who’s benefited from our hard work recently, right?” Yuki asked.

“Mm. On top of that, even the amulet that we’ve obtained won’t protect him from being possessed if he’s careless with it,” said Natsuki.

“Believe me, I’m really sorry about that,” said Touya. “However, everything with Edith worked out in the end, right?”

“In the end, yeah. We also learned the limits of the amulet’s effectiveness as a result,” said Haruka. “However, this is only relevant to you, Touya.”

“Ugh, come on!” Touya exclaimed. “Fine, I’ll do my best to live up to everyone’s expectations, so give me a break...”

Touya had a dejected expression on his face and let his tail droop, and the rest of us exchanged some glances and laughed before resuming our original conversation.

“Okay, that’s enough teasing Touya for now,” I said. “At the end of the day, the only practical way of dealing with undead monsters is weapons made from elemental metal, right?”

At least, it was the only realistic option apart from training our magical abilities, but elemental metal weapons weren’t cheap by any means.

“Mm, we confirmed that with Edith,” said Haruka. “She also taught us how to craft elemental metal.”

“Yeah, we can probably create a lot of different elemental metals, since there

are a lot of mages in our party!” Yuki exclaimed. “Well, not darkness elemental metal, though.”

“Oh, like how we worked together to make our magic bags?” I asked.

“Mm. There are also other methods of making elemental metal, but there’s no reason for us to spend more money than necessary,” said Haruka.

According to Haruka, the process would require special materials that would differ depending on the element. With that in mind, you had the option of purchasing those special materials directly or making them yourself by obtaining the help of mages who could use the element you wanted to enchant the metal with. Purchasing the materials was obviously the more expensive option, and the mages in our party had every element except darkness covered, so saving money was the correct option for us.

“In that case, we should make the metal right away so that we can place an order for our elemental weapons!” Touya exclaimed. “Undead monsters won’t be scary for me if I can actually deal them damage!”

Touya seemed quite excited about the prospect, but Haruka sighed. “It’s not that simple, Touya. We can save money by making the elemental materials ourselves, but the other materials we need are also expensive! If we factor in the materials that we made with Edith’s help as practice and the amount of money that we have on us, then we can probably only afford one elemental weapon at the moment.”

“Yeah, that sounds about right,” said Yuki. “I’m not sure if we can even make enough elemental metal for a sword.”

Spears for my use and Natsuki’s would only have to have spearheads made out of elemental metal, but a sword for Touya would require much more metal.

“I guess that means we need to earn more money,” I said. “It’s not like we can sell Edith’s mansion, so...”

“Of course not!” Touya exclaimed. “I’d rather earn all of the money myself than do that!”

I had no intention of selling Edith’s mansion, but Touya’s reaction was much stronger than I had expected. *I wonder if he’s really against this idea because he*

spent the most time with Edith. I hope it's not because he wants to use it as a personal home for him and his future wife...

“Oh, I see. In that case, I like the idea of making Touya earn the money for his own weapon,” I said, grinning.

Yuki chimed in right away. “Yeah, that sounds good! Touya can’t directly contribute to the crafting process, and this way, he won’t be worn out that easily either!”

“It’ll probably take a lot of hard work to earn the value of a mansion,” said Natsuki. “Good luck, Touya-kun.”

“Finding work in the first place might be the hard part,” said Haruka. “We’ll probably need to ask Diola-san to recommend high-earning quests for Touya to take on, regardless of how hard those quests might be.”

“Huh? I’m the only one who’s going to have to work hard?” Touya asked. “I mean, it’s true that I can only contribute to the crafting process by earning money for the materials, but still...”

Touya had a slightly gloomy expression on his face as he pointed at himself, and the rest of us laughed once again.

“Relax, we’re just joking. But in any case, we definitely need to find ways to earn money, and we can’t really rely on orcs anymore, since there are fewer of them around now,” I said. “We’ll either have to venture deeper into the forest or aim for different monsters that are worth more apiece.”

“Monsters, huh? If I recall correctly, there are monsters like scalp apes, bind vipers, and ogres in the second and third sections of the forest, right?” Haruka asked. “Are any of those monsters worth good money?”

“Scalp apes aren’t even worth considering,” said Natsuki. “Bind vipers are worth slightly less apiece than orcs, but they’re not an efficient source of income because they don’t move in groups. As for ogres, they’re worth more than orcs, but that’s only if you somehow succeed at slaying them.”

Natsuki had tacked an important piece of information onto the end of her explanation, and Yuki hastily waved her hands. “Doesn’t that imply that we should flee from ogres?! We can’t earn money slaying them, right?!”

“Mm, ogres aren’t a good source of income,” said Natsuki. “And unfortunately for us, they don’t appear in large numbers, unlike orcs.”

“That’s actually a good thing for us, Natsuki! Come on, let’s think of something more realistic.” Yuki sighed when she saw the smile on Natsuki’s face and then paused in thought for a moment before bringing up an idea of her own. “Well, if we’re not going to just earn money little by little, then how does harvesting precious wood sound? Diola-san didn’t seem to approve of that idea, though.”

The branch master of the Adventurers’ Guild in Laffan had mentioned a quest to harvest precious wood, but Diola-san had strongly objected at the time. That being the case, it was probably dangerous work, but...

“Let’s do some research before we make a decision,” said Haruka. “We can just give up on the idea if it seems impossible.”

“Yeah, that sounds good,” said Yuki. “All right, let’s go ask a specialist for information!”

Yuki pumped her fist in the air. Later that day, she led the way to someone who would have information on the subject of precious wood.

Chapter 1—Let's Cut Down Some Trees!

It was our first time visiting Simon-san's workshop, which happened to be quite large. There was a lot of open space for carpentry, but next to the work floor, there was also a much larger space storing lumber; in fact, the storage area was spacious enough to fit six ordinary houses. Simon-san's workshop was even larger than the other workshops that I had seen on the way here, so there was a high chance that Simon-san was actually a very influential and important person in Laffan.

When I first saw Simon-san's workshop, I felt a bit intimidated, since I had been imagining a small artisan's atelier, but Yuki didn't seem to be bothered at all. She had visited this place many times in the past, and now she stepped inside without breaking her stride. Her lack of hesitation was helpful to me; I simply followed her inside. The first thing I saw was a bunch of unfinished furniture in rows. Simon-san must have had multiple apprentices, as you'd expect based on the size of the workshop itself, and it was actually quite noisy; the sounds of sawing and hammers vibrated throughout the interior of the building.

Yuki raised her voice over the noise to announce our presence. "Hello! Are you here, Simon-san?"

We heard a voice from somewhere inside of the workshop; it sounded like it was coming from some distance away. "Yeah, I'm here. Sorry, wait a moment."

"Okay!"

Since the place was unfamiliar to me, I made use of the wait time to observe my surroundings, and soon, Simon-san approached us through the gaps in the rows of furniture. "Oh, it's you guys. What are you all here for? Any problems with your house?"

Simon-san sounded a bit unhappy, so Haruka shook her head. "No, there's nothing wrong with our house. In fact, we're perfectly happy with it. Thank you so much for your excellent work, Simon-san."

“Heh, I’m glad to hear that. It was a good project for me too,” said Simon. He sounded pleased and satisfied at Haruka’s words. “In that case, what are you all here for? To order some furniture?”

We asked him about the idea of harvesting precious wood, but...

“Are you serious? I know you kids are quite strong, but you might die trying.” Simon-san grimaced. “Carpenters like myself would really appreciate getting our hands on precious wood, but there are monsters and animals like deer in those parts, you know?”

“Don’t worry, we plan on doing thorough research before we make a decision,” said Haruka. “Our questions for you are part of that research.”

“Sure, I take your meaning, but even high-rank adventurers have fled for their lives from quests to harvest precious wood...”

According to Simon-san, over a decade had passed since the last successful attempt to harvest precious wood from the north forest; all of the wood that remained in stockpiles in Laffan was from past quests, and its price had only grown over the years. Apparently there had been a few occasions in the past when high-rank adventurers, up to Rank 6—the kind of adventurers who usually wouldn’t stay in Laffan—had formed groups to venture into the north forest, since they’d be rich if they returned with precious wood.

However, none of their attempts had lasted long. As high-rank adventurers, they had been able to deal with the monsters in the north forest just fine, and they had no issues with harvesting the wood, but one major issue was how to transport it back to town. Even high-rank adventurers weren’t capable of carrying all that wood by hand, so they had no choice but to gather other people to drag the logs through the wilderness of the north forest. Monsters would attack them along the way, so more adventurers were needed to protect the people dragging the logs. As a result, the amount of money that each individual could earn had decreased until it was no longer worthwhile for high-rank adventurers. The natural conclusion for them had been to stop taking on that kind of work after a few attempts, and they’d left Laffan immediately afterward.

With all of that in mind, the biggest problem when it came to harvesting

precious wood was transportation, but our party had a solution in the form of magic bags. When we explained to Simon-san that we could simply stuff whole logs into our bags, he nodded. “Hmm. I guess you guys might be able to earn a decent amount of money from that kind of work if you have magic bags that can fit an entire log, but that’s only if you’re capable of slaying the kinds of monsters you’ll run into.”

“Don’t worry, we’ll be careful,” said Haruka. “Safety is our first priority, after all.”

“People who consider safety their first priority wouldn’t even think of heading to the north forest in the first place, you idiot!” Simon-san sounded exasperated and worried, but then sighed and shook his head. “Well, I guess it’s nonsense to say such things to adventurers. What do you want to know? I can’t tell you how to harvest precious wood—us carpenters just buy it.”

“Uh, well, we’d like to know what type of precious wood is worth a lot,” said Yuki. “We don’t really know much about precious wood, so...”

“The price can vary, but all of the trees in the north forest fall under the category of precious wood,” said Simon. “I don’t think showing you the wood itself will be too useful a reference, but I may as well for whatever it’s worth. Follow me!”

Simon-san guided us to a small shed in one corner of the storage space. Inside were stacks of roughly sawed timber. At a glance, the precious wood didn’t look that much different from the other lumber stored in this part of the workshop, and even after closer inspection, I couldn’t tell the difference. *Is this wood actually that much more valuable? It’s kind of hard for me to believe...*

“We’re one of the largest workshops in Laffan, but this is all we have left,” said Simon. “I can’t stock up either—there’s no precious wood on the market.”

“Um, Simon-san, is this really precious wood?” I asked hesitantly. “It doesn’t look like it at all...”

Simon-san chuckled and nodded. “Yep, it’s hard for a layman to tell from rough timber, and even I don’t know what it looks like as a whole tree. It’s said that you can find higher-quality wood the deeper you go into the northwest part of the forest. I hope this is useful information.”

It seemed like the price of precious wood was decided by its quality, and people had discovered that wood from deeper within forests tended to be of higher quality by comparing the precious wood with the areas that the wood had been harvested from.

“Precious wood is a hardwood with a unique fine grain, so it’s absolutely perfect for furniture,” said Simon. “There are some types with odd colors that even laypeople can spot, but that’s not all there is to the wood.”

According to Simon-san, precious wood was beautiful even when relatively unmodified, and it was also well suited for carving. On the other hand, it was a waste to use precious wood in construction if it wasn’t visible from the outside of the building. Apart from furniture, then, precious wood was only used for the floors and wallboards of mansions owned by nobles even in the past when there was still a steady supply from the north forest.

Simon-san picked up a board and held it up to us. Its dimensions appeared to be about fifty by a hundred centimeters; in its current state, it was about the right size for a small table. “Take this board here. It’s been properly planed. Can you tell the difference?”

Yuki touched the board, but she couldn’t come up with much to say. “Uh, well, it looks pretty, I guess? It also feels nice to the touch.”

As a guy, I couldn’t tell how it was different from a normal board either. When I rapped it with my fingers, it felt hard, and its swirling grain pattern was definitely unique, but I wasn’t sure if all that was enough to make it valuable. For the most part, the others seemed to have the same impressions, but there was one person among us who could tell the difference: Natsuki, which made sense to me, since she had been born into a rich family.

“Mm, this really is precious wood,” said Natsuki. “In fact, it’s a *very* expensive kind, isn’t it?”

“Oh, I’m surprised you know,” said Simon. He grinned; he seemed pleased that one of us had an eye for wood. “The figure of this wood is excellent. I was thinking of using it to make a desk table. It’s not easy to come across wood this fine.”

Simon-san proceeded to show us a bunch of different types of wood and

explain their properties, but I couldn't really follow. I could tell that the boards he showed us were all completely different from normal boards, but I couldn't understand why they were so valuable.

The types of wood that he showed us had holes in them, weird patterns, or different colors that didn't blend together. All of those properties seemed worthless to me, but obviously there were factors in the value of precious wood beyond its sturdiness and how it felt to the touch.

Apart from Natsuki, all of us were quite confused. Simon just chuckled and shrugged. "Well, it's to be expected that laypeople can't tell the difference. You kids could pick out specific types of precious wood to harvest if you wanted to, but there's probably no need to worry. All types of precious wood will sell for good money."

"I see," said Natsuki. "By the way, do you know why the precious wood in the forests near Laffan is all high quality?"

"Nah, no idea. Lot of mana in the air around those forests, though," said Simon. "One theory is that the mana makes the trees grow like so, but it makes the monsters stronger too, so lumberjacks can't harvest wood by themselves anymore. Life isn't that easy, I suppose." He had a bitter smile on his face.

It was kind of a natural outcome, though. The level of mana in the air differed between different places, and mana was theorized to affect a lot of different things. It was wishful thinking to expect that it would only affect the trees and not the monsters.

"That makes sense. Oh yeah, is there a specific season for harvesting precious wood?" Yuki asked. "Is right now a good time?"

"Frankly speaking, you're a bit late if you want to start at this time of the year. But if you succeed in bringing some back, I'm willing to purchase as much as you want to sell me, and I'll pay more than what you can get from the Adventurers' Guild," said Simon. "After all, you can't sell on the lumber market, can you?"

According to Simon-san, the lumber market was managed by the carpenter and lumberjack associations of Laffan, and only members of those organizations or the Adventurers' Guild could participate in the market. However, the Adventurers' Guild only dealt in precious wood, not normal wood from nearby

trees, a restriction that the lord of the viscounty had put in place to prevent reckless deforestation. Precious wood had been excluded from the ambit of the restriction because harvesting it was a difficult task that nobody was willing to attempt nowadays. However, the authorities would turn a blind eye as long as you didn't try to sell wood yourself, so it was all right to gather firewood from the forest or fell trees for your own use.

"Hmm. Well, if we succeed in bringing precious wood back with us, we'll take you up on your offer," said Natsuki.

"Looking forward to it," said Simon. "But don't push yourselves too hard, now. There's nothing pleasant about young people dying," he added awkwardly.

"Mm, thank you," said Natsuki. "We'll be careful."

When Natsuki had thanked and reassured Simon-san, we headed out of his workshop.



"In brief, it seems that all we have to do to earn more money is venture as deep as we can into the forest," said Natsuki.

The rest of us were clueless about the specifics, but Natsuki had summed things up for the rest of us in a way that we could understand. Apparently even twisted trees were considered unique and valuable and might sell for a lot of money. With that in mind, we would probably be able to earn more money by harvesting as much lumber as possible than by looking for a specific type of tree. The world of precious wood was a very strange one to me.

"Um, Natsuki, I don't really understand the value of the precious wood that Simon-san showed us," said Haruka. "Wouldn't wood with clean and harmonious grain look better than blackish wood with swirling patterns?"

I nodded, as did Yuki and Touya.

"Yeah, I feel the same way," I said. "I'd rather have furniture for my room made from cleaner-looking kinds of wood."

Natsuki forced out a chuckle as she nodded back at us gently. "Well, this

doesn't apply to all precious wood, but it's valuable in part because of its rarity. You know, it's somewhat like how even old toys can be worth a lot if comparatively few of them were produced."

"Right, I guess there are useless antiques that can go for ridiculous prices," said Touya. "If it were me, then I'd definitely sell that kind of thing right away rather than hold on to it."

"The things that you're talking about are only worthless if you don't know what they are, Touya," I said.

Antiques were only valuable because of their provenance and history. There wasn't a universally agreed upon value for art, and there had been a lot of artists throughout history whose paintings hadn't sold for much money during their lifetime. In fact, many famous paintings skyrocketed in value after the death of the artists who created them. Simply put, old paintings were valued for their scarcity, and works by a dead artist were considered to be more valuable because the artist couldn't produce any more works. I wasn't very fond of this idea, but it was the harsh truth.

"However, it's a bit different in this world in that precious wood here is also better than normal wood for practical purposes," said Natsuki.

"Right, precious wood in this world is very hard, right? I wonder if it'll be a struggle for us to cut down the trees," I said.

Our plan was to purchase tools like axes and saws from Gantz-san's store, but none of us had any experience with felling trees. In fact, I had only sawed branches and chopped firewood with axes before, so I felt a bit uneasy about our chances.

"Can't we easily cut through wood with Haruka's magic?" Touya asked.

"That's a lot to ask of me, Touya," Haruka replied with a sigh. "It'll be just as hard as trying to cut through trees with your sword."

Touya's sword was more or less a blunt weapon. He nodded when he heard Haruka's indirect refutation of his idea. "So you're saying it's basically impossible, huh? I guess Yuki's kodachi would have a better chance at cutting through a tree than my sword."

“That’s much harder than trying to cut through a tree with magic!” Yuki exclaimed. “Oh yeah, Haruka, there’s a Wind Magic spell called Air Cutter, right?”

“Just so you know, you’re asking about a Level 5 spell,” said Haruka. “Besides, wind doesn’t have a physical form, so I think spells like Water Blast or Sand Blast would be better. You can use those spells, right, Yuki?”

“Yeah, and so can Nao!” Yuki exclaimed.

“...Haruka, do you want me to teach you Earth Magic?” I asked.

Haruka’s level for Wind Magic was Level 3 at the moment. The spells that we mages could use weren’t necessarily limited by the levels displayed in our status screens, but the level was a rough indicator of the difficulty involved in casting a spell, and it was very hard to learn how to cast a specific spell beyond our current levels. With all of that in mind, Haruka was right that it would be better to practice Water Blast and Sand Blast, since both of them were Level 1 spells, but it would be a lot of painful work for the three of us who could use those spells.

Natsuki chuckled as she watched the three of us each try to foist responsibility onto the others. “Before we resort to magic, why don’t we think of a normal method of cutting down trees? Lumberjacks just use axes and saws, after all. We don’t have the expertise or experience of professional lumberjacks, but I think some of us have just as much raw strength.”

“I’m down for that idea!” Yuki exclaimed. “It’d be wrong to deny Touya the opportunity to be useful!”

“Oh, the spotlight is on me now? Well, I don’t mind working hard to cut down trees,” said Touya. “If we have the necessary tools and if we can reach areas with precious wood, I’ll do my best. I am very good at physical labor.” He puffed out his chest.

I gently placed my hands on his shoulders. “Touya, you don’t have to put yourself down like that. Physical labor isn’t the only thing you’re good at.”

“I didn’t say that at all!” Touya exclaimed. “It’s only one of the many things that I’m good at!”

“Oh, was my choice of words misleading? I sincerely apologize if what I said made you feel bad, Touya,” I said.

“You definitely don’t sound sorry to me!” Touya exclaimed. “All right, enough joking around. Another major issue we need to resolve is how to deal with ogres, right?”

“Yeah. I’m also a bit worried that Simon-san specifically mentioned deer,” I said. “Deer aren’t normally dangerous, right?”

When I thought of deer, I thought of the ones roaming around the historic city of Nara that tourists would feed with rice crackers. They would probably be dangerous if they charged you in a herd, but they didn’t seem like the kind of animals that adventurers would have a hard time dealing with.

“Deer, huh? Has anyone here seen a deer in this world?” Haruka asked.

“Not I,” said Natsuki. “And we’ve spent most of our time in this world together...”

“Yeah, exactly,” said Yuki. “It shouldn’t be that hard to slay deer, but maybe the deer in this world are bigger, like Yezo sika deer.”

That was when Touya raised his voice. “Oh, right! Hold on, I have something to show you guys.”

He stood and took a book out of his backpack. The title on the cover was *A Guide to Gutting for Animals & Monsters*.

I hadn’t seen it before. “When did you get this book, Touya?”

“Hm? Oh, I bought it a while back,” Touya replied. “You know, unlike everyone else, I can only really contribute in combat, so yeah.”

Touya said he had purchased this book with his own personal money after Haruka had finished distributing our earnings among the five of us. It was true that most of Touya’s skills were combat-oriented, but his bravery fighting foes head-on was reliable and very reassuring to the rest of us. However, it would have been embarrassing to shower him with honest praise, so...

“Oh, Touya, there’s more to you than just that,” I said. “You also play a very important role as our party’s meat shield.”

“Yeah, there’s no need to get down on yourself!” Yuki exclaimed. “We won’t abandon you, even if you’re only useful in combat!”

“Well, I want to escape that category!” Touya exclaimed. “I’m going to become a genius!”

He sounded a bit whiny declaring his aspirations that way, and Natsuki had a gentle smile on her face as she watched him. “It’s a good thing that our status screen doesn’t display things like stats, isn’t it?”

“Where did that completely irrelevant statement come from all of a sudden?!” Touya exclaimed. “Actually, hold on, are you trying to make fun of me by implying that my intelligence stat would be low if it were visible, Natsuki?!”

“Hee hee. Well, increasing your knowledge will have a positive effect on your Appraisal skill, so it’s good that you’re eager to learn new things,” said Natsuki. “So, have you managed to find the passages in the book with information about deer, Touya-kun?”

Touya wagged his tail to express his discontent while the rest of us laughed at Natsuki’s joke, but in the end, he still pointed at a section of the book in his hands. “Yeah, it’s right here. Apparently their horns, hide, and meat all sell, and their soft hide can be tanned to make leather for clothing.”

“Oh, right, things like chamois leather can be made from deer skin,” Natsuki said. “It’s a soft type of leather that can be used for watchbands and cloth for cleaning glass.”

“Chamois leather, huh? I see,” I said.

I responded to Natsuki without thinking, but I hadn’t actually heard of chamois leather before, and when I thought of cleaning class, the first thing that came to mind was wet newspaper. *Yeah, I’m nowhere close to her when it comes to these kinds of things. Also, I wonder if she’s thinking of glass tableware...*

“As far as things to be careful about, the book says that venison will go bad easily if you don’t cool it right away, so it’s recommended that you submerge it in a river,” said Touya.

“That isn’t a realistic option for us, but we can cool it ourselves with magic,” said Haruka.

Haruka nodded to herself as she peeked at the book in Touya’s hands. One advantage that our party had over normal hunters was the fact that we had access to all sorts of methods for preserving materials from game.

“We probably can’t get as much meat from deer as we can from a boar, but I wonder what venison actually tastes like,” said Yuki.

“Um, well, the book says that venison is delicious if prepared properly,” said Haruka.

Haruka was still peeking at Touya’s book as she answered Yuki’s question. It sounded like venison would taste disgusting if it wasn’t processed properly. Its price on the market would probably differ depending on how we handled it, and I was a bit curious as to how professional hunters would do it.

“In any case, we should make use of whatever might be useful to us,” said Natsuki.

“Yeah. Venison will also add some variety to our diets, so I’m looking forward to trying it,” I said.

Natsuki chuckled awkwardly. “Um, I don’t have any experience cooking venison. What about you, Haruka?”

“Of course not,” Haruka replied. “Did you really expect that of someone like me who had a normal upbringing?”

“I suppose the same applies to you as well, right, Yuki?” Natsuki asked.

“Yeah. You were the one person who was the most likely to have experience, Natsuki, so I guess that means we just have to count on the Cooking skill,” said Yuki.

You couldn’t purchase venison at normal supermarkets in Japan, and I would have been very surprised if someone had told me they’d cooked it before. Of course, I’d never eaten boar, much less orc, back on Earth, but they could be classified as types of pork, so the cooking methods weren’t that different. It was possible that you could make venison delicious with normal cooking methods,

but...

“Why don’t we ask Aera-san first to see if she knows how to properly cook venison?” I asked. “She’s a professional cook, after all.”

We hadn’t been visiting Aera-san’s café as frequently since moving into our own house, but we had continued to supply her with meat and were still on good terms with her. It would be out of the question to get secret recipes from her café, but she probably wouldn’t mind teaching us everyday cooking methods.

“Oh, that’s a great idea!” Haruka exclaimed. “Once we get our hands on some venison, let’s bring it to Aera-san and ask her how to cook it.”

“Is that necessary?” Touya asked. “It’ll probably be perfectly edible if you just cook it however seems right.”

Haruka stared at him scornfully. “That might be the case for a beastman like you, Touya, but the rest of us want to eat soft, tasty meat.”

“You’re just biased!” Touya exclaimed. “Well, I wish I could say that, but I can’t really deny it, ha ha.” An awkward chuckle had escaped his mouth after he tried to refute Haruka’s words.

I felt like Touya’s appetite for meat had become much stronger than before. His jaws were definitely sturdier compared to everyone else’s, and he would gleefully chew down on cuts that were too thick for the rest of us to bite through. It was possible that just as Haruka and I had unique traits as elves, this was a unique racial trait of wolf-type beastmen.

“Well, in any case, I’m also looking forward to eating venison,” said Touya. “Starting tomorrow, let’s work hard toward that goal!”

We were all looking forward to venison even though we had yet to obtain any, but there was something that had slipped our minds, and we wouldn’t realize for quite a while that we had been too optimistic about our chances.



“So yeah, Gantz-san, please sell us a set of tools for felling trees!” I exclaimed.

“I don’t have any in stock, you idiot!” Gantz exclaimed. “You can’t ask out of

the blue and get everything you want!”

I can't believe I got yelled at...even though I'm a customer...

Touya seemed a bit dissatisfied with Gantz-san's response. “Huh? Really? Aren't there a lot of lumberjacks here in Laffan?”

Gantz-san sighed. “Please! Lumberjacks don't purchase new tools that often. Most of them just want their axes sharpened or their saws dressed. But I'll make new tools if you place the orders.”

“Oh, I guess that makes perfect sense. In that case, can we place an order for the tools, Gantz-san?” Haruka asked. “We don't really know what we need, so we'd like a full set of axes and saws. How much will it cost us?”

“It won't be cheap, but it also won't be anywhere near as expensive as the weapons that you're using,” Gantz replied. “Okay, give me about two days to prepare. You're fine with standard specifications, right?”

“...What would be nonstandard specifications?” I asked.

According to Gantz-san, the axes that lumberjacks used were made to order based on their height. There was a standard size for axes, but it wouldn't be efficient for Touya and me to use axes of exactly the same size and weight. Heavier axes were more powerful, but only if you could wield them properly.

“In that case, Gantz-san, can you make one specifically for Touya and the rest of the same size?” Yuki asked. “You've made weapons for us, so you have some idea of the ideal size and weight for us, right?” She grinned at him.

Gantz-san grinned right back. “That a challenge? I'm down. Leave it to me!”



Three days later, we were walking through the east forest just as we had originally planned, which meant that Gantz-san had lived up to our expectations once again. *I knew we could count on you, Gantz-san. Well, Tomi seems to have contributed too, so I guess I should probably bring something with me as a treat the next time that I drop by.*

“We've almost reached the area where we last encountered some undead monsters—around the second section of the forest—so we need to be careful,”

I said.

Currently, our only means of dealing damage to incorporeal undead monsters was the Purification spell, which only Haruka and Natsuki could use. Corporeal monsters would be another story, but a shadow ghost like the one we'd run into before would be an annoyance, and it wasn't impossible that we'd run into even more dangerous incorporeal monsters, so we had to stay alert against any potential danger. Before heading out to explore a particular area, we usually did thorough research about what kind of monsters were likely to appear there, but in this situation, there was nothing we could have done to prepare, since no one had ever sighted undead monsters in this area before we did.

"I honestly think we'll be fine," said Touya. "I'm not scared of any undead monster now that I have a powerful amulet!"

"Those sure are some nonsensical words coming from the guy who set himself up to get possessed by Edith," said Yuki.

The rest of us apart from Touya burst into laughter at Yuki's offhand remark.

"Listen, I've learned my lesson!" Touya exclaimed. "I won't make the same mistake again and accidentally discard the amulet!"

"I seriously hope that's the case, Touya. You lucked out with Edith, but I really don't want to think about what could have happened to you if you had been possessed by a normal evil ghost," I said. "You're the best of any of us at close combat, so we definitely can't stop you if you attack us full force."

The Purification spell was very effective against ghosts, but that was only if Haruka or Natsuki had enough time to cast it, and I wasn't sure if we could put up a good fight if Touya attacked us as a result of being possessed. We could probably win if we gave up on preserving his life, but that wasn't an option for us.

"Yeah, you really need to be careful, Touya," said Yuki. "The weather has been hot lately, and it'd be awful if you accidentally discarded your amulet while changing your clothes."

The reason that Edith had been able to possess Touya was that he had discarded his amulet along with his cloak. He obediently nodded in response to

Yuki's words, as if he couldn't completely refute the possibility she'd brought up. "I don't think I'll need to change my clothes out here in the woods, but I'll keep that in mind."

"Well, don't worry too much, Touya. I'll do my best to detect undead monsters with my Scout skill," I said. "I've grown as a person too!"

Undead monsters that were hard to detect weren't the only threat in this forest; we had to be wary of ogres as well. I was the only one in this party with the Scout skill, so this was my time to shine. It wasn't a standout role, but it was an important one, so I pumped myself up for the task. However, my resolve was about to be shattered by a sudden betrayal from my best friend.

"Oh yeah, I forgot to mention this, but I managed to learn the Scout skill," said Touya.

Touya turned around with a smug look on his face, and I was speechless for a moment. Once I'd recovered, I asked him for confirmation. "Wait, seriously? You don't just have a rough sixth sense for the presence of other living beings anymore?"

"Yeah, I can detect other living beings much better now," Touya replied.

Hold on, I'll have nothing to do if you improve your specs that much, Touya. You're already useful during combat, aren't you? Don't take away my time to shine...

"Oh yeah, you haven't copied the Scout skill yet, have you, Yuki?" Haruka asked.

"Yeah, I didn't copy it since I wasn't sure how I'm supposed to learn it," said Yuki.

"You might as well just copy it for now," said Haruka. "It seems like it's not that hard to meet the 'learning' condition for the Copy skill, so it'll probably work out."

Huh?! There's another threat to my important role in this party?!

"Mm. Oh yes—I've also become somewhat capable of detecting the presence of foes recently," said Natsuki.

“Same here,” said Haruka. “I can’t detect individual presences that well yet, however.”

“Ugh, I can’t believe this!” I exclaimed. “If everyone figures out how to scout out foes, then I’ll have an identity crisis!”

My slightly overpowered Scout skill is one of my specialities! It’s not the most unique, but it’s a relatively important skill! Sure, it’s a good thing if our entire party becomes better at scouting out foes, but I have mixed feelings about this...

“Relax, Nao. It’s not like we can detect foes that are over one hundred meters away,” said Haruka.

“Mm. Your Scout skill is very useful to us as a party, Nao-kun,” said Natsuki.

“Natsuki’s skill build is better suited for a scout role, however,” said Yuki. “Your skill build is kind of like an incomplete mix, Nao.”

“Haruka, Natsuki, thanks for cheering me up,” I said. “On the other hand, you shouldn’t have said something like that out loud, Yuki! The truth can be really painful, you know?”

“You’re one to talk, Nao!” said Yuki. “I got called things like a ‘downgraded version’ and a ‘jack-of-all-trades but master of none’ in the past, you know?!”

“Well, I’m pretty sure that I wasn’t the one who said that stuff to you,” I said. “I won’t deny the fact that I thought those were fitting descriptions, however.”

“Deny them, please!”

“Oh, my bad, Multiplayer Master. Ha ha!”

“Don’t bring that up again either, Nao! I wasn’t in my right mind when I said that!”

Yuki tugged on my left arm as she begged me to forget her embarrassing past, but I didn’t react; instead, I paused in thought. It was a fact that I hadn’t had a set role in our party ever since Natsuki had joined us, since she was better suited than I was for close combat. My abilities at scouting and combat with a weapon and magic were all above the party average, but there wasn’t any skill that I’d specialized in, so there was a high likelihood that my skill build would become an incomplete mix, as Yuki had said.

“Hmm. Maybe I should try specializing in a certain role,” I said.

“Eh, I don’t think it really matters. Reality is different from a game world,” said Touya. “Also, Yuki, I don’t think you have the right to talk at the moment. Your current skill build is the very definition of ‘jack-of-all-trades, master of none’—you’re below average in everything.”

“Mm. Most of her skills are ones that she copied, and those skills are mostly still at Level 1,” said Natsuki.

Yuki lurched backward in shock when she heard Touya and Natsuki’s comments. “Th-That’s crossing the line, Touya, Natsuki!”

I gently placed my hands on her shoulders and smiled at her.

“N-Nao...”

Yuki had a disheartened expression on her face, but I felt no hesitation as I blasted her with my words. “Your skill build is what I’d call a *real* incomplete mix, Yuki.”

“You too?! Please shower me with some kind words instead!” Yuki exclaimed.

I mean, it’s only fair for me to strike back, right? You started this, and I felt a bit hurt by your words. Now we’re even.

“Well, if neither of you want to become a jack-of-all-trades, then you’ll have to either specialize in something or work harder than the rest of us,” said Haruka.

“Work harder than the rest of you? I feel like we’re already spending a lot of time training each day, aren’t we?” Yuki asked.

“Yeah, we are,” I replied. “With that in mind, there basically isn’t really any time for us to work harder than anyone else.”

Time was equally fair to everyone—even me with my Time Magic, although that might change in the future if I managed to level up my Time Magic by a lot. In any case, none of us had slacked off on training, so the gap between specialized builds and all-rounder builds would only grow larger over time.

“Doesn’t that mean there’s nothing we can do?” Yuki asked, her brow drooping.

“To be honest, I don’t think there’s anything wrong with being a jack-of-all-trades,” said Haruka. “Attempting to level all of your skills is a bit too extreme, but it’s good to be able to do all sorts of things. We’re not going to be in a group of five at all times, after all.”

“Mm. I’m not sure if this is a good way to put it, but you’d be very convenient to have around when we need to split into smaller groups, Yuki,” said Natsuki. “In fact, I think it’d be a good idea for you to learn more skills, Touya-kun.”

Haruka and Natsuki had both cheered up Yuki when they saw the sad look on her face, but then they’d glanced in Touya’s direction.

“Boy, I sure didn’t expect to get hit by a stray bullet all of a sudden,” said Touya. “Well, I’ve also thought I should learn more skills, but I went for a physical fighter build during my character creation process, so...”

“I’d recommend an animal ears ninja bui—oh, it sounds like the time to chat is over,” I said. “I’ve detected a hostile signal with my Scout skill.”

Touya was walking in front, but he rounded on me with a look of surprise. “Huh? Did you really just say something weird and then change the subject?”

I ignored him. “It’s just one signal, and it’s not an orc. I don’t think it’s an ogre either—it doesn’t feel like it’s dangerous to us.”

“No reply?!”

“Shut up, Touya,” said Haruka. “If it’s only one foe, we should try fighting it.”

“Ugh, you’re so mean too, Haruka.” Touya drooped his ears after Haruka had mercilessly struck down his complaints, but his expression immediately changed to a serious one, and he started to move his eyes and ears around. “Where’s the location of our foe, Nao?”

“It’s that way, about eighty meters from our location,” I replied. “It’s most likely a bind viper.”

If Natsuki’s information was correct, then it was highly unlikely that the signal I had detected was a scalp ape, which tended to move in groups, and it also felt too weak to be an ogre, which were stronger than orc leaders.

“I see,” said Touya. “In that case, can I try fighting it myself at first to test how

strong it is?”

“Are you sure about this, Touya?” Haruka asked. “Based on the information Natsuki has gathered, bind vipers have very tough skin...”

“Yeah, that’s another reason why I want to test things out and see for myself,” Touya replied. “If I can’t deal much damage to bind vipers, I’ll have to come up with a specific strategy for fighting them.”

After a bit of discussion, we all agreed to Touya’s idea. It wouldn’t be that hard to back him up against a single bind viper if he ended up needing our help.

We headed toward what we were assuming to be a bind viper. Once we got within ten meters of our quarry, Touya was able to detect it as well, and he turned around to nod at us.

“It seems like it’s somewhere in the canopy, but I can’t see it yet,” said Touya.

“Be careful, dude,” I said.

“Of course,” Touya replied.

Touya approached the foe slowly and carefully. As soon as the hostile signal from my Scout skill overlapped with Touya’s friendly signal, something long suddenly descended from the treetops. It was a large, dark green viper with a diameter of about twenty centimeters. It lunged at Touya’s neck. However, Touya was on alert, so he was able to dodge the bind viper easily, and he swiftly took a step backward before swinging his sword down on it.

When his sword struck the viper, a dull sound vibrated through the air, as if he had tried to smash a diamond.

“Ugh, just how tough is this skin?!” Touya exclaimed.

The bind viper’s body had bent as a result of Touya’s attack, but it didn’t seem to have taken any damage, and it coiled up and tried to ascend to the treetops again.

“What’s the plan?” Haruka asked.

“Help me out!” Touya exclaimed.

Haruka quickly fired an arrow into the bind viper’s eye. It opened its mouth

and released a rattling scream of pain, but Natsuki swiftly stabbed it through the mouth with her spear and pinned it to the tree.

“All right, leave the rest to me!” Touya exclaimed.

Now that the viper had stopped moving, Touya aimed for its head. His initial attack had bounced off of its body, but blunt weapons were very effective against tough and hard surfaces. Natsuki pulled her spear out at the same time that Touya swung his sword down on its head, and his sword made a crushing sound as it smashed the viper’s skull and scattered blood all over the tree behind it.

“I’m not trying to jinx us, but did we get it?” Touya asked.

“Well, there’s no way that it can resurrect from its current state,” I said.

The bind viper’s head had been completely destroyed, and its body was dangling down from the top of the tree. When I poked its body with my spear, it unwrapped itself from the tree and fell to the ground.

“Whoa, this viper has a really long body!” Yuki seemed quite curious. She grabbed its tail and pulled it out to its full extension. “I wonder how long it actually is.”

“It’s definitely over five meters,” said Touya. He paused in thought and looked back and forth between the viper and Yuki. The next words that slipped out of his mouth were “Hmm. It’s probably as thick as your thighs, Yuki.”

Yuki happened to be standing next to him, so the thought was natural enough, but it was a careless mistake to say it out loud.

“Do you have a death wish, Touya? Just so you know, my kotetsu happens to be thirsting for blood today,” said Yuki.

As Yuki called her kodachi by a fancy name, she rattled it in its sheath, then smiled and lowered her hips as if to indicate that she was ready to attack at any time. *Yikes, I think she’s actually serious! She’s probably angry enough to do something like chop off Touya’s tail!*

Touya also seemed to sense that he was in danger, and he hastily shook his head. “I’m sorry, Yuki! What I meant to say is that the bind viper is as thick as

your body!”

“Are you trying to say that my body has no curves?! I’m definitely not a straight line like this bind viper!” Yuki exclaimed.

“No, I’m talking about your waist!” Touya exclaimed. “Your waist is much slimmer than this viper!”

“Oh, really? Well, that sounds like a lie, but I’ll let you off the hook this time,” said Yuki. “Be careful with your words, Touya. I’m really conscious of the fact that my legs have become thicker recently! I’m glad they’re not flabby, but still...”

Yuki puffed up her lips in a pout and seemed pretty unhappy, but it was a fact that either the bind viper was actually that thick or Yuki was actually that slim. However, I was wise enough to avoid voicing my thoughts on this matter.

“It’s a natural result of being an adventurer. Your lower body strength directly affects how powerful your leg movements are, so we have no choice but to train our legs for combat,” said Natsuki. “Survival matters the most, after all.”

Touya glanced at Natsuki’s legs under her long hakama. “With that in mind, Natsuki, you’re better than Yuki at close combat, so—”

Right away, a cold voice vibrated through the air. “Touya-kun?”

“Never mind!”



Touya had once again been careless with his words, and he hastily turned away from Natsuki and back toward the viper. “Okay, time for my Appraisal skill. The materials we can retrieve from a bind viper are its skin and meat... Meat, huh? I have a hard time believing that the meat from this viper is edible, given how tough it is.”

“You’re being way too obvious with your attempt to change the subject, Touya,” I said. “Well, it’s true that this bind viper doesn’t look like it would taste very good...”

I felt kind of bad for Touya, so I decided not to roast him for his mistake. I poked the dead body of the bind viper with the butt of my spear. However, its skin bounced back in an elastic way. It felt kind of like a rubber tire.

“The skin is quite tough,” said Touya. “Do you think you can slice through this, Yuki?”

“Uh, with my kodachi? Hold on, I’ll test it out,” said Yuki.

Yuki tried to slice through the bind viper with her kodachi, but to no avail. She did manage to slice open the viper’s skin, but her attack wasn’t able to cut very deep. On top of that, this was the result of her attacking a dead and immobile bind viper, so any attacks with her kodachi would probably deal even less damage during actual combat.

“It would definitely be impossible to slice off its head like this,” said Yuki. “Maybe it actually was a strong foe.”

“Well, I can smash a bind viper’s head if it gets pinned to something like earlier,” said Touya. “Do you think you could slice through a bind viper, Natsuki?”

“Me? Hmm. Haruka, lend me your kodachi for a bit,” said Natsuki.

“Sure, feel free to use it,” said Haruka.

Natsuki had learned martial arts back on Earth, and now she also had the Level 1 Katana Wielding skill. The rest of us watched to see what would happen. Natsuki lowered her hips, breathed slowly for a bit to relax, then suddenly whipped out the kodachi and slashed the bind viper’s body. All of Natsuki’s

movements had looked very refined, and even an amateur like me could tell that she was much better at this than Yuki. However, Natsuki was only able to slice through half of the bind viper's body; the bones of its spine stopped her blade.

"Whew. I don't think it's possible to slice through a bind viper with this kodachi," said Natsuki. "I couldn't even slice through a dead one, so it's probably very difficult to slice through their spines."

"Yeah, they definitely seem like they have hard spines," I said.

"However, it might be possible to power through using the weight and centrifugal force of a polearm like a naginata," said Natsuki.

"Tomi might be able to make a naginata for us if we place an order, but I'm not sure if we actually need one when we already have magic." *Besides, a weapon like a naginata that requires a lot of space to swing around probably isn't a good fit for settings like this forest.*

"Mm. In addition, bind vipers tend to appear alone most of the time, and spears can pierce through them just fine," said Natsuki. "Touya-kun can handle the task of finishing them off."

"You can place an order for a naginata if you really want one, Natsuki. We can think about it some more after we've made some elemental metal," said Haruka. "Let's start to gut this bind viper. One good thing about this is that it looks like it'll be easier to gut than the other animals and monsters that we've slain up until now."

"Mm, it'll probably be similar to gutting an eel, though I've never done that before," said Yuki.

"Opportunities to gut eels are rare for ordinary people," I said. "Actually, wait, didn't we catch some eels ourselves? What happened to those?"

"They're still stored in our magic bags. It'd be ideal to eat them as fresh as possible," said Haruka. "I hope we can get our hands on some soy sauce at some point in the future."

So we had actually had an opportunity to gut eels before, but apparently Haruka was saving them for the future. I felt like eels were only delicious if they

were prepared through the kabayaki method, so until we had some soy sauce to spread on them, there was no reason for us to force ourselves to eat them.

“I think bind vipers will probably be easier to gut than eels,” said Natsuki. “Their very toughness should make it easier to separate the bones from the meat.”

We retrieved the magicite from the remains of the bind viper’s skull before opening it all the way to the tip of its tail and extracting and discarding its internal organs. When that was done, Natsuki pulled on the viper’s bones; they fell out easily. The only work that remained was to separate the meat from the bones, but...

“Well, then. This meat certainly has a strange color,” said Haruka.

“Yeah, it really does,” said Yuki. “I thought the meat would be white... It doesn’t look very appetizing.”

The meat of the bind viper had a vibrant red color. That was typical of mammals as well as some types of fish, like bluefin tuna. Maybe we didn’t need to worry about it too much.

“Orc meat is probably better purely in terms of taste,” said Natsuki. “Meat from bind vipers is sold for about the same price due to low supply, but the skin sells for a lot more.”

“Yeah, the dark green color of the bind viper’s skin is definitely beautiful,” I said. “By the way, is anyone here scared of snakes?”

Snakes and spiders were the most common candidates for animals that people disliked and were scared of. However, none of the girls had screamed during our battle against the bind viper. As for me, I couldn’t stand things like caterpillars. If we ever ended up fighting some kind of caterpillar monster, I was determined to use my magic to burn it to a crisp.

“I’m a bit scared of snakes, but it kind of goes away with snakes this big,” said Yuki.

“Mm, size is definitely a factor,” said Natsuki. “It also applies to things like spiders.”

“To a certain extent, it’s just a matter of getting used to things. We almost vomited from our first attempts to gut animals and monsters, after all,” said Haruka. “Okay, there we go.”

Once Haruka had finished gutting the viper, she wrapped up the skin and stuffed it into a magic bag. She did the same with the remaining meat, which she had crudely sliced into cuts of similar size. Once she was done, she breathed a sigh of relief and then used the Purification spell to clean all of us.

“Whew, that should be it. Okay, let’s try to fight the next bind viper with our magic this time,” said Haruka. “If we can’t easily slay bind vipers with magic, then harvesting precious wood from deep areas of this forest will definitely be too hard for us. Can you find one, Nao?”

“Yeah, I’ve managed to locate another one,” I replied. “It’s some ways from here, but follow me.”

Natsuki threw her hands in the air to get our attention. “Oh, before we do that, there’s something I want to bring up.” She started to search through her backpack. “I actually made some healing potions with my Pharmacy skill yesterday, so let me hand them out.”

She distributed a few bottles that were each about half the size of a vitamin drink. The liquid inside was a bit greenish.

“Oh, so you succeeded at making some?” I asked.

“Mm, I did,” Natsuki replied. “Up to this point, my Pharmacy skill hasn’t been of much use, but it should be from now on.”

“Well, I think your Pharmacy skill has already helped us just as a backup plan,” I said.

The medicines that Natsuki had been making were things like digestants and painkillers—the kinds of medicines you’d find in the first aid kit in an ordinary household—which had helped us feel safe. We had been lucky so far in that thanks to the Robust skill, none of us had ever had to resort to medicine.

“They should heal injuries, but they won’t be as dramatically effective as magic,” said Natsuki. “Pouring some of the liquid onto an injury or drinking it will work equally well, but it tastes very bitter. To be more specific, it’s just as

bitter as herbal medicine.”

“I see,” I said. “Herbal medicine, huh?”

I was a bit confused by the comparison; I couldn’t remember if I had ever drunk any herbal medicine. However, Touya must have known what it tasted like, because he had a look of disgust and pain on his face.

“Do you know what herbal medicine tastes like, Touya?” I asked.

“Yeah, I do. It’s usually prescribed in the form of granules, but the proper way to consume them is by melting them in boiling water to drink them,” said Touya. “The herbal medicine that I drank was described by my pharmacist as very bitter, so...”

Touya had a distant look in his eyes and grimaced, as if recalling its bitter taste. According to him, the proper way to consume herbal medicine was slowly, over a long period of time, but he had taken everything that was prescribed to him at once and had avoided herbal medicine after that experience. That being the case, I probably wouldn’t be able to force myself to drink herbal medicine, especially since I really disliked powdered medicine. It was unlikely that I would have to drink herbal medicine in this world, but potions existed here, so if they had a similar taste, I wanted to avoid drinking them if possible.

“Okay, I understand that potions are bitter. So what’s the point in drinking them instead of pouring them on injuries?” *There’s no reason to put yourself through that if either method works equally well, right?*

“The effects of the potion will last for a while if you drink it, so if you want to heal an injury right away, then pouring it over the injury is better,” Natsuki replied. “Choose depending on the situation. Haruka and I can probably heal most injuries with our magic, but don’t hesitate to use these potions if you’re in danger. I can easily make more of them.”

“Okay. Thank you very much, Natsuki,” I said.

Natsuki had a smile on her face when she answered my question, so I had no choice but to express my thanks. *Man, I definitely need to avoid any battles in which I don’t have the luxury of getting potential injuries healed by magic...*

There seemed to be a decent number of bind vipers in the deeper areas of the forest; we found another one not too far from the first and prioritized magic in our battle against it. Its tough skin was no match for our spells, which could slay even orcs in one hit. All we had to do was land a clean hit on a viper's head, and it would fall dead from the treetops.

However, that didn't mean the bind vipers were weak foes. Their green skin camouflaged them in the foliage, so if you walked under them without noticing their presence, they could coil themselves around your neck and break your bones or even strangle you to death. We had been able to avoid those scenarios due to the Scout skill and the Light spell, but exploring this forest would have been exhausting if those options hadn't been available to us, and it would have been difficult to escape unscathed. *So this is probably one of the reasons that people don't try to harvest precious wood nowadays, huh?*

"Well, this means all of us apart from Natsuki can slay bind vipers, right? With that in mind, we probably don't have to worry too much here," said Yuki.

"Please, I'm pretty sure that I can slay bind vipers just fine if I do my best," said Natsuki, sounding a bit sulky. "The only thing that worries me is the durability of my spear..."

Haruka hastily chimed in when she saw Natsuki's reaction. "You better not try it, Natsuki! Your spear is pretty expensive."

"I'm perfectly aware of that," Natsuki replied. "I'm just saying that I could do it if I tried."

Natsuki's spear was worth 140 gold coins. At this point, we could earn that amount of money without too much trouble, but for most ordinary citizens, it represented a whole year's living expenses.

"Also, Yuki, don't let your guard down," said Haruka. "There are still some potential foes that we haven't encountered yet in this part of the forest."

"Yeah, don't worry, I know," Yuki replied. "Ogres, scalp apes, and deer, right?"

"Hmm. I want to hunt and slay some deer at least once for their meat, but whether we continue doing that will depend on how much venison is worth," I

said.

“Oh yeah, I didn’t check the value of the materials that we can retrieve. Hold on, give me a second.” Touya took out the *A Guide to Gutting for Animals and Monsters* book that we had seen the other day and started flipping through it. “Uh, let’s see. Bind vipers are worth roughly thirty thousand Rea for their meat and skin combined. It looks like there’s also a section on brown eik here, and it says that the value of their meat varies a lot depending on how you gut them, but it can range from fifteen thousand to thirty thousand Rea.”

Yuki looked quite surprised by that information. “Huh, is venison really worth that much? That’s more than I thought it would be, especially since you probably can’t get as much meat from deer as you can from boars. In that case, are deer actually an efficient source of money?”

“Well, it seems that they aren’t commonly hunted, so there’s probably a catch,” said Natsuki.

“Maybe they’re actually stronger than boars or something like that,” I said. “Oh, hmm. My Scout skill has detected a signal that’s probably a deer, so we may as well go see for ourselves right now.”

Nobody raised any objections, so we followed the signal and advanced through the forest. However, we were astounded when we reached the source of the signal.

“That’s a deer, huh?” I said.

“Yeah, that’s a deer,” said Haruka.

“Mm, that’s a deer,” said Natsuki.

“It’s definitely a de—wait, why is it so large?!” Yuki exclaimed. “Is this some kind of optical illusion?”

While the rest of us were commenting on the deer, Touya had simply stood with his mouth open in shock, but all of our reactions had been perfectly normal. The word “deer” would bring to my mind the image of a sika deer, although we had considered the possibility that deer in this world might be as large as Yezo sika deer. With that in mind, we’d anticipated that their long antlers might be annoying to deal with, but we had been confident that they

wouldn't be too much of a threat to us with our current physical abilities and magic and that we could easily slay numerous deer at the same time and turn them into our main source of dinner.

However, the deer that had appeared ahead of us was nothing like what we had imagined. Its body length was over three meters, its legs were thicker than Haruka's body, and its head was much higher than Touya's head. On top of that, it had giant antlers as well that gave the deer a very intimidating aura. The size of the deer was about the same as a moose, but it looked more similar to a sika deer. It would probably be perfectly safe to blast it to death at range with our magic, but challenging the deer to close combat seemed like a very dangerous option due to there being a high chance of suffering severe injuries if we were stabbed by the deer's antlers or kicked by its legs.

"Well, I guess this is why Simon-san specifically emphasized the existence of deer," I said.

Wild deer were dangerous for ordinary people, but they normally weren't animals that adventurers had to be careful of. However, Simon-san had still warned us about deer, so we should have expected the deer that he had been talking about to be abnormal in one way or another.

"So, what were you saying earlier about less meat from deer compared to boars, Yuki?" Touya asked.

"I mean, I had no idea that deer were so large!" Yuki exclaimed quietly. "It's larger than a wipac bear! The guild should have warned rookies about these deer as well, right?!"

Don't worry, I had the exact same thoughts as you did, Yuki. Or rather, I'm fairly confident that nobody expected the deer to be this large.

"Well, rookies probably don't venture this far deep within forests, Yuki," said Touya.

"Mm. Adventurers that can venture this deep will probably do some research beforehand by themselves as well," said Haruka. "Is there nothing about the size of deer inside of that book of yours, Touya?"

"I mean, this isn't an encyclopedia with illustrations," Touya replied. "There's

just information here on how to gut deer, and that's all."

"Hmm. It might be a good idea to actually consider purchasing some monster encyclopedias," said Haruka.

We technically had a monster encyclopedia on us, but it was one that we had bought from a secondhand bookstore. The monster encyclopedias that Haruka was talking about were the ones that you could purchase from the Adventurers' Guild by placing an order for one, and it seemed like the complete set consisted of over ten different volumes that had information on all of the currently known monsters. It would be convenient if we had those encyclopedias, but they were proper books with illustrations in them that had been compiled under the supervision of the Adventurers' Guild, so they were expensive as a result, and most adventurers weren't capable of affording such books.

"By the way, the deer in front of us counts as an animal, right?" I asked.

"...I wonder if there are any encyclopedias on animals as well," said Haruka.

"We'll probably have to spend a lot of money on this," said Natsuki.

"Oh, it seems like the antlers of brown eiks are worth a lot of money, so try not to damage those antlers with magic," said Touya.

"Are you telling us mages to approach close enough until we can accurately land our spells for sure, Touya?" I asked. "It's a huge deer, you know? You're asking for a lot, my dude."

Ten meters away was more than enough distance for a boar, but the deer ahead of us could probably close that distance in an instant by stepping forward a bit and swinging down its antlers. On top of that, my slim body would probably either be impaled or sent flying with ease if the deer rammed into me with its body, so it seemed like it would be a "thrilling" experience.

"Well, I think this is a good opportunity to practice my abilities for a scout role, so I'll give it a shot," I said.

"Huh? You're actually going to try, Nao?" Yuki asked. "Is it because you're bothered by what I said about Natsuki being better suited for a scout role? Don't worry, we're in the same boat! Yay!"

“No, that’s not it!” I exclaimed. “Well, it’s true that I’m slightly bothered by what you said, but I’m not going to force myself to try anything reckless as a result.”

Yuki held my hands as if to cheer me up, so I shook her off. After that, I glanced at Haruka and Natsuki, and they nodded in response to express their approval of my idea even though they had worried looks on their faces.

“Make sure to be careful, Nao-kun,” said Natsuki. “Even sika deer can kill people by impaling them with their antlers, after all.”

“Your life is more important than money, Nao,” said Haruka. “Ignore the value of the antlers and blast the deer with your magic if things get dangerous.”

“Yeah, don’t worry,” I said. “I won’t hesitate to slay it with magic or flee from combat if necessary to ensure my own safety.”

I walked away from the others and tried to conceal my presence by hiding in the greenery as I slowly tried to circle behind the brown eik. There were no large trees near the brown eik, and it was probably because its giant antlers would get in the way. With that in mind, it probably wasn’t easy for the brown eik to walk through the forest, and there was a chance that it would be an easy foe to slay if I was capable of baiting it into a convenient position.

“Just a little bit more...”

Once I had managed to sneak my way near the brown eik, I heard some chewing sounds that kind of sounded like it was crunching things in its mouth. I sneakily peeked at the deer from where I was hiding and saw that it was directly chewing on some thick branches instead of just chewing the leaves or tree bark. It didn’t seem like a very delicious meal, but I was impressed by the brown eik’s huge appetite. In fact, I felt like places such as mountains and forests would be devoured in no time by brown eiks if left alone, so I was curious if they had a predator that whittled down their numbers. The brown eik was probably on guard against predators since it was twitching its ears as it ate, but I didn’t want to encounter any kind of predator that preyed on such large deer. With that in mind, I stayed alert for the presence of other animals or monsters as I slowly tiptoed closer to the deer.

However, the brown eik suddenly stopped its meal and looked up at its

surroundings, so I hastily stopped my movements and held my breath to hide from the deer. It seemed like the brown eik was looking directly in front of it, and I wasn't sure if it had noticed the others or not. There was a higher chance of the brown eik noticing the others instead of me due to the difference in our skill builds and numbers, but I didn't want the deer to escape after all the effort that I had put in to sneak near it. I decided to trust my Stealth skill as I dashed forward to close the distance and swiftly shot a Fire Arrow toward the deer. It seemed like the deer had noticed the heat of my Fire Arrow since it slightly moved its head, but it was too late for the deer. My Fire Arrow landed on the back of the deer's head with an explosive sound and blasted off half of its head. It seemed like it wasn't enough to blast off its entire head due to its large size, but it was still a lethal blow. A large amount of blood gushed out of its head as the brown eik slowly tilted and fell to the ground.

"Whew..."

"Excellent work, Nao-kun," said Natsuki.

The others had jumped out of hiding at the same time that I had attacked the brown eik with my magic, and it was probably for the sake of backing me up if needed, so I walked back to them and shrugged in response. "Well, this deer's very large, but it's still just an animal. However, I feel like it was more wary of its surroundings compared to monsters."

"Yeah, it seems like this deer had noticed us," said Yuki. "It didn't attack us, however, and maybe it's because it's an animal and not a monster."

"Mm, that might be the case," said Natsuki. "However, in a way, that makes it harder to hunt them. I wonder if I would have been able to slay this deer without any trouble."

Natsuki had no methods to attack from long range, but her skill build was similar to one of a scout. She had the Sneak skill as well, so there was a chance that she would have been able to sneak close enough to attack the deer with her spear by herself, but...

"Our goal is to slay deer, so there's no reason to force yourself to take on risks, Natsuki," I said.

"Mm, exactly," said Yuki. "You might get injured from a counterattack, after

all. It'd probably be lethal if you got kicked by these legs."

I looked at the legs of the deer after Yuki had pointed at them, and they were very thick legs. The hooves at the end of the legs were quite big as well, and my palms weren't capable of covering them at all even if I opened them as much as I could, so the thought of getting kicked by these legs and hooves made me shiver with fear. Kicks from a normal horse were enough to break someone's ribs with ease, and kicks from these legs were probably powerful enough to completely destroy someone's internal organs.

"Man, this really is a huge deer," said Touya. "Oh, wait, we need to hurry and drain its blood for gutting. The value of its meat will go down if we don't do this as soon as possible."

"Right, that's a good point," I said. "The first thing we need to do is to hang it."

We hastily started the gutting process for the deer after Touya had pointed out that speed was of the essence for money as he slapped the deer with his hands. Luckily for us, there were a few thick trees that weren't too far away, so we had no troubles with picking a place for this. I climbed up a tree that looked sturdy and dangled some rope from it, and then Touya dragged the deer toward the tree before he tied its hind legs to the rope. After that, we all pulled on the rope to complete the process of hanging the deer.

"The antlers are in the way," said Haruka. "Let's cut them off first. We should probably use saws for this, right?"

"Yeah," I said. "I sure didn't expect to use them on antlers before using them on precious wood, however."

We had prepared enough saws for each one of us to use. Yuki chuckled as she started to work on one of the antlers with her saw, and she was the first one to do so. Touya took out his own saw after that to cut off the other antler, and he muttered to himself that it was lighter than he had expected it to be.

"Okay, I'm going to cut off its neck next," said Natsuki.

Natsuki nonchalantly cut off the deer's neck using the kodachi that she had borrowed from Haruka. It was a clean single stroke that had passed through the

deer's cervical spine with ease, so Natsuki's abilities at this were very impressive. The blood that gushed out from the deer's neck fell into a hole in the ground that Yuki had dug with her Earth Magic. There was a lot of blood due to how large the deer was, and there was already enough blood in the hole for a bucket to scoop up.

"Yikes. I've gotten somewhat used to it by now, but the smell of blood still makes me feel a bit nauseous," said Yuki.

"The smell's going to get worse once we gut it," said Haruka. "We have to extract its internal organs first. Touya, we can discard these, right?"

"Well, those organs are edible, but it's a lot of work to prepare them, and it seems like they don't taste that good," Touya replied. "Also, this should be obvious, but try not to damage the deer when you cut open its belly."

"Okay," said Haruka. "Oh, I can't reach with my hands."

"Yep," I said.

Haruka had tried to reach out her hands with a gutting knife in them, but the deer had a body length of over three meters, so it was impossible for her to reach the top of a hanging deer.

"Uh, do you want me to do this instead, Haruka?" I asked. "If not, then maybe you should find some kind of platform to stand on, so..."

"Nao, lend me your shoulders to ride on," said Haruka.

Haruka had a look of discontent on her face as she ordered me to lend her my shoulders, so I had no choice but to obey her command. Touya looked at his book as he gave out instructions, and some steamy, hot internal organs jumped out and hung in front of me after Haruka used her gutting knife to cut open the belly of the deer while riding on my shoulders. I was used to seeing internal organs by now, but it wasn't a pleasant sight, so I hastily discarded them into the hole in the ground so that we could move on to the next step.

"The next step is to skin the deer," said Touya. "Larger deer are more valuable, so try not to damage the skin as well."

"Uh, can't we deal with the skin at another time?" I asked. "We do have magic

bags, after all.”

I would need to stand still while someone sat on my shoulders as they skinned the deer if we were going to do it while the deer was still hanging from a tree. That in itself was perfectly fine with me, but it probably wouldn’t be easy for someone to do the work, and it would be a waste of skin if mistakes were made due to the increased difficulty of the process.

“Oh, I guess you’re right about that. Let’s skip ahead to the next step, then.” Touya had nodded in response to my words before he used his fingers to trace the pages of the book that he had in his hands to confirm the instructions. “Uh, let’s see. The best thing to do for the next step is to toss the deer into a river to cool it, but that’s not an option for us. We should probably just cool the deer with magic before tossing it into our magic bags along with some ice.”

“Okay,” said Haruka. “Will the temperature of a refrigerator be enough for this?”

“Uh, well, I’ve learned how to use the Cool spell,” I said. “Do you want me to do it, Haruka?”

The Cool spell was actually a Level 4 Fire Magic spell that I had become able to use recently. It wasn’t as efficient as the Freeze spell from Water Magic, but it was more than enough for the purpose of cooling meat. However, it was quite difficult to cool something to below the freezing point with the Cool spell, and it was probably because of the difference in the elemental category of magic that the spell belonged to.

“Nah, it’s fine,” Haruka replied. “Help out Yuki instead.”

“Okay. Oh, Yuki, I feel like you should make the hole in the ground deeper,” I said. “The blood is spilling out of the hole right now.”

“Yeah, it seems like it,” said Yuki. “The earth didn’t soak up as much blood as I thought it would.”

Yuki made the hole full of blood deeper before she buried it. After that, we placed one of our magic bags on top of the covered hole, and a large amount of deer meat fell into the magic bag once we loosened the rope.

“The procedure we have to follow for gutting a deer isn’t that hard, but it’s a

lot of work,” said Natsuki.

“Mm. One major problem is the size of these deer,” said Haruka. “It wouldn’t exactly be fair if Nao had to lend me his shoulders each time, after all.”

“Well, I don’t really mind, and—”

I was about to mention that Haruka wasn’t heavy at all, but Yuki interrupted me with a grin on her face. “And you enjoyed the sensation of Haruka’s thighs, right?”

“Oh, is that so?” Haruka asked.

“Mm, exac—of course not!” I had played along with Yuki’s joke to jab back at Haruka since she had a playful tone to her voice as she asked me that question, and I sighed before I continued with my words. “The main issue for deer is profitability. I thought we would be able to earn a lot since I had expected normal deer, but bind vipers would be much less work and more profitable. It doesn’t seem like there are many deer either, so yeah.”

Bind vipers were worth around a total of thirty thousand Rea each, while the value of brown eiks could vary from between fifteen thousand to thirty thousand Rea. If we factored in the amount of time required for combat and the gutting process, then there was no reason for us to go out of our way to hunt brown eiks instead of bind vipers.

“Yeah, good point. Brown eiks aren’t hard to slay, but the gutting process is annoying to deal with,” said Touya. “However, I know you enjoyed it, Nao, so you probably feel disappointed about this.”

“Dude, believe me, that’s not it!” I exclaimed. “Well, in any case, how about we only slay brown eiks that happen to bump into us?”

“Sure, I’m down for that,” said Touya. “We can change course if the meat from brown eiks is delicious, however.”

It sounded like Touya’s preference for meat was the same as usual, and we all laughed as we nodded in response.



Two weeks had passed since we had first entered the forest, and we had

finally arrived at an area with trees that looked like proper sources of precious wood. The area felt like it was about twenty kilometers away from Laffan, and the forest looked a bit different, as there were more tall trees here compared to shallower areas of the forest. There were also larger gaps of space between trees that made it easier for us to traverse the terrain, but one downside was that there was less sunlight due to the sun being blocked off by the taller trees. On the other hand, the heat had also eased up a bit due to less sunlight, so it was a good thing for the upcoming seasons.

“It looks like thicker trees are a lot more common here,” said Yuki.

“Mm. They’re also a lot taller compared to before,” said Haruka. “None of them are as massive as dindel trees, but they’re still quite tall.”

“Well, at least Simon-san surely won’t have any issues with wood from trees this thick,” I said.

It actually wasn’t our first time harvesting wood, since our first attempt had been from a shallower area of the forest. We had harvested some wood as practice and brought the wood to Simon-san’s workshop, but he told us that the wood we had brought back wasn’t good enough to be considered as precious wood, and he had requested that we attempt to harvest wood from deeper areas of the forest if it was possible. He had still bought the wood that we had brought back for more than the usual price, but the amount of money wasn’t a lot. The wood we had brought back was a log that had a diameter of about thirty centimeters, but there were a lot of trees nearby that all looked like they had diameters of over fifty centimeters, and it seemed like there were some trees with diameters of over one meter as well. In fact, I was quite amazed by our surroundings because I wasn’t even able to wrap my body around half of a tree when I had tried to hug one of them.

“Trees this thick should sell for a good amount of money, even if the wood isn’t precious wood.” Haruka was touching a huge tree that looked like it had a diameter of over two meters as she said that, and it was a very straight tree that even an amateur like me could tell would fetch a lot of money. “If there aren’t any cracks or anything inside this tree, then it would probably fetch over ten million yen back in Japan. The number of large trees in Japan has decreased in recent years, and there’s been a shortage of timber needed to repair

buildings like shrines and temples.”

According to Haruka, the price of wood depended on the tree species, but it seemed like the supply of such wood had decreased to the point that you couldn't purchase the wood even if you had enough money to pay for it. It seemed like there were still some guardian forests and sacred mountains left intact back in Japan, but cutting down trees in those places wasn't easily allowed by any means, and you would have to wait a very long time even if you planted new trees for harvesting in the future.

“Honestly speaking, I feel a bit hesitant about cutting down a tree this large,” said Natsuki.

“Mm, definitely,” said Yuki. “I wonder how much time it took for this tree to grow this large.”

“It's probably many times that of our lives so far,” said Haruka.

We all felt a bit sentimental about the everlasting flow of time as we looked up at the giant tree in front of us, but Touya was an exception as he snapped us out of the moment. “We're still going to cut it down, right?”

“Well, yeah,” I replied.

We had put in a lot of effort to reach this deep area of the forest, so I didn't want to simply return back to Laffan without cutting down some trees here to harvest wood. However, I still felt a bit sentimental about this, but it was a feeling that I had to shake off.

“Let's at least thin out the trees to make some space as we cut them,” said Natsuki.

“Tree thinning, huh? Well, I guess that makes sense since it seems like nobody else will come here to harvest wood,” I said.

Luckily for us, it seemed like the sources of wood here weren't going to be depleted anytime soon.

“Um, people used to harvest wood from deep areas of the forests in the past, right?” Yuki asked. “I don't see any traces of it here, however.”

“Oh yeah, I don't remember seeing any tree stumps,” I said. “It's unlikely that

they were dug up or something like that, but...”

There was no reason for people to dig up tree stumps in the forests, since it wasn't like they were going to turn such areas into fields for growing crops. However, I hadn't noticed any tree stumps on our way here despite the fact that it seemed like there had been a lot of tree cutting in the past.

“Well, there technically is a tree stump,” said Touya. “It looks quite different because it has decayed a lot over time, however. Look over there.”

Touya cleared the undergrowth with his hands and pointed at somewhere after he had answered my question, and there were the remains of a tree stump at where he was pointing. Its diameter was less than one meter, but it was still quite large. There wasn't much of the tree stump left above ground, and its underground portions had decayed to the point of almost turning back to earth, with grass growing out of it like the surrounding ground.

“I thought tree stumps were things that remained for quite a long time, though I don't know how long this tree stump has been here for,” I said. “At least over ten years should have passed, right? I'm surprised that you managed to find this, Touya.”

There was a possibility that this tree stump was something from over twenty or even thirty years ago, but there weren't any other tree stumps that stood out, so it was likely that most tree stumps would finish decaying over about ten years.

“There are things like magical mushrooms that grow on fallen trees just as they start to rot, so maybe decay happens easier and faster as well,” said Natsuki. “After all, it seems like trees here also grow quite fast.”

“Yeah, there are a lot of strange and mysterious things in this different world,” said Yuki. “Inspiel sauce is one of them, for example.”

“Mm, I didn't think there was a sauce that could break down ingredients so fast,” said Haruka.

“Honestly speaking, the fact that it doesn't result in bioterrorism is the strangest thing about it,” said Natsuki.

“Yeah, I feel the same way,” I said. “I'm not sure if something like inspiel

sauce is actually safe for consumption, but I'll still consume it since it tastes delicious." *I guess decay being fast for tree stumps isn't that strange compared to things like inspiel sauce.*

"Now, then, it's about time to start cutting down some trees!" Yuki exclaimed. "We can just start with the one that Haruka touched, right? It looks quite tall, after all."

I looked up at the tree that Yuki was looking at as well, and the canopy of the tree was very high up in the air. The height of the tree didn't really surprise me since I had already seen ridiculously large trees in the form of dindel trees, but it was still a very tall tree. "Just how tall is this tree...?"

I hadn't expected an answer to my words, but I received one from Natsuki who was looking up at the tree as well. "Well, it should be about over thirty meters tall."

"I'm surprised that you can tell that from just looking up at this tree, Natsuki," I said.

"I simply calculated it by making use of trigonometric functions," Natsuki replied. "I'll need actual measurement devices for an accurate number, but a rough estimate isn't that hard to do."

"Oh right, you can roughly tell what the height is even without calculating it by simply looking up at the tree from forty-five degrees." Yuki clapped her hands together once she understood Natsuki's explanation and jumped away from the tree while looking up at it. She eventually stopped at an area that was thirty meters away from the tree and nodded to herself. "We should probably cut down the tree in this direction! It won't bump into any of the other trees if we succeed at this!"

"Uh, Yuki, amateurs like us are the ones that are going to cut down this tree, so I don't think we'll be able to pull it off," I said.

Calculating what direction to cut down a tree was important for not damaging it, but the area that Yuki wanted us to aim for had some narrow gaps of space that were only about five meters apart from each other. With that in mind, there wasn't much space there for cutting down a tree that had a diameter of two meters, and being slightly off in terms of the angle would be enough for the

tree to collapse into other trees.

“Well, it seems like this tree will hit other trees for sure if we try to cut it in a different direction,” said Natsuki. “It’s quite dangerous for a tree to stop in the air while leaning on another tree, especially if it falls to the ground when we approach it, so...”

“Hmm. We have a pulley with us this time, so I think it should work out,” said Yuki.

“I guess it might work if we tie a rope to the tree and pull it by using the pulley,” I said.

We had prepared a pulley by making use of the knowledge that we had obtained from our previous attempt at harvesting wood. Tomi had made it for us after we had placed an order for it, and the purpose of the pulley was to allow us to safely pull a tree. It was a method that I had seen before online in a video of cutting trees, so I wanted to believe that it was an effective method. Luckily for us, it wouldn’t be that hard for me or Haruka to climb up in order to tie some rope to the top of a tree.

“Well, let’s just give it a try first and call it a success as long as a tree doesn’t fall on us. After all, it’d be pointless if we forced ourselves and caused an accident,” said Haruka. “Touya, what should we be careful about when cutting down trees?”

“Right, it’ll be different from our previous attempt, since this tree is much larger and taller. Uh, the first thing we need to do is to cut a notch on the side that we want the tree to fall in,” said Touya. “After that, we need to make the felling cut from the other side at slightly above where the notch was, and then we need to properly check our surroundings before we insert a wedge to use for felling the tree. We should also shout that the tree is going to fall down before we cut it, and that should be it.”

“Mm, it’ll actually be important to shout out a warning,” said Haruka. “After all, anyone could easily die from being crushed underneath a tree this large.”

“Yeah, this tree definitely seems like it’s very heavy,” I said.

The threat of a heavy tree falling on you was probably similar to something

like a sumo wrestler pressing down on you with his body from dozens of meters above in the air, but a tree was probably worse since trees were harder than sumo wrestlers. Surviving being crushed by a tree with just bone fractures would be considered lucky, and death was the other potential result if you weren't lucky. Our physical abilities had improved a lot compared to our previous bodies back on Earth, but I wasn't brave enough to test the durability of my body in this world.

"Eh, I'm pretty sure the main issue is going to be the thickness of the tree," said Touya. "Can we really cut through this with an axe?"

Touya took out an axe and tried to strike the trunk of the tree with it, but it looked much weaker compared to the tree. His axe was much larger than the ones that the rest of us had, but the blade of the axe was still only about thirty centimeters, so Touya could probably only chip away at the tree instead of being able to cut through it.

"How are you supposed to cut down a tree this large back on Earth in modern times?" Yuki asked.

"Uh, I remember a video before where a giant chainsaw about as long as my height was used to cut down trees," I said.

"That information isn't of much use to us," said Haruka.

"Can't you try to make a chainsaw, Haruka?" I asked.

"You mean as a magical device, right? Well, it's not impossible if I spend time on research, but I'm not too keen on this idea," Haruka replied.

"What about that giant saw with a really large blade?" Touya asked.

Touya drew a simple diagram to explain what he was talking about, and Haruka nodded at first once she saw it before she shook her head. "You're talking about frame saws, right? Frame saws have large jagged teeth, but only the tips are sharp."

According to Haruka, frame saw blades had jagged teeth for the purpose of making it easier to get rid of sawdust. In addition, it seemed like frame saws were mostly used for converting logs into lumber, so they weren't actually used for cutting down trees.

“What about the kind of saw that two people can pull on from opposite sides?” Natsuki asked.

“We didn’t purchase that kind of saw,” I said.

“Mm, we thought axes would be enough,” said Haruka.

We had thought that one tree wouldn’t be too hard to cut down, but there were many trees here that were all much larger than we had imagined them to be.

“Cutting down one of the trees here is tough enough, but more than one would be so exhausting,” I said. “Right, Touya?”

“Using just an axe to cut down trees will probably take a lot of time, so it’s not going to be an easy task,” said Haruka. “Right, Touya?”

“Doing this by yourself would definitely make your muscles sore and cause muscle pain,” said Natsuki. “Right, Touya-kun?”

“He has a lot of muscular power from his regular training, so I’m sure he’ll do his best,” said Yuki. “Right, Touya?”

“I can’t believe you’re all on the same page about making me do this!” Touya exclaimed. “Sure, I’m the best person for swinging an axe in this party, but can’t the rest of you help me out by using your brains for magic?!”

Touya had fiercely objected to our attempts to casually place all of the burden on him. He had cut down a tree by himself without complaining at all during our previous attempt, but it seemed like this large tree was too much for him.

“Oh, come on, it’s your time to shine,” said Yuki. “Didn’t you say that you were willing to work hard, Touya?”

“Yeah, but there’s a limit to that! My muscles aren’t invincible!” Touya exclaimed. “They were quite sore the next day after I cut down a tree during our previous attempt at harvesting wood!”

“Relax, you’ll be fine! Nice bulk! Peak muscles!” I exclaimed. “Your enormous pecs are great, your shoulders are like a mountain, and your biceps are bursting with energy! You’re absolutely ripped, so feel confident in your ability to rip through things, ha ha!”

“That makes no sense at all!” Touya exclaimed. “Also, stop trying to bait me by half-heartedly cheering me on!”

Uh, I’m actually somewhat serious about this, Touya. Strong looking muscles are something that I can’t seem to get, after all. I’ve trained as much as you have, but my body has nothing to show for it in terms of muscles. It’s not like I want to become super muscular, but the idea of becoming a slim muscular guy sounds kind of nice to me.

“Just to make sure, Nao, do you think you can make me do anything like climbing trees by flattering me?” Touya asked.

“I’d rather have you cut trees than climb them,” I replied. “I’ll climb up trees instead for the sake of tying rope.”

“Is that supposed to be some kind of joke? Whatever, I guess,” said Touya. “So, what’s the plan? Are we going to try cutting down trees with magic or not?”

“Magic, huh? I’ve given this some thought since we talked about this before, but I’m not sure,” I said. “What about you, Yuki?”

I asked Yuki for her opinion since I was curious, and she looked quite surprised as she pointed at herself in response. “Huh? Me? Well, I tried before, but it doesn’t seem possible, so...”

Everyone aside from Touya in our party could use magic, and all of us had continued to train our individual magic, but Fire Magic was our main source of damage for combat. Fire Magic had the strongest spells in terms of raw potency, and we hadn’t encountered any monsters that had an innate resistance to Fire Magic yet. As a result, there had been no reason for us to use other types of magic in combat, but undead monsters were an exception. We had only fought undead monsters a few times so far, but the Purification spell was capable of vanquishing them, so it was the optimal spell to use against undead monsters and better than Fire Magic for this purpose. As for the other types of magic, all of them had been more useful for our daily lives instead of combat. It was all thanks to magic that we had been able to take baths, stay clean, not worry about the cold, and avoid being soaked wet by the rain. There was nothing flashy about this usage of magic, but it had played a very important

role.

“We had talked about using spells such as Water Blast and Sand Blast, right?” Natsuki asked. “How effective are they, Yuki?”

“Well, just to be clear, Water Blast is a spell that’s even weaker than a pressure washer by default.” Yuki held up her index finger and moved it very close to the trunk of the tree. “I’ll try my best to increase the pressure of the water, but don’t expect much. *Water Blast!*”

Water gushed out from the tip of Yuki’s index finger and drilled into the trunk of the tree. She then slowly moved her finger away, but...

“It looks like the spell only managed to chip away at the outer bark of the tree trunk,” said Haruka.

“I’m not sure if anyone here already knows this, but it seems like pressure washers can sometimes be used to shave off the bark from wood,” said Touya.

“Can’t you do better than this, Yuki?” I asked. “Try doing something like keeping the amount of water the same while squeezing it or something for more pressure.”

“Nah, I can’t! This is as much as I can do!” Yuki exclaimed. “Or rather, I’m at my limits for mana! No more!”

Yuki stopped the water from her finger and breathed a sigh of relief before she wiped some sweat off her forehead. I checked the section of the tree that Yuki had used her magic on, and Haruka was right about how only the outer bark had been chipped away. With that in mind, it was pointless to use the Water Blast spell for this purpose because you could easily chip off the outer bark of a tree by using an axe instead.

“The Water Blast spell would actually be a bit useful if it could chip away at the trunk of a tree, but...”

“Hmph! In that case, prove it, Nao! Give it a try yourself!”

“Oh, are you telling me to show the difference in prowess between you and me for our all-rounder skill builds, Yuki? Well, I guess I have no choice but to do so!”

“You don’t sound reluctant about this at all! Does this mean you have an idea for success? Ugh...”

Yuki seemed a bit frustrated as she stamped the ground with her feet, and I patted her on her head in response. “Hee hee! Heroes always arrive late, Yuki!”

“Are you saying that I’m just a side character that exists for you to shine?!” Yuki exclaimed. “Was it really my role to use so much mana to emphasize the difference in our abilities?!”

“Uh, well, I thought you managed to create a spell that could easily cut through things, so...”

“You don’t sound like you believed in me at all, Nao! I’m going to laugh at you if your spell turns out to be weak!”

“Sure, you can see for yourself. Gaze upon the results of my hard work!”

The spell I had created was a mix of the Water Blast and Sand Blast spells. I had been fairly sure that abrasives would be effective, since they were used in water jet cutting back on Earth in the modern day, so I had worked really hard to replicate it. I moved my index finger to the same spot that Yuki had moved hers to before I used my new spell, and the spell cut into the trunk of the tree with ease.

“What do you think, Yuki?” I asked.

I was grinning as I turned around and saw a look of frustration on Yuki’s face, but Haruka approached the tree to check my results and chuckled in an awkward way. “Um, it looks like your spell only managed to cut into the tree by about three centimeters, Nao.”

“Huh? That’s strange,” I said. “I swear that I managed to cut deeper when I tested this back at our house, so...”

It was obvious that there was no way I could possibly pull off a new spell on my first try, so I had practiced a few times before on some logs of wood, and my new spell had been able to cut through logs that had a diameter of about twenty centimeters during my practice sessions. With that in mind, I had been fairly confident about my success at creating a decently useful spell, but...

“Maybe it’s because the tree here is precious wood,” said Natsuki. “Precious wood is harder than normal wood, after all.”

“Oh, that could be it,” I said. “I guess that means I’m not at fault, so...”

“Your spell is incomplete, just like your skill build, Nao!” Yuki exclaimed. “I can’t laugh or praise your spell since it’s incomplete! Did you really think you could get some laughs out of me with this?!”

“That wasn’t my goal at all, Yuki! Also, I actually managed to cut through the trunk of the tree with my spell,” I said. “There’s a possibility that I could cut deeper if I tried harder, you know? Well, I’ll probably run out of mana first, but yeah.” *I’m fairly sure that it would take me a few days to cut down this tree with my magic...*

“That doesn’t sound like a very good option at all!” Yuki exclaimed. “Besides, we need to avoid running out of mana as mages!”

“Yuki’s completely right about this,” said Natsuki. “Your Fire Magic is very important for dealing damage, Nao-kun.”

“Mm, exactly,” said Haruka. “We can encounter dangerous monsters here, so we definitely need your magic to be available if needed. Let’s just try to cut down this tree with axes and saws.”

Haruka turned around and looked at Touya once she had finished her words, but I had something that I wanted to bring up. “What you said is true and all, but shouldn’t you also give it a try with your magic first, Haruka?”

We had discussed the use of magic for cutting trees, so that meant it was likely that Haruka had practiced the Air Cutter spell a bit based on her personality. However, the fact that she hadn’t volunteered to show it indicated that she probably hadn’t been successful with it.

I wanted Haruka to be a part of this as well, so I glanced at Yuki for backup, and she nodded in response as if she had received my message. “Yeah, it’s not fair that only Nao and I have given this a try. Show us your magic, Haruka!”

It seemed like Haruka was aware of our intentions, as she sighed out of exasperation and raised her hands. “I don’t really see any point in showing failure, but fine. It’s a bit dangerous, so stand away a bit. *Air Cutter!*”

I hadn't been able to see anything with my eyes after Haruka had used her spell, but a cut had appeared on the trunk of the tree, and Touya seemed quite surprised as he blinked multiple times after he saw it. "Yikes, this really is a dangerous spell. It was really fast, and I couldn't see anything. I'm pretty sure that I wouldn't have been able to dodge this if a foe used it against me."

"You can somewhat see it if you can feel mana," said Haruka. "More importantly, what's the result?"

"Uh, it looks like it's about one centimeter," I said.

The width of the cut I had created with my spell was about five millimeters, but the cut from Haruka's spell had a width of less than one millimeter, and it wasn't really possible to properly estimate the depth of the cut by eye. I had picked up some leaves on the ground instead to stuff into the cut for measurement, and one centimeter seemed to be as far as the leaves could reach.

"I figured as much. It might change in the future with more practice, but cutting trees normally is a more efficient method for us at the moment," said Haruka. "We're counting on you, Touya."

"Well, I can't say no after seeing that you've all tried and worked hard with magic," said Touya. "All right, time to do this!"

Touya rolled his shoulders for a bit before he pumped himself up and held the axe in his hands high up in the air to prepare for lumberjack work.

Touya hummed a famous lumberjack song as he swung his axe. He didn't have very much experience cutting down trees, but he already looked like he was quite good at it—probably more because of his raw strength than any real expertise, but regardless, I could never have pulled it off, so it was actually kind of fun watching him chip away at the trunk of the tree.

"Your strength is impressive as always, Touya," I said.

"I mean, that's what I'm the best at." Touya stopped chopping away at the tree and wiped the sweat from his brow. "Okay, this should be fine for the notch, right?"

"Apparently the notch should normally be at least one third of the tree's

diameter, so it looks fine to me,” I replied.

“Good to know. In that case, the next thing to do is to work on the other side,” said Touya. “Oh, by the way, does anyone want to trade places with me? I could use some rest.” Looking exhausted, he planted his axe on the ground and leaned on the handle as he looked at the rest of us. He was right that it would be a good idea for someone else to step in, but...

“Well, I don’t think I’ll be able to perform as well as you have, Touya,” I said.

“Don’t you have the Enhanced Muscles skill too, Nao?” Touya asked. “You shouldn’t have any trouble swinging an axe, right?”

“I mean, yeah, I can do it, but I’d have to spend a lot of mana to get decent results,” I replied.

My Enhanced Muscles skill was actually Level 2 now, but it increased your physical abilities by burning through your mana. Touya wasn’t a mage, so he wouldn’t ordinarily expend a lot of mana, which meant that his natural mana regeneration was more or less enough to cancel out the skill’s mana consumption. However, it was different for the rest of us. We were all mages, and emptying our mana pools would drastically hinder our ability to handle combat. It wouldn’t be as bad for Haruka, who had the Enhanced Mana Capacity skill, but she was also the weakest member of our party physically, so she wasn’t suited for lumberjack work. With all of that in mind, Natsuki was probably the next best choice due to the fact that she was the second-strongest person among us, besides which she was capable of combat even without using magic, but...

“Hmm, me? Well, I suppose it’s true that I’m the next best suited for lumberjack work,” said Natsuki.

I had glanced briefly at Natsuki, and she must have noticed, since she nodded in response, but Yuki started to scold me playfully. “Really, Nao? Are you actually trying to make a girl do hard physical labor?”

“I’m a feminist, Yuki,” I replied. “And by that, I mean in the proper sense of the word.”

True equality would entail individuals doing what they were best at regardless

of their gender. Anyway, I was absolutely sure that Haruka was the only person in my party who was weaker than me.

“We girls are the ones who do all the cooking, though,” said Yuki.

I couldn’t really refute that point. “Ugh. I mean, I’m willing to try if I have to, but I doubt I’ll be able to make good meals...” I wanted to avoid cooking if I reasonably could. I preferred the idea of eating delicious meals.

“Don’t worry about it, Nao,” said Haruka. “I don’t want to eat bad-tasting meals either, and it’s honestly not that much work now that we have a pantry for storing food.”

“Mm, we can just prepare meals ahead of time whenever we’re free and then store them in the pantry,” said Natsuki.

Our pantry was actually just a box with the same enchantment as a magic bag. It was very convenient for us. It could preserve food much better than a fridge, and we could also keep both hot and cold food inside that were ready for consumption the moment we took them out. As a result, even Touya and I could easily prepare meals.

“Haruka and Natsuki have also been doing all of the cleaning and laundry,” said Yuki.

“I mean, that’s a different story,” I said. “You haven’t been helping out in those areas either, have you, Yuki?”

I was more than willing to pitch in with regular cleaning work, but Haruka and Natsuki didn’t actually need anyone else’s help; the Purification spell was all it took to deal with cleaning and laundry. I’d started practicing Light Magic myself so I could contribute to that kind of work, but other types of magic were more important for me, so it was going to take a while before my efforts would bear fruit. On the other hand, Yuki couldn’t use Light Magic even if she practiced because she didn’t have the relevant aptitude skill, so that was one clear advantage that I had over her. *Ha ha ha!*

“Well, feel free to voice any complaints that you might have,” I said.

I glanced at Haruka and Natsuki, but Haruka simply shrugged. “Nothing comes to mind at the moment. It’s not like you idle around or drink all day, and you

haven't slacked off on training either. You've been thoughtful and considerate to us, so..."

"Mm. In fact, we've been living together for quite a while, but it's worked out fine so far," said Natsuki.

"Yeah, that's true," I said. "We haven't run into any major issues."

Initially, we hadn't had the luxury of complaining about our living conditions, and we were already good friends when we moved in together, but even so, it was noteworthy that we hadn't encountered any real problems even though we'd all lived separately back in Japan. In our past lives, Haruka and I had been close enough that we'd casually visit each other's houses, but I was fairly sure that the other three people in our party had very different lifestyles and standards.

But in spite of that fact, there hadn't been any real conflicts between us. We didn't always agree about everything, but we usually resolved our disagreements by talking and arriving at a conclusion that satisfied all of us, so our daily lives had been perfectly fine.

"I've heard a lot of stories about things not going well for people who live together in shared houses," I said. "I gotta say, we're really lucky that we managed to group up."

"Mm, I feel the same way," said Haruka. "We're in really unusual circumstances, so the only way we can trust people is if we're willing to work hard alongside them."

"In that case, I suppose I'll work hard at felling the tree," said Natsuki. "After all, Nao-kun must already be working hard to look out for the rest of us with his Scout skill."

"Oh, how did you notice, Natsuki?" I asked.

"The way your eyes move gave it away," Natsuki replied. "Is there anything that we might need to be careful of, Nao-kun?"

My Scout skill didn't grant me enhanced vision, but if I was paying attention, it would prompt me to look in the direction of any signals it detected, which was probably how Natsuki had noticed that I was using it.

“So far, nothing’s really come within the range of my Scout skill,” I said.

It had been the same during our previous attempt at chopping down a tree. Apparently monsters wouldn’t approach us even if we were making noise with our axe. My Scout skill had a very long range, so I could detect some monsters in the area, but their movement patterns hadn’t changed much in the time I’d been monitoring them; some of them had actually started to move farther away from us. However, that was all I could tell with my Scout skill, so I wasn’t sure if our lumberjack activities would eventually have a different effect on the monsters. I was a bit concerned about that possibility, so I wanted to focus as intently as possible on using my Scout skill.

“I see. Don’t let your guard down, Nao-kun,” said Natsuki.

“Of course. Feel free to chop away without any worries,” I said.

“Mm. I’ll do my best without forcing myself to overdo it,” said Natsuki.

“I’ll take over before you start to feel too tired, Natsuki,” said Yuki.



About an hour had passed since Natsuki swapped out with Yuki. Touya, who’d had enough time to recover, had resumed swinging his axe, but now he stopped and looked up at the tree. “Hmm. I think that we’re getting close to the danger zone.”

I saw Touya’s ears twitch, so I listened carefully, and my ears picked up the sounds of the wind along some snapping noises as it blew through the branches of the tree.

“Hmm, okay,” said Haruka. “Touya, we’re leaving the task of inserting the wedges to you. The rest of us will pull the rope.”

“Gotcha! You can count on me!” Touya exclaimed.

We had tied some rope near the top of the tree. The other end was tied to a pulley situated in the direction where we wanted the tree to fall. When the four of us pulled on the rope, the top of the tree started to bend and we heard some creaking sounds. Touya inserted a few wedges into the felling cuts that we’d made in the tree and smashed them in with a mallet. The sound of the blows

echoed through the air, and it felt like the tree was slowly tilting down, but...

“Hmm, I don’t think we can pull this off,” I said.

“Apparently not,” said Natsuki. “As of right now, at least, we don’t seem to be strong enough.”

“Even if we were strong enough, that rope seems like it might break,” said Yuki.

The rope we were using was the same one we had purchased to use as a lifeline while climbing dindel trees, and it was very sturdy, but it wasn’t as tough as a wire rope. We could pull on it to tilt the tree in the direction that we wanted it to fall toward, but we weren’t strong enough to pull down the tree by main force.

“I wonder if we should have cut deeper into the trunk,” said Haruka.

“Yeah! Maybe!” Touya exclaimed. “Ugh, no good. All of the wedges have sunk in.”

Touya stopped hammering away at the wedges and pointed at the ones that had sunk into the trunk. I wasn’t sure if it was because the wedges were the wrong size for the tree or if we didn’t know how to use them properly, but one way or another, we couldn’t pound them in any farther.

“Maybe we should have talked to a professional lumberjack beforehand,” I said.

“I think we can solve this problem with brute force,” said Touya. “It seems like we’re really close...”

“Mm. Let’s give it a push with magic,” said Haruka. “Any updates on the movements of our foes, Nao?”

“They’re slowly starting to gather up,” I said. “It doesn’t seem like they’re going to attack us anytime soon, but still.”

My Scout skill had actually detected the signals of foes that were slowly moving to surround us soon after Natsuki had started to swing the axe. The signals didn’t seem very strong, but there were a lot of them, and their movements seemed disciplined and orderly. Our conclusion was that they were

probably the scalp apes, which we hadn't encountered yet. Part of the reason that Haruka and I hadn't participated in the lumberjack work was the fact that we weren't physically fit, but we were also conserving our mana in case we needed it to deal with the apes.

"I think it'd be best for you to save your mana, Nao," said Haruka. "I'll try blasting the tree with my magic, and you go help with pulling the rope, Touya."

"Okay. Nao, go with Haruka and guard her," said Touya. "I can make up for the two of you in terms of physical strength."

"I guess you're right about that," I said. "All right, I'm counting on you, Touya."

Haruka and I swapped positions with Touya, and when he began pulling on the rope with Natsuki and Yuki, the tip of the tree started to bend. He'd been completely right about being equal to the two of us together. Once she'd confirmed that the tree was starting to tip, Haruka blasted the cuts with the Air Cutter spell. The cuts were very thin, so it was hard to tell how deep they were, but they must have been effective, because the tree started to tilt more and more as it made louder and louder snapping sounds.

"Do you think it needs one more round, Nao?" Haruka asked.

"Nah, let's take cover," I replied. "We don't know which way the tree's going to fall, after all."

I wasn't too worried, but it was also our first time trying to cut down a tree this large. It was possible that when the tree hit the ground, it would bounce back from the force of the impact, and that would be dangerous for anyone standing nearby. When I brought up those concerns, Haruka nodded, and we moved away from the root of the tree. Once they had confirmed that we were safe, Touya and the others started to pull on the rope more forcefully, and that caused an even larger snapping sound in the air. The bent tree began to tilt down slowly, then collapsed to the ground, and a loud crash vibrated through the air, accompanied by the sound of wood snapping.

"Whew. We somehow managed to fell this tree without suffering any injuries," I said. "It was a lot of hard work..."

There would have been no way to avoid serious injuries if we'd messed up while trying to cut down a tree this large, so I was glad that everything had worked out in the end.

Touya approached me with an exasperated look on his face. "Sorry to interrupt you while you're acting like you just finished a difficult task, but you're the one who contributed the least, Nao."

"Really, now, Touya? I'm the one who climbed to the top of the tree to tie the rope, and I monitored our surroundings with my Scout skill, you know?"

"Yeah, I guess it's true that only you can do both of those things, Nao. However, I wish you'd come up with a spell that made it easier for us to cut down trees!"

"I'll give it my best shot, so look forward to me figuring out a solution. It's something I'm concerned about too, after all."

"I'm counting on you, buddy. Seriously. I really don't want to go through that much hard work every time we cut down a tree if it isn't necessary." Touya looked down at the felled tree and seemed shaken at the thought of all the hard work it had taken, but he quickly recovered and looked up with a smile on his face as he slapped the trunk. "I gotta say, though, this really is a huge tree! No wonder it took so much effort!"

"Yeah, it took us a lot of time too," said Yuki. "I hope it'll be worth it. It'll be really painful if this doesn't sell for a lot of money."

Touya had started chopping away at the tree in the morning, and we had paused for a lunch break, so it was currently about three o'clock in the afternoon. There was still work left to be done after this, so felling a single tree effectively took an entire day. The wood from a tree this large was probably quite valuable, but I wasn't sure if this was an efficient method of earning money.

Now was not the time to worry, though.

"It seems we don't have the time to reflect on our accomplishment," I said. "A group of foes is rapidly approaching us! Get ready for combat!"

"Damn it!" Touya exclaimed. "I knew this was coming, but man, we really

can't catch a break, huh?"

I already had my weapon in my hands, but the others weren't yet prepared. As Touya groused about the sudden turn of events, he reached for his weapon, and the girls swiftly followed suit.

We hadn't been waiting long when our foes appeared ahead of us. The best way I could describe the scalp apes was to say that they looked like stylish gorillas. They were slimmer than the gorillas I had seen in zoos back on Earth, and they also looked quite different from a typical chimpanzee. In fact, the scalp apes seemed like what gorillas would look like if they worked out and bulked up. Their fur was a darkish brown, which was another clear difference between them and normal gorillas.

The scalp apes were approaching us in a group of five, slowly trying to surround us. They all had what looked like wooden clubs in their hands that they seemed to have crafted themselves, so they must have been at least somewhat intelligent.

"Hey, I don't know if you guys already know this, but apparently gorillas have a grip strength of about five hundred kilograms," said Touya.

"These stylish gorillas must be at least that strong or even stronger," I said.

I'd responded offhandedly to that random bit of trivia from Touya, and suddenly, I heard some laughter from beside me.



“Nao, don’t make us laugh right now!” Haruka exclaimed. “We’ll lose focus if we do, you know?”

“Hee hee. W-Well, they definitely look dangerous,” said Natsuki. “We need to make sure that they don’t grab us.”

“Yeah, they definitely look like they can crush our bones with ease,” said Yuki. “Okay, I think we’ve managed to relax in a good way, so I’m going to take the first shot!”

The battle started with a Fire Arrow from Yuki, which she aimed at the scalp ape closest to us. The ape tried to swing its club at the Fire Arrow, but the flames blasted off its right arm and its head. Haruka followed up on Yuki’s attack with a volley of arrows. They weren’t as flashy as Yuki’s magic arrows, but they dealt swift death to an ape that was trying to approach us from behind; Haruka had sniped it right in the head.

The remaining scalp apes froze in their tracks for a moment, as if they were shocked by the fact that they had instantly lost two of their troop, but they recovered right away and started to yell loudly enough that the sound echoed through the forest. In that instant, there was a change in the movements of the scalp apes that I could detect farther away. They instantly closed the distance between our locations, but I couldn’t see them with my naked eyes. *Oh, they’re in the treetops!*

“Natsuki, Touya, take care of the scalp apes on the ground!” I exclaimed. “Haruka, Yuki, aim for the apes in the treetops!”

Everyone else replied in unison with an “Okay!” and I counted on them to deal with the nearby foes as I searched for hostile signals to the limit of my Scout skill’s range. At the same time, I used the mana I had been storing up to slay the foes that were trying to approach Touya and Natsuki from their blind spots. I didn’t hold back at all and shot a continuous volley of Fire Arrows at the scalp apes, but it was hard to land clean hits, since they were more agile than orcs and were also capable of outmaneuvering us in three dimensions by scaling the trees.

“Oh, sorry, I messed up!” Yuki exclaimed.

A scalp ape that Yuki had shot with a Fire Arrow fell from the treetops, but half of its left arm was intact. After bouncing off the ground, it got right back up and tried to run away, but it fell down for good when Haruka put an arrow in it.

“Sorry, and thanks!”

Haruka smiled and gently shook her head. “Don’t worry about it, Yuki. It’s only natural for us to help each other out.”

“What about the two of you, Touya, Natsuki?” I asked. “Oh, things look fine for now.”

“Mm. The scalp apes are fast, but they’re easy to deal with. I can easily reach them, since they’re smaller than orcs,” said Natsuki. Even while she replied, she was running her spear through a scalp ape.

Meanwhile, Touya seemed to be avoiding head-on clashes and making quick work of the scalp apes by dodging their attacks and slashing them.

“This might actually be good practice for fighting against humanoid foes!” Touya exclaimed. “They’re pretty similar in size to regular humans!”

“I hope this’ll continue to be easy enough that you can treat it as practice,” I said. “Yuki, two scalp apes are coming from the bushes!”

“Okay! Leave one to me!” Yuki exclaimed.

Our magic couldn’t keep up with the number of reinforcements. Yuki stood in front of me with her kodachi while I wielded my spear to protect Haruka, who was behind me. Being partially hidden behind Yuki was somewhat awkward, but it was the best position for me, since I had a long weapon.

Two scalp apes jumped out of the bushes at about the same time, and the three of us attacked them at about the same time. Yuki circled around the right side of one ape and slit its neck with her kodachi. I aimed for the other ape’s heart with my spear. A heavy sensation followed as the tip of my spear pierced almost all the way through its body, and the strength seemed to drain out of it as it slid off my spear onto the ground, so I must have successfully pierced its heart. Meanwhile, blood was gushing out of the wound that Yuki had dealt the other scalp ape, but it was still moving. It would probably die eventually if we left it alone, but that wasn’t an option.

“Yuki, three more scalp apes inbound!” I exclaimed.

“Huh?!” Yuki looked a bit troubled, but she quickly seemed to resolve herself to being covered in blood. “Fine, I’ll do it!”

However, before she could move, an arrow flew from behind her and finished off the injured scalp ape on the ground.

“Thanks again, Haruka!” Yuki exclaimed.

“Focus on the scalp apes that are coming, Yuki!” Haruka exclaimed.

Three more scalp apes appeared from the bushes, which matched what my Scout skill had detected ahead of time. Four more scalp apes appeared near Natsuki and Touya, and five were approaching us from the treetops. They weren’t that intimidating individually, but they had strength in numbers. I used my spear to hold back a scalp ape before I slew it with a Fire Arrow, and out of the corner of my eye, I saw Haruka unsheathe her own kodachi. I was about to deal with another one when I noticed some unusual movements from one scalp ape. It picked up a rock in its hands and threw it straight up into the air. The rock rose to the level of the treetops, where another scalp ape caught it and swung it toward us.

“Seriously?!” *It’s coming at us as fast as a baseball in a batting cage!*

The rock was hurtling toward Haruka, and I couldn’t warn her in time, so I forcefully swapped positions with her. Some signs of anxiousness slipped out from Haruka in response to my sudden movement, but she swiftly adjusted to the situation and slashed the scalp ape in front of her with her kodachi while I took the flying rock in her place. A loud thwack echoed through the air, and dull pain shot from the palms of my hands and up my arms.

“Ouch!” I exclaimed.

Haruka finished off the scalp ape in front of her, and then, when she realized what I’d done, said, “Oh, thanks, Nao!”

I waved my hands at her and shook my head in response. “D-Don’t worry about it. I just wish I had a pitcher’s glove...”

I was wearing leather gloves, but they lacked the cushioning of a pitcher’s

glove. We had become capable of dodging thrown rocks as long as we noticed them and could probably catch them easily enough, but the possibility of rocks being thrown at us from behind during combat was quite dangerous. On top of that, the squeaking sounds that the scalp apes were making sounded like they were laughing at us, and it was quite irritating to hear.

“Long-range attacks are kinda annoying to deal with,” I said. “Have a taste of your own medicine!”

I clenched the rock in my right hand before I swung it to serve the rock back at the scalp ape that threw it, and an idea came to mind during this, so I used the Heavy Weight spell on the rock right as it flew out from my hand. It was an experiment, but a sharp sound echoed through the air before the rock slammed into the face of the scalp ape and caused its brain fluids to scatter behind it.

“Whoa, this is quite impressive...”

My improved physical abilities combined with a good pitching form and the Heavy Weight spell had led to a very powerful attack. It seemed like throwing stones had killed more people than swords had during wars in the past, and I was willing to believe this based on the sight in front of me. *Actually, perhaps this isn't a fair comparison, since I can use magic and have better physical abilities. Something feels weird about this, though. Hmm...*

“Nao, help!” Yuki exclaimed. “More reinforcements have arrived!”

“Oh, sorry!” I replied.

Haruka and Yuki were dealing with four scalp apes by themselves, and I joined them after I received a request for help from Yuki. I held up my spear once again and attacked the nearby scalp ape while I shot a Fireball at the scalp ape that had picked up a rock earlier in order to distract it. Fireball was a Level 3 spell that was flashy and would create a huge explosion upon impact, but the Fire Arrow spell was actually more powerful with the same amount of mana used. However, the Fireball spell was better for distraction purposes and for dealing with large numbers of weak enemies. The flashy explosion and the large sound it made caused fear among the scalp apes near us, and we took advantage of that to swiftly deal with them. However, there were still seven scalp apes left in the vicinity. I wanted some time to rest, but it seemed like

there were still more reinforcements that we had to deal with.

“Did we make a tactical mistake? It might have been better if we’d taken the initiative to attack the scalp apes instead of waiting for them to attack us,” I said.

“There’s no point regretting our past decision!” Haruka exclaimed. “Also, these might end up as wasted shots, but let’s barrage the scalp apes with magic!”

Haruka barraged the scalp apes with multiple Fire Arrows at the same time even though each one was less accurate and weaker through this method, and I followed her example as I barraged the scalp apes with my own Fire Arrows, but it only resulted in an increased number of wounded scalp apes due to the arrows not being strong enough to finish them off. I tried to finish off some wounded scalp apes with my spear as I used my magic, but I wasn’t able to slay all of them, and one scalp ape managed to slip past me as it dashed in Haruka’s direction.

“No!”

Haruka had just used her magic and probably couldn’t react, so I instantly reached out at the scalp ape with my left arm, but that was a mistake. The scalp ape grabbed my left arm after I held it out, and a crushing sound echoed through the air after I hastily tried to shake off the scalp ape. However, I managed to restrain myself from moaning out of pain and instinctively took a step forward. *Thanks, Natsuki! I wouldn’t have been able to do this if you didn’t teach me the Martial Arts skill!* I smashed my elbow into the nose of the scalp ape that looked like it was smirking at me, and it seemed effective, as the scalp ape’s grip on my arm loosened a bit with a cracking sound, so I forcefully freed my arm and thrust my spear at the scalp ape even though my posture wasn’t perfect for it. The attack with my spear didn’t deal that much damage, but it was enough to make it take a step back, so I swiftly extended my hands at the scalp ape for my next move.

“Fire Arrow!”

The potency of my Fire Arrow was about less than half of the ones that I had used against orcs because I prioritized speed instead of potency, but it was

enough to end the life of the scalp ape, since the Fire Arrow was shot from point-blank range.

“Nao, don’t force yourself to attempt reckless actions!” Haruka exclaimed. “I can deal with scalp apes myself, even if some slip past you!”

“Oh, sorry about this, Haruka,” I replied. “In that case, I’m counting on you.”

“Mm!”

Haruka held up her weapon as she lined up next to me, and I tried to properly hold my spear as well, but I felt a dull pain in my left arm. Both arms were needed to properly hold and use a spear, so I probably couldn’t use my spear to its full potential in my current condition.

“Man, I probably should have ordered a kodachi as well for emergency use,” I said.

It was still possible to use my spear with one hand to a certain extent, but it would be difficult for me to deal with combat at point-blank range. I had heard before that spears were difficult to wield at close range, and it was clear that this was even worse for combat against multiple enemies, as it was very difficult to maintain the best distance for using spears.

“Well, it’s not an issue if I mainly use magic instead, but still,” I said.

Haruka and I barraged the nearby scalp apes with our magic and sniped the ones far from us to kill them in one blow as we slowly whittled down the number of our foes. It seemed like no additional scalp apes were going to appear in Yuki’s direction, and it was probably fine to leave her as is, since she was only a bit tired and not injured at all. On the other hand, it seemed like a few more reinforcements were going to appear near Touya and Natsuki.

“All right, I guess I’ll have to work hard for a bit longer!” I exclaimed.

I endured the pain from my left arm as I pumped myself up and dashed toward Touya and Natsuki to help them out.

★★★★★★★★

The total number of scalp apes that we had slain ended up being thirty-eight. There were a lot of corpses in our vicinity, and we didn’t have the luxury of

slaying the scalp apes cleanly, so there was a nasty smell in the air that was a mix of blood and the liquids that had escaped from the internal organs of the scalp apes. It was a very gruesome scene to be in.

“Whew,” said Touya. “There were way too many of these scalp apes...”

“Yeah, for sure,” I said. “What do these apes feed on...?”

The group of scalp apes that we had fought was quite numerous, and each one of them had been quite big as well. Common sense wouldn’t always apply to monsters, but I was curious if it had actually been possible for these scalp apes to survive by just hunting other living beings for food. I had no idea about what was considered a normal population for scalp apes, however.

“Gorillas can consume about thirty kilos of vegetation, but I’m not sure if scalp apes are herbivores or carnivores,” said Natsuki. “Or rather, do monsters actually have diets that match their physique?”

“It seems like there hasn’t been much progress for research about this topic,” said Yuki. “The reason for this seems to be because people can’t afford the money for it, and monsters are also more ferocious than animals. We might be able to find out for ourselves if we investigate the stomachs and intestines of these scalp apes, though.”

“I’m somewhat curious as well, but I’m not too keen about that idea,” said Haruka. “More importantly, Nao, you got injured, right?”

“Yeah, my left arm hurts a bit,” I said. “Can you heal me?”

I grimaced as I held up my left arm when Haruka approached me with a worried look on her face. It was actually very painful, and I was fairly sure that some of my bones were broken, but I was lucky that none of my bones had been smashed to pieces.

“I’ll take care of this,” said Natsuki. “After all, I didn’t use magic during combat.”

Natsuki held my left arm and used the Cure spell on it, and then the stinging pain that I felt in my left arm instantly faded away. *Whew, magic really is amazing.*

“Thanks, Natsuki,” I said.

“No problem, Nao-kun,” Natsuki replied.

Natsuki smiled at me before she turned around and healed Touya as well. Touya had some bruises on his body due to the fact that he had been constantly fighting on the front line, but it seemed like thanks to his armor, he hadn’t suffered any serious injuries.

“Now, then, let’s retrieve the magicites first,” I said. “How much are the magicites from scalp apes worth?”

“If I recall correctly, they’re worth twelve hundred Rea each,” Touya replied. “By the way, only their magicites are worth money.”

“That’s depressing to know,” I said. “It’s even less than half of what magicites from orcs are worth, huh?”

Each scalp ape was individually weaker than an orc, but scalp apes were also dangerous if they attacked as a large group. We had been ready for the scalp apes and managed to survive their onslaught, but one of us would have probably suffered a serious injury if the scalp apes managed to catch us by surprise and attacked us from all sides at the same time. I had technically suffered a serious injury myself in terms of my left arm, but Light Magic ended up being capable of healing it.

“All that hard work for nothing but magicites? Well, I guess there are a lot of these scalp apes,” said Yuki. “The total should add up to about 45,600 Rea, I think.”

“We had to ‘bust’ an arm for this, but it doesn’t feel like it was worth it at all,” said Haruka.

Haruka glanced at my left arm as she commented on our potential earnings, and it was true that this wasn’t that much money at all, since we could earn more from just two orcs, but my injury was a result of my own careless mistake. *I’d appreciate it if you stop talking about my arm, Haruka. Just let it slide, okay?*

“All right, let’s split up to retrieve the magicites,” I said. “It’ll be a bit of a hassle, but it would be a waste not to, so...”

“Yeah, it’s still a bit over one gold coin per scalp ape,” said Touya. “What should we do about the corpses? Can we just leave them alone?”

I looked around at the corpses of the dead scalp apes that were scattered everywhere in the vicinity. Carnivores that lived in the forest would take care of corpses if it was just a few, but...

“There’s probably about a total of two to three metric tons of meat here, so I don’t know if the animals in this forest can actually eat all of that,” said Yuki. “The meat probably doesn’t taste good if only the magicites from scalp apes are worth money, right? I don’t know if animals care about the taste of the meat itself, though.”

“One option for us would be to put the corpses into our magic bags and then scatter them all across the forest,” said Haruka. “However...”

“Uh, I feel like that counts as a nuisance, right?” I said.

Scattering corpses all over the forest was basically the same as littering, and it would cause trouble for others if the animals in the forest weren’t capable of cleaning up the corpses. However, the corpses of the scalp apes would definitely rot and release a nasty odor if we left them alone here as is.

“In any case, we’ll have to gather up these corpses to make sure we don’t miss out on any magicites,” said Natsuki. “We can just have Nao-kun burn these corpses to a crisp if there are any remaining when we come back here the next time, like how we dealt with the bandits.”

“Oh, if you’re talking about that, then I guess it’ll probably work,” I said. “There’s plenty of space between trees here, so we probably don’t need to worry about fire spreading to and from the trees.”

Nobody else had any other good idea, so we ended up agreeing with Natsuki’s idea before we started to gather up the corpses of the scalp apes. During the process, one of the apes that Touya brought over caught my eye.

“Oh, isn’t that the scalp ape that I killed by throwing a rock at it?” I asked.

“Did you manage to accomplish this, Nao? Its head is almost all gone,” said Touya. “Sure, you have the Enhanced Muscles skill, but is it really possible to deal this much damage by just throwing a rock?”

“Well, I used the Heavy Weight spell on the rock as well, so it wasn’t just pure muscular power,” I said.

Oh, right, something felt weird to me at the time. What was it? Was it the speed that the rock flew at? Sure, it was quite fast, but I was still able to track it with my eyes, and it wasn’t an abnormal speed if I factor in the Enhanced Muscles skill. Hmm...

“I’m surprised that you managed to accurately land the rock, though,” said Yuki. “Were you good at baseball, Nao?”

“Nah, not really,” I replied.

Haruka looked a bit exasperated when she heard my answer and glanced at me. “What do you mean by ‘not really’? A person that isn’t good at baseball wouldn’t normally be capable of performing as well as a member of the baseball club, you know? I remember Touya pulling off similar feats together with you as well.”

“Oh, right, both Nao and Touya were good at sports,” said Yuki.

“If you think that your abilities at sports are normal, then other people might feel envious of you in a negative way, Nao-kun,” said Natsuki.

Eh, really? Surely they’re exaggerating, right? I’m not bad at sports by any means, but I don’t think I stood out that much. People that practice every day in the baseball club are way better than me, after all. I didn’t have to throw the rock very far either, so I’m pretty sure that Touya could land a clean hit as well.

“I merely threw the rock normally,” I said. “Oh, wait, so that’s it!”

“Huh? What’s up all of a sudden?! Don’t surprise me like that!” Yuki exclaimed.

Yuki flinched out of surprise and glared at me, but I ignored that look as I continued with my words. “The fact that the rock landed without any issues is what felt weird to me. I mentioned earlier that I used the Heavy Weight spell on the rock, right?”

“Yeah, you did,” said Yuki.

“However, the rock flew in the way that I aimed it just fine,” I said.

“What’s strange about that?” Haruka asked.

The girls had looks on their faces which seemed to imply the result of my rock throwing was only natural, as I had properly aimed it, but I shook my head in response. “It’s strange, but it’s also not strange. Up until now, I’ve assumed that Heavy Weight was a spell that increased the amount of gravity applied to an object, but the trajectory of the rock wasn’t affected by the spell at all.”

It seemed like the girls finally understood what I was talking about after my explanation.

“Oh, with that in mind, I guess it does sound a bit strange,” said Haruka.

“Uh, does it actually make a difference if the rock was thrown at a speed fast enough to destroy the head of a scalp ape?” Yuki asked.

“Even if that’s the case, the rock shouldn’t have landed where Nao-kun had initially aimed at before using the Heavy Weight spell,” said Natsuki.

However, Touya tilted his head and seemed like he wasn’t able to understand right away, so I chimed in with more information. “It can be explained with physics, and the specific subject at hand is projectile motion. If the amount of gravity exerted on a thrown object is increased, then the trajectory of the object should divert downward, but the rock flew exactly how I had initially assumed it would.”

“By that, are you trying to say that the Heavy Weight spell doesn’t directly affect gravity?” Haruka asked.

“Yeah, that’s probably it. I think the reason why the rock was more powerful than I had assumed it would be was probably because its mass was increased by my spell,” I replied. “However, an increase in mass should also increase the effect of gravity as well, so the only theory that makes sense to me is if the Heavy Weight spell can block off the influence of gravity while increasing the mass of an object. Is this actually possible, though?”

I was fairly sure that it was nonsense to seek a scientific basis for magic, but I was still quite puzzled by this phenomenon. However, it seemed like the girls were a step ahead of me in terms of their understanding about this subject.

“If Time Magic is capable of only applying an effect onto a spell’s target and

can block off external effects, then it could be a very powerful and dangerous type of magic depending on how you use it,” said Haruka. “There’s a Time Magic spell called Accelerate Time, right?”

“Yeah, there is. Oh, right, I guess you could increase the speed of an object while keeping everything else the same,” said Yuki. “Energy is directly proportional to the mass of an object and to the square of the object’s velocity, so if you could accelerate and double something like an arrow’s speed, then it should increase the potency of the arrow by about four times of the original potency.”

“It’ll jump up to eight times if you can double the mass as well,” said Natsuki. “However, that’s only if Time Magic can affect objects in an optimal way.”

“Time Magic sounds like it could be very useful for situations like pushing rocks off high places like cliffs,” said Yuki.

“I’m curious about what will happen if you use the Accelerate Time spell on parts of a building,” said Haruka. “Is it possible to make a building collapse depending on how you use this spell?”

The girls started to come up with very dangerous ways of using Time Magic, and I was a bit spooked by their ideas.

“You know, I had thought up until now that Time Magic was a plain and boring magic that was only useful for making magic bags, but I guess it actually depends on how you use it,” said Yuki. “There are infinite possibilities to Time Magic! Yay!”

Yuki smiled and seemed quite happy as she patted me on my shoulders, and her previous thoughts weren’t wrong at all based on our experiences with Time Magic up until now. However...

“Is that what you truly felt about Time Magic up until now, Yuki?!” I exclaimed. “It’s a type of magic that already had infinite possibilities to begin with! Have you forgotten about things like the Teleportation spell?!”

“That spell is way beyond our reach at the moment, Nao,” said Yuki. “It’ll probably take a very long time before we become capable of actually using it properly.”

“Ugh, I guess you’re right about that,” I said. “Man, Time Magic is a really difficult type of magic to master...”

My Time Magic was currently Level 4, and Yuki’s Time Magic was currently Level 2. Teleportation was a Level 6 Time Magic spell, but it seemed like you could only teleport things within your eyesight upon initially reaching Level 6. I believed that Teleportation was a spell with a lot of potential to it, but it didn’t seem like something that could be used right away for practical purposes.

“Can you actually cast such difficult Time Magic on small moving objects like rocks or arrows, though?” I asked. “It’d be pointless to cast Time Magic on objects before you actually throw or shoot them, right?”

“Mm. Causing an object to become heavier ahead of time just means you’d need to throw or shoot a heavy object,” said Natsuki. “However, I’m not sure if you can accurately cast magic on something like an arrow that flies away really fast. It’s probably something that only Yuki and Nao-kun can pull off, as only they can adjust things by themselves.”

“Well, I kind of want to try out something like a combination attack if Nao can match my timing,” said Haruka.

“Hmm. Sure, we can try to practice that,” I said. “I don’t think we’d be able to pull it off right away, so practice is definitely needed.”

Haruka’s idea was something that we had to test out and practice first, but if it ended up being as effective as it sounded like, then it was something definitely worth trying out.

“Well, let’s think about this after we get back to town,” said Haruka. “Let’s deal with the scalp apes first before harvesting the precious wood.”

“Yup. This should be it for the scalp apes, though,” said Yuki. “Precious wood is next.”

A good habit that we had was the fact that we wouldn’t stop working even while chatting with each other. Haruka and Natsuki used the Purification spell on all of us after we were done piling up the corpses of the scalp apes at a spot slightly away from us, and then we started to work on the tree that we had cut down.

“Let’s start by pruning the tree,” said Haruka. “A tree this large probably won’t roll around that easily, but make sure to be careful.”

“Gotcha,” said Touya. “Leave the thick branches to me. The rest of you can deal with the thin ones.”

We had no idea what would happen as a result of Touya smashing his axe at the tree, however, so Yuki and I created some chocks with earth on both sides of the tree’s trunk in order to prevent it from rolling before we started to prune the tree’s branches.

“You can probably use your magic for the thin branches, right, Haruka?” I asked.

“Mm. However, my Air Cutter spell can only prune very thin branches,” said Haruka.

“Yeah, yeah, I get it, my magic can’t even prune thin branches!” Yuki exclaimed.

“Yuki, you don’t have to force yourself to try using magic for this,” said Natsuki. “Just use a hatchet instead, okay?”

“Ha ha! My axe can slice through thick branches with ease!” Touya exclaimed.

We peacefully chatted with each other as we worked on the branch-pruning process, and the tree turned into one huge log after a while. However, the next step was the hard one, since we had to somehow fit this log into a magic bag in order to bring it back with us. We had prepared a specialized magic bag that had been enchanted with the Spatial Expansion and Light Weight spell for this purpose, but magic bags in this world lacked the convenient function of being able to suck in objects by merely touching them.

“How are we supposed to get this log into a magic bag?” I asked. “This log doesn’t look like it’ll be easy to lift even if we use the Light Weight spell on it, so...”

Covering the log with the magic bag was a logical and reasonable way to attempt this task, but I wasn’t sure if that would actually work.

“Let’s create some gaps under the tree with Earth Magic and make use of

them to cover the log. We don't have to worry about the weight of the part that's entering the magic bag, so I think this should work," said Haruka. "We also have some fire hooks from the sets of lumberjack tools that Gantz-san prepared for us, so let's make use of those as well."

"Oh, right, we're supposed to apply the principle of a lever for situations like this," I said.

One way to roughly describe tools like fire hooks was that they were similar to a metal bar with a pointy edge on one end, so they were somewhat shaped like the L letter. We jammed some fire hooks into the log and successfully applied the principle of a lever to pull and move the log around. It was possible to lift the log by a few centimeters by using less than one-tenth of the force that would normally be required this way, so it was a magnificent product of humanity's ingenuity. However, even though we had some convenient tools like fire hooks, we still struggled with the work, since we weren't used to it at all. We prioritized safety as we slowly made progress, and we eventually managed to succeed at fitting the giant log into a magic bag.

Chapter 2—Be Wary of Things Too Good to Be True

“Huh?! Seriously?! Whoa!”

Simon-san seemed to be at a loss for words after he saw the precious wood that we had brought back with us to his workshop.

“There are no rotten parts and no cracks either! Damn, it’s actually perfect!”

Oh, I guess his vocabulary has recovered. At first, Simon-san had been surprised by the capacity of our magic bag, but he basically hugged the precious wood as soon as he saw it pop out of our magic bag and was only capable of muttering words like “Huh?!” and “Whoa!” to himself for a while.

“Oh, just to make sure, please keep quiet about our magic bag,” said Haruka. “It’ll be troublesome if word gets out, after all.”

We had received promotions for our ranks as adventurers, and it wasn’t like we had sold magic bags to other people without thinking, so there probably wasn’t any need for us to worry about this, but it was better to avoid taking any risks if possible.

“Don’t worry, I’ll keep this to myself. Well, honestly speaking, I don’t care about the magic bag!” Simon exclaimed. “How deep did you guys venture into the forests? This is the first time that I’ve seen precious wood of this quality!”

“Is it really that high-quality precious wood? We only ventured to a point where we could barely make it back to Laffan in one day, so it probably wasn’t that deep within the forests,” said Natsuki. “Perhaps the quality of this precious wood is due to the fact that nobody’s harvested any from such areas in a long time.”

“Yeah, that might be the case. I’ve heard stories about how trees in deeper parts of the forests near Laffan grow faster than other places.” Simon-san nodded to himself after he heard Natsuki’s theory, and then he suddenly glared at us. “So, you guys are going to sell this precious wood to me, right?”

Simon-san was technically asking us for confirmation, but the look in his eyes

implied that he would unleash his fury on us if we didn't reply positively to his question.

"O-Of course!" I exclaimed.

"I see, that's good to know!" Simon-san grinned as soon as he heard my answer, and he patted me on my shoulders as he urged us to follow him farther inside of his workshop. "All right, let's finalize the sales agreement! Don't worry, I have plenty of money on me to pay for this!"

Simon-san laughed cheerfully as he went away for a bit and casually brought back a very heavy-looking leather bag, and the amount of money inside of it was beyond our imagination.



"I can't believe Simon-san paid us so much money," said Haruka.

"Yeah, same here," I replied. "This is actually a mind-blowing amount of money."

Simon-san had paid us a total of twenty-eight hundred gold coins for the precious wood that we had harvested and brought back with us. He basically pushed the money onto us and sounded quite confident about it, so the only choice we had was to nod in response. Simon-san was someone that we trusted to not rip us off, and it wasn't like we had any other method of directly selling the precious wood aside from the Adventurers' Guild, so the only other place we could sell the precious wood was at other workshops. With all of that in mind, it felt better to simply sell the precious wood to Simon-san, since we knew him well enough, so there had been no reason for us to reject his money.

"We only got paid a few dozen gold coins the last time, so it's a huge difference," said Yuki.

"Yeah, but the wood we brought back that time was quite thin," I said.

"I gotta say, though, I'm amazed that Simon-san was able to prepare so much money right away," said Touya.

"Now that I think about it, there's only about a twenty percent difference in the volume of wood that we brought back this time compared to the previous

time, so..." said Natsuki.

"I mean, it was way more efficient this time in terms of effort for money," I said. "It's not comparable at all to our previous attempt."

A day's worth of work harvesting high-quality precious wood was enough to pay for a house, so I was absolutely amazed by how good it was as a source of money. In fact, precious wood was a way more efficient source of money considering the number of days that we had to work hard to earn money for our own house via other methods. Our other methods of earning money were quite good as well, but they paled in comparison to precious wood.

"Well, in any case, we've earned a huge amount of money in an instant!" Yuki exclaimed. "It's way more than enough to make up for the days that we took off work!"

"Mm. If we continue to earn money at this pace, then we should be able to afford new weapons and armor for all of us in no time," said Haruka.

"Everyone's down for the idea of continuing to harvest precious wood for money, right?"

"Yeah, of course!" Touya exclaimed. "If we can earn this much from precious wood, then it's definitely worth the amount of physical labor required!"

"Yep. It was a lot of work, but it felt very rewarding in the end, so I don't mind doing it again," said Yuki. "I kinda don't want to fight scalp apes, though. I'm counting on you, Nao."

"I don't know if I can somehow make us avoid scalp apes, but I'll try my best," I said.

Logging work required us to stay in one place for a long period of time, and it would also create a lot of noise, so I was fairly sure that it was almost impossible to avoid catching the attention of scalp apes.

"It's still worth it even if we factor in combat against scalp apes as a necessity," said Haruka. "However, if we can cut down trees faster, then there's a higher possibility of us being able to avoid combat in the first place. Practice your magic for this, Yuki."

"Ugh, I can't believe my own words backfired on me!" Yuki exclaimed. "Well,

I'll do my best. Please teach me, Nao."

"Sure, I don't mind," I said. "I also need to practice at improving the potency of my magic."

There were some hassles that we had to deal with for harvesting precious wood, but we were guaranteed a reward for it at the end, so all of us looked quite optimistic and happy about our plans. However, some things were too good to be true forever.



"Sorry, but can you guys put off harvesting precious wood for a while?" Simon asked.

Some time had passed since our initial attempts at harvesting precious wood, and we had become proficient enough at the work to the point that we were on the verge of establishing a surefire method of cutting down trees with magic. However, it seemed like we had to put a stop to our work after what we heard from Simon-san.

"Um, is there an issue with the wood we've been supplying?" Yuki asked worriedly.

Simon-san forced a bitter smile on his face as he shook his head in response. "No, there's nothing wrong with stuff on your end, since it's actually an issue on my end. There's no point beating around the bush, so I'll just outright say that it's because I don't have enough money left to purchase more wood at the moment."

We all replied with an "Oh" and nodded in response, since Simon-san's words made perfect sense to us. In fact, we had received a lot of money recently as payment from Simon-san for precious wood. Our initial earnings of twenty-eight hundred gold coins had seemed like an overwhelming amount of money at the time, but we started to feel a bit numb about it after Simon-san continued to pay us money for further shipments of precious wood. However, it was somewhat abnormal for one workshop to be able to afford to pay so much hard cash, and there was a specific reason behind this.

"The precious wood that you guys have brought back has more or less been

distributed across all of the workshops that I know, and none of them have any money left right now,” said Simon.

Other furniture workshops had paid money as well for purchasing precious wood from us. The shipments of precious wood that we had brought back were a fresh supply for the first time in a few dozen years, and precious wood was a trademark material for Laffan’s furniture business, so each furniture workshop had competed with the others for the sake of obtaining some to restock their supplies. However, high-quality precious wood wasn’t cheap at all, so it wasn’t possible for any single workshop to purchase a large amount of it.

“Each workshop is drying the precious wood they’ve purchased and is about to start using the precious wood they’ve had in stock forever to make furniture for the first time in quite a while,” said Simon. “We’ll be able to purchase more precious wood once that furniture sells, but most of our customers aren’t going to be people in Laffan, so it’s going to take a while until we can recover our investments.”

“Mm, that makes sense,” said Haruka. “High-end furniture isn’t something that ordinary citizens can afford, after all.”

“Yeah, exactly. In addition, the upcoming season isn’t suitable for harvesting precious wood,” said Simon. “Any kind of precious wood would’ve been fine up until now, since supply had dried up, but that’s not the case anymore, so obtaining the highest quality precious wood possible is ideal. I’m really sorry about this.”

Simon-san grimaced as he lowered his head toward us to apologize, but Haruka shook her head in response. “Oh, don’t worry about it, Simon-san. It’s not like we want to go out of our way to antagonize the furniture workshops in Laffan, so it’s fine.”

“Every furniture workshop I know is actually very grateful to you guys,” said Simon. “However, it’d be even better if you guys end up purchasing some furniture. You guys haven’t bought much furniture after you paid for your house, right?”

“Oh, yeah. It’s true we haven’t really purchased that much so far, since we’ve been busy for a while,” said Haruka.

“Mm. We might as well take this opportunity to spend some of our earnings to put some money back onto the market,” said Natsuki. “It’s only fair given the fact that we’ve earned a lot from selling precious wood, after all.”

Oh, I guess we also need to consider spending some of the money that we’ve earned. We had dumped a lot of our money on weapons and armor, but we had mostly avoided splurging on other things up until now. *Maybe it wouldn’t be a bad idea to purchase the rocking chair that I saw at the exhibition hall.* I glanced at Touya and noticed that he was muttering something about wanting to purchase a sofa, and the girls seemed like they had some furniture in mind that they were interested in. We all looked at each other and nodded in agreement.

“All right, I guess we’ll visit the furniture exhibition hall once again,” said Haruka.

“Yeah, go ahead,” said Simon. “You guys are more than welcome at the exhibition hall!”

“Thanks,” I said. “Oh, wait, now that I think about it, can’t we just place an order for furniture with you, Simon-san?”

“I appreciate the thought, but I can’t do that for high-end furniture,” said Simon.

According to Simon-san, the furniture industry was very crucial to Laffan, as there were no other industries here, and it was important for carpenters to stay in shape in terms of their carpentry abilities by lining up their works at the exhibition hall for people to use as a reference when placing orders for furniture. Each work was compared to each other in terms of quality only, so it seemed like there was no room for slacking off in regard to the works that were displayed at the exhibition hall.

“However, if you guys happen to come across my works and like them, then I’ll happily take on any orders,” said Simon.

“Hmm. Well, the pieces of furniture at the exhibition hall don’t have the workshop names engraved on them, however, so it’s going to come down to our personal preferences, right?” Yuki asked.

“Yeah, of course! Every carpenter in Laffan is proud and confident in their

abilities at crafting furniture, so feel free to choose the ones that you like the most!” Simon exclaimed.

There was no way for him to tell if we would end up picking some of the works from his workshop, but Simon-san still seemed a bit happy as he saw us leave his workshop. On the next day, we visited the furniture exhibition hall that we had dropped by in the past, and we were greeted by someone that seemed a bit familiar.

“Um, if I recall correctly, you’re Crowney-san, right?” Natsuki asked.

We had only met this person once before, but it seemed like Natsuki remembered his name, so I was quite impressed.

“Oh, thank you for remembering my name. Yes, I’m Crowney. I’m glad to see you all today.”

“Mm, we feel the same way,” said Natsuki. “However, I believe that you mentioned before about how there’s a rotating shift for who manages this exhibition hall, right?”

“Yes, that’s true, but I happened to come across some information about how your party was going to visit today, so I asked the person in charge to do me a favor by swapping duties in order for me to get an opportunity to express my gratitude.” Crowney-san stood up straight and then politely bowed to us before he continued his words. “Thank you very much for providing Laffan with a new supply of precious wood. Laffan’s furniture industry would have collapsed sooner or later in the future without your help, and that would have led to Laffan eventually becoming a deserted town. Your activities have saved not only the furniture workshops, but also the town of Laffan itself.”

“Um, surely it’s not that big of a deal, right?” Yuki asked.

We were all kind of confused by the fact that someone much older than us was bowing and thanking us, and Yuki shook her head to imply that Crowney-san didn’t need to do this, but Crowney-san shook his head back in response. “This isn’t an exaggeration at all. Every workshop tried their best to work with what they had left in stock, but there wasn’t much precious wood left as a whole here in Laffan. We’re very confident in our abilities as carpenters, but one downside to Laffan is its location. There’s no reason for other cities or

towns to import furniture made of normal wood from Laffan, so money would have stopped flowing into this town.”

Logistics in this world weren’t as well-developed as they were back on Earth, so the cost of transportation was actually quite expensive here. For example, even if carpenters in Laffan were able to use materials worth one hundred gold coins to craft furniture that was worth one hundred and fifty gold coins, they wouldn’t be able to profit at all if transportation cost something like two hundred gold coins. With all of that in mind, it was cheaper for other cities or towns in this world to simply place an order for furniture from local workshops. On the other hand, furniture made of precious wood was something that workshops in other cities or towns couldn’t emulate, since it wasn’t possible for them to obtain the raw materials needed for it.

“Is that so? Well, we’ve earned a lot ourselves from selling precious wood, so it’s been a mutually beneficial trade,” said Haruka.

“I’m glad to hear that. So, what kind of furniture are you looking for today?” Crowney asked. “Furniture made of precious wood happens to be much cheaper if you place orders for some now.”

“Oh, in that case—actually, there’s no way that kind of furniture is cheap at all,” I said.

We were aware of how much the raw materials were worth, so precious wood that had been processed and crafted into furniture was definitely worth way more than the cost of the raw materials. With that in mind, if all of us decided to purchase furniture made of precious wood for the ones that we wanted, then there was a real possibility that it would consume most of our earnings.

“Ha ha ha! That’s true, but it’s still cheaper now compared to before your party started to provide a supply of precious wood,” said Crowney.

Crowney chuckled as he replied to me, but it didn’t change the fact that high-end furniture wasn’t suitable for us. It was probably true that furniture made of precious wood was cheaper compared to before, but it would feel awkward to use such furniture on a daily basis.

“We’re perfectly fine with furniture made from normal wood,” I said. “After

all, all of the furniture displayed here at this exhibition hall are high-quality works, right?”

“Well, I can’t deny that fact,” said Crowney. “All right, then. Please follow me.”

Crowney-san smiled as he guided us through the exhibition hall, and we took our time once again to browse the works that were on display, but the furniture that I ended up deciding on was a better version of the rocking chair that had caught my eye before. I placed an order for a unique one that would be made for me after a craftsman took my measurements, and it was more expensive than a regular order as a result, but there was nothing wrong with this, since it was merely a way of redistributing income to a local business. *Yep, this is a perfect excuse!*

It seemed like everyone else had a similar excuse in mind, since there were no signs of their usual frugality when they placed orders for the furniture of their liking, and all of this would help improve the stark interior of our house by a bit. On a side note, the rocking chair I had ordered and the sofa that Touya had ordered happened to be works from Simon-san’s workshop, and this felt reassuring for the sake of maintaining our positive business relationship with each other.



We had all finished placing our individual orders for furniture, but all of the orders were for high-quality products that were handmade, so they weren’t things that could be finished in a short amount of time. With that in mind, we decided to slowly wait for our orders to be completed as we returned to our daily lives, but we upgraded our equipment before that. The furniture we had paid for was quite expensive, but it was nowhere near the amount of money that we had earned, so we had decided to commit toward further redistribution of income by purchasing new equipment that was all made of elemental metal. The amount of money required for this would consume most of the money that we had earned from precious wood, but dead people couldn’t use savings, so our own safety was a bigger priority.

Nobody had objected to the idea of spending money on elemental metal

equipment, so Haruka took Yuki with her as they went to visit Riva to place orders for the materials needed to craft elemental metal, and Touya went to the Adventurers' Guild for a walk and to sell the materials we had that weren't useful to us. As for me and Natsuki, we went to Aera-san's café together. The goal that we had in mind was delicious meals, but we weren't going to actually eat meals there. We had been distracted for a while by the gold rush from precious wood, but we finally had an opportunity now to ask Aera-san about if she knew how to properly prepare and cook the meat from brown eiks and bind vipers.

"Welcome!"

We were greeted by a voice we hadn't heard before when we opened the door of Aera-san's café, and I saw a stranger that looked like a woman who was in her early twenties when I glanced in the direction of the voice. I looked back at Natsuki out of confusion, but she shook her head in response, so it seemed like she didn't know who this stranger was either.

"Feel free to sit down at any of the open seats."

The stranger tilted her head and seemed a bit confused as she looked at us, so I hastily responded to her in order to clear things up. "Oh, um, we're actually here to see Aera-san. My name's Nao."

"Nao-san? Hmm. Please wait for a bit."

As soon as I told her what we were here for, the stranger opened her eyes wide a bit as she stared at my face as if to confirm something. She blinked a few times before she headed off to the kitchen, and I looked around the café after I saw her off. It was still morning at the moment, and we had decided to visit at this time in order to avoid the busy hours, but it seemed like Aera-san had changed the opening hours of her café to the morning. I felt like morning was a period of the day when very few customers would drop by, but Aera-san seemed to have succeeded, as half of the tables inside of the café were already full and occupied. Most of the customers were women that seemed very mature and relaxed, and that was the exact customer base that Aera-san had planned on attracting to her café. I was a bit worried about the amount of work that she had to do in order to keep her café running for longer hours, but she

was a professional at her job, and I probably didn't need to worry about her if the stranger earlier was someone that she had hired for this purpose.

"It seems like things are going well for Aera-san, so that's reassuring to know," said Natsuki.

"Yeah, it really is," I said. "Well, I guess this means we won't have to bust out the clothes that you girls made before once again."

The effectiveness of the clothes that the girls had made for the purpose of attracting customers was something that we had already tested out, and it was possible that these clothes would have been required once more. However, it seemed like Aera-san's café was doing well enough at the moment, so there was no need for them for now.

"Oh, Nao-kun, did you enjoy seeing those clothes?" Natsuki asked. "If you want me to, then I don't mind wearing them at home for you."

Natsuki smiled at me as she brought up that tempting offer, but I barely managed to hold myself back from instinctively nodding in response. "Uh, I'm not sure if this is a situation where it's okay for me to nod affirmatively..."

"Don't worry, I'm the only one listening here," said Natsuki.

That makes it even worse, Natsuki. I definitely need to change the subject. "I gotta say, though, we haven't found any other use for those clothes in regard to our daily lives."

"Mm. The clothes themselves were quite high quality, since Yuki worked very hard on them, so it kind of feels like a waste not to wear them," said Natsuki.

Natsuki was still smiling at me, so I averted my eyes away from her as I looked around the café once again, and I noticed Aera-san peeking out from the kitchen. She seemed quite happy to see us and hastily dashed over. "It's been a while, Nao-san, Natsuki-san!"

"Um, I'm pretty sure that we just saw each other a few days ago," I said.

"Yeah, but you left right away after you were done with the delivery of meat," said Aera. "Are homemade meals number one to you after all, Nao-san?"

Aera-san pouted as she voiced some complaints, and I forced a bitter smile on

my face as I responded to her. “Please don’t ask me questions that are hard to answer, Aera-san. If I answered your question, then it’d be like saying who cooks better between you and Natsuki right here, you know? With that in mind, any answer would cause issues for the future, so...”

“I’m a professional cook, so I’d like you to answer that my cooking tastes more delicious, Nao-san,” said Aera.

“Oh, feel free to answer her question, Nao-kun,” said Natsuki. “However, the quality of your meals at home may drastically decrease depending on your answer.”

“Ugh, that’d be a major issue!” I exclaimed. “I’m definitely not answering!”

It seemed like Aera-san and Natsuki were toying with me as they smiled in a playful way, and I looked away from them toward the woman that was looking at us with great curiosity in her eyes. “By the way, Aera-san, if I may ask, who is this person?”

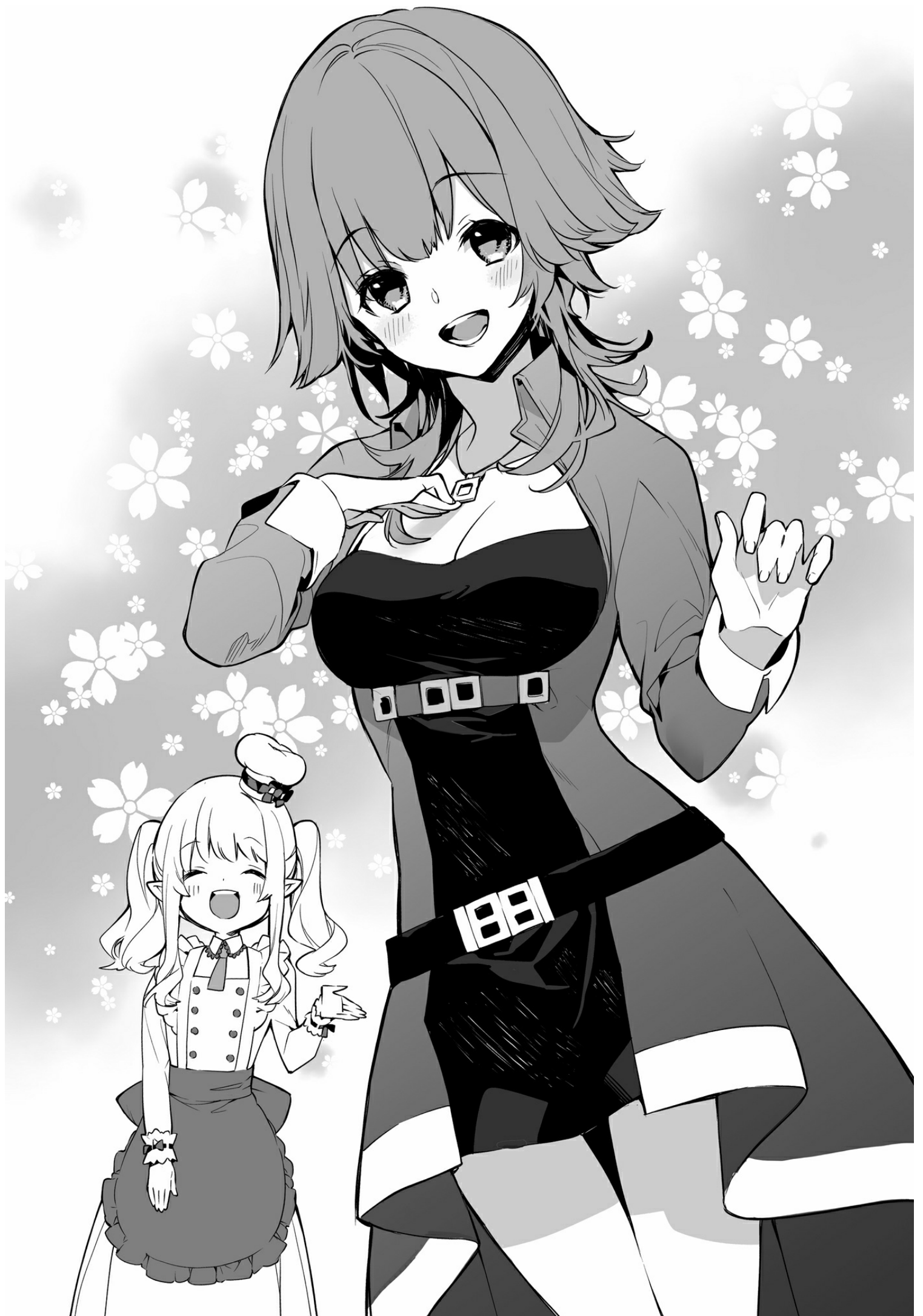
“Oh, right, neither of you have met her before. She’s a friend of mine that I got to know during my time training as a cook,” said Aera. “Business has started to become busier for me, so I asked for her help.”

“My name’s Luce, and it’s nice to meet you two,” said Luce. “So you’re the ‘Nao-san’ that I’ve heard so much about from Aera, huh?”

Luce-san lowered her head as she introduced herself, so Natsuki and I replied to her with our own introductions. “My name’s Nao, and Aera-san has helped us a lot with all sorts of things.”

“My name’s Natsuki,” said Natsuki. “If Aera-san got to know you while she was training to become a cook, then does that mean you’re also a cook yourself, Luce-san?”

“No, I was just a waitress at the restaurant that Aera was working at,” Luce replied. “Aera promised to pay me more than what I was getting paid there, so I decided to move to this town.”



“Oh, so you got poached in exchange for better pay and not because Aera-san’s your friend?” I asked.

Luce-san lifted a finger to her lips when she heard my words and chuckled in response. “Just so you know, Nao-san, friendships aren’t a substitute for money.”

“Oh please, Luce,” said Aera. “You told me that you were only willing to accept about the same amount as you got paid before, and yet you moved all the way here, so...”

“I mean, it’d be a shame if your café went out of business after I moved here, so yeah,” said Luce.

Luce sounded very nonchalant as she responded to Aera-san’s pouting, but it was probably just an excuse to hide her embarrassment. Luce-san looked like the older person between the two of them from their appearances, but she was a human, so Aera-san was most likely older than her due to being an elf. However, age probably wasn’t a factor in their friendship, as they seemed to be on very good terms with each other.

“More importantly, Aera, I think you shouldn’t leave your guests hanging,” said Luce.

“Oh, right. Sorry about this, Nao-san, Natsuki-san,” said Aera. “What are you here for today?”

Aera-san hastily turned back toward us after she heard Luce-san’s reminder, and Natsuki answered her question. “We actually managed to come across and hunt down some bind vipers and brown eiks the other day, and we want to make good use of the meat, so we were wondering if you would be willing to teach us how to properly cook these types of meat.”

“Oh, sure, I don’t mind at all! Leave it to me!” Aera exclaimed. “Both meats can become very delicious if they’re cooked properly!”

Aera-san smiled as she casually accepted Natsuki’s request, but Luce-san hesitantly pulled on Aera-san’s arm. “Hey, are you sure about this? Your knowledge and abilities at cooking are valuable assets, so...”

“Yeah, it’s perfectly fine to teach them. My café wouldn’t have been able to recover without their help, after all,” said Aera. “Also, just so you know, the most popular dish on the lunch menu is something that they taught me how to make.”

“Oh, really? Does that mean they’re also good cooks? In that case, I guess it’s worth exchanging ideas,” said Luce.

Aera-san and Luce-san were probably talking about the pork cutlets, and Luce-san seemed very surprised as she looked at Natsuki, but Natsuki merely responded with a humble smile. “Oh, we’re not exactly amazing cooks by any means. Some of us just enjoy cooking as a hobby, that’s all.”

“If what you taught me was from someone that wasn’t good at cooking, then every cook in this town would count as amateurs!” Aera exclaimed.

Aera-san sounded like she was exaggerating, but I actually agreed with her for the most part, and that was because there were a lot of dining establishments in Laffan that shocked me due to the fact those places served dishes that felt like they weren’t worth paying for at all. There were a few exceptions, like the dining hall at The Slumbering Bear, but most stalls were definitely operated by people that were worse than amateur cooks. On top of that, the level of Haruka’s Cooking skill was Level 4, and it was Level 3 for Natsuki and Yuki, so that was definitely enough to describe them as amazing cooks.

“If there are no issues, then it’d be great if you could teach us,” I said. “However, do you actually have any free days, Aera-san? It seems like you’ve started to open your café in the mornings as well, so...”

“Mm, Luce recommended this idea to me, so I went along with it,” said Aera. “However, I’ve also set a day off each week in exchange.”

“Business has been booming thanks to the extra income from the morning hours, but the number of reservations has increased by way too much,” said Luce. “The new schedule left no room for personal time to deal with other things, so I felt like a day off each week was necessary.”

According to Aera-san and Luce-san, they had started to open for business in the morning as morning hours weren’t as busy as other times of the day, but they had also set up a day off from work in exchange, and it seemed like this

was their new business strategy. Most dining establishments didn't have any days off, so it was a very brave and bold decision.

"I think having a regular day off each week is a good idea," said Natsuki. "After all, I don't think it's possible to make delicious food in busy and stressful circumstances."

"Mm, I feel the same way, especially since this allows me to have time for attempting to make new dishes," said Aera. "Oh, while we're on this subject, I'll have free time during the regular day off, so is it fine for me to teach you on that day?"

"Yeah, that's fine. As for where, you can come over to our house," I said. "You're welcome to drop by as well if you're free that day, Luce-san."

We had borrowed Aera-san's kitchen during our previous cooking lessons for her and the girls, but we had our own kitchen now. I offered our kitchen as the location because I felt bad about borrowing Aera-san's kitchen for personal use, and she nodded in response right away. "Okay. I'll come over when it's time."

"Oh, is it really okay for me to drop by as well?" Luce asked.

"Mm, don't worry about it," Natsuki replied. "Our house is quite large, so please feel free to drop by along with Aera-san."

Aera-san seemed quite happy due to the fact that this was an opportunity for her to use ingredients that she wouldn't normally be able to get her hands on, and Luce-san seemed a bit hesitant as she asked us for confirmation, but Natsuki simply smiled in response at both of them.



On the same day, all of us gathered back at home during dinner, and the topic at hand was reports about our individual results for the day.

"So you two managed to set up an appointment with Aera-san, right?" Haruka asked.

"Mm. It won't be for a while, but she said that she would come over to teach us," said Natsuki. "How did things go on your end for elemental metal?"

Our main goal for today had been to work toward upgrading our weapons

and armor, but Yuki shook her head and shrugged in response when she heard Natsuki's question. "We'll need a lot in total for all of our weapons and armor, but Riva didn't have enough in stock at her store."

"We did place orders for more elemental metal, but it'll probably take quite a while before we can get our hands on some," said Haruka.

"I see. Well, we're not in a hurry, so I guess that's fine," I said. "What about you, Touya?"

"I don't really have anything to report about, since all I did was sell materials at the guild and walk around town after I handed the money to Haruka," said Touya. "Nothing eventful happened, but it might have been different if it was you, Nao. You seem to bump into girls easily just by walking around town."

"Don't put it like that, Touya!" I exclaimed. "Besides, eventful days aren't always good, you know?"

"Mm. The situation that we encountered by ourselves before counts as a bad one, after all," said Natsuki.

"Yeah, it wasn't a pleasant experience," said Yuki. "Are you the type of guy that wouldn't mind encountering yanderes, Touya?"

Oh, right, there were those three guys that tried to hit on the girls, but all three of them are dead now. Yandere isn't exactly the right description for them, though. I'm pretty sure they were just sexual predators, and that's it.

"Nah, even I'm not willing to walk myself into a land mine like yanderes," said Touya. "Well, if it's a yandere girl with animal ears, then..."

"Touya, I'm pretty sure you don't truly understand how scary yanderes are. Go read a novel called *Misery*." *That'll teach you reality, Touya. An animal ears freak like you needs to learn his lesson.*

"Huh? What's that? A novel? I mean, sure, but there's no way for me to get my hands on it for reading in this world," said Touya.

"Mm, what a shame," I said. "It's one of the best yandere novels out there, so..."

"I'm not really sure if that actually counts as a yandere novel," said Natsuki.

“Sure, one of the characters isn’t mentally stable, but horror is the general category that the novel falls under,” said Haruka.

“I feel like the actions that were depicted in that novel don’t count as ‘normal’ displays of affection,” said Yuki.

All of the girls had awkward expressions on their faces as they commented about the novel that I had mentioned, and those were natural reactions for people that knew what the novel was about. The idea of someone like the female character in that novel being obsessed with me made me feel uncomfortable, but Touya had no idea about the novel’s contents, so he sounded quite confident as he refuted the comments from the girls. “Nah, I’m pretty sure I can tolerate someone who’s a bit deranged or mentally unstable as long as they’re cute!”

“...Touya, I think you’re taking this too far,” said Haruka.

“Not all girls with animal ears are good people, Touya-kun,” said Natsuki.

“I can see the future of Touya shivering out of fear in an alley after losing every last strand of his tail hair,” said Yuki. “Oh, that would be absolutely awful!”

Haruka and Natsuki had exasperated looks on their faces, and Yuki pretended to cry out of pity as she covered her eyes. However, part of me agreed with Touya’s statement about being able to tolerate negative traits to a certain extent as long as the girl was cute, so I tried to back him up. “Well, I’m pretty sure that Touya’s just starving for exposure to girls with animal ears, so I think his condition can be cured easily if we just visit a town that has a lot of beastmen and beastwomen living there.”

“You’re treating this like an illness, Nao?! Please!” Touya exclaimed. “I’m perfectly capable of observing to find out if someone’s way too crazy, and I’ll dodge them if that’s the case!”

However, the girls seemed a bit skeptical of Touya’s argument, and Haruka was the first one to comment about it. “We’re worried that your ‘observant’ eyes will only see a girl’s animal ears and tail, Touya.”

“Mm, I wouldn’t put it past Touya to make such mistakes,” said Yuki. “With

that in mind, it might be a good idea for us to actually consider going to the kind of town that Nao mentioned, so I'm a bit curious if there are any lands in this world which fit that description."

"That's such a rude assumption, Yuki!" Touya exclaimed. "However, if that's all there is to it, then I'm more than willing to accept such slander in exchange for visiting that kind of town!"

Your reaction itself makes me think that you're hopeless, Touya. Well, nobody's going to stop you from counting your chickens before they hatch, so...

"We can think about that if Touya actually manages to find a girlfriend," I said. "It might end in vain, after all."

"Uh, just to make sure, you mean that this conversation might end up being moot if I end up finding a girlfriend, right?" Touya asked. "You don't mean that my efforts to find a girlfriend will end in vain, right?"

"...Well, let's just say that the chances of you finding a girlfriend are probably higher than the chances of the sky falling on us," I said.

"That's not a straight answer at all!" Touya exclaimed.

I mean, I'm pretty sure you can find a girlfriend as long as you're not picky, but I don't think you'd be completely faithful to specific animal ears, so yeah. You'll probably cause a ruckus if I say this, however, so I'll keep quiet about it and sum things up. "In any case, everything worked out just fine for us today, so let's discuss what to do from tomorrow onward. Any ide—?"

Yuki hastily interrupted me in the middle of my sentence. "Oh yeah! I want to create a sauce!"

"Where did that come from all of a sudden, Yuki?" I asked.

"Well, you see, it's true that inspiel sauce tastes quite good, and it's amazing how good it tastes considering the average taste of food in this world." Yuki paused for a moment and then pointed at the dishes in front of her before she continued her words. "However, I'm a bit tired of eating the same tasting food! I want some variety in how our food tastes!"

"Oh, that makes sense. I'm perfectly satisfied with our current meals, but I'm

down for the idea of increasing the variety of tastes available,” I said.

The girls were much better at cooking compared to places like random stalls in this world, but the idea of being able to eat different delicious meals sounded nice to me, especially when all three of them were good at cooking. Inspiel sauce was a condiment that was regularly used for the dishes that the girls made, since it was one of the few that was available to us, but it wasn’t as versatile as something like soy sauce. However, inspiel sauce was a good fit for our current meals that mostly consisted of dishes made with bread, and it tasted better than the simple taste of salt, so most of our meals had ended up tasting similar to each other.

“I’m down as well, but is there really anything that Nao and I can help out with?” Touya asked.

“Yeah, I can’t think of anything either,” I said. “We’re not good at cooking, so there’s no way that we could create something as difficult as a new sauce.”

“I’m perfectly aware of that,” said Yuki. “That’s why I want you guys to make inspiel sauce!”

Yuki had a very confident look on her face, so Touya and I looked at each other after we heard her words, and I asked Yuki a question in order to clear things up. “Doesn’t that change nothing, then?”

“Tsk, tsk, think again! Don’t you remember the fact that the taste of inspiel sauce can change a lot depending on what ingredients you use for it? With that in mind, I think that we’ll get different tasting inspiel sauces if each of us uses unique ingredients!”

“Oh, that’s actually a pretty good idea, Yuki,” said Haruka. “It sounds a bit fun and interesting to try out.”

“Right? So yeah, I’ve prepared some jars for this purpose!” Yuki exclaimed.

Yuki took out ten jars from her magic bag, and each jar seemed like it could contain up to five liters of liquid. The jars were all dark brown and shaped like bottles, and Yuki evenly distributed two of them each between the five of us.

“You sure are quite prepared for this before we’ve even made a decision, Yuki,” I said.

“We earned a lot of money recently, so I decided to go ahead and prepare in advance!” Yuki exclaimed. “I was planning on experimenting by myself even if this idea got rejected by the group!”

We had plenty of money on hand thanks to the precious wood that we had harvested and sold, so the jars that Yuki had bought weren't painful expenses at all. I opened the lid of one of my jars to peek inside it, and I saw a tiny amount of inspiel sauce at the bottom.

“Let's individually choose ingredients to throw into our own jars and then hold a competition to see who made the best sauce!” Yuki exclaimed. “How does this idea sound to everyone?”

“Oh, so you're saying that my intuition is going to be put to the test for this, huh? I don't know how to cook, but this is something that I'm perfectly capable of!” Touya exclaimed.

Touya laughed and seemed quite confident in himself, but Natsuki had a worried expression on her face as she looked at him. “Just so you know, Touya-kun, you're not supposed to throw in inedible ingredients.”

“Oh, come on, have some faith in me! I'm not that stupid!” Touya exclaimed. “It's not like this is some kind of hot pot where mystery ingredients are allowed, so I'm only going to throw in edible ones!”

“I don't think inedible ingredients are okay, even as mystery ingredients,” said Natsuki. “Humans don't eat bones, okay?”

“I'm not a dog! Trust me, I'll only throw in normal ingredients!” Touya exclaimed. “I don't intend or plan on wasting money at all!”

I mean, I trust you not to throw in inedible ingredients, but I wouldn't put it past you to throw in raw meat just because you love meat, Touya. Actually, wait, maybe that could still work due to how powerful inspiel sauce is? Hmm...

“...Nao, do you have some kind of weird idea in your head?” Haruka asked.

“Oh, nah, not at all,” I replied. “I was just thinking to myself about the magnificent potential of inspiel sauce.”

“That's a weird way to describe it, but setting strict restrictions would just

cause our results to end up being similar, so I guess it's fine to choose slightly weird ingredients," said Haruka. "As for the budget, let's allocate two gold coins for each person."

"Yeah, that sounds good," I said. "It's an amount that we can afford just fine now."

The expenses would add up to a total of ten gold coins for the five of us, and I was quite amazed by our progress in this world, since it was an amount that we could actually afford to spend without any issues now.

"Yep! Oh, by the way, remember to record what ingredients you used so we can replicate the result!" Yuki exclaimed.

"Mm. After all, we'll have to make more if the end result is something delicious," said Natsuki. "Also, when should we set the deadline for this?"

A deadline for completing our individual attempts at creating different inspiel sauce was necessary in order to make this a proper competition. However, inspiel sauce was something that would take a while to complete, so...

"How about the day when Aera-san comes over?" I asked. "We can ask her to serve as a judge by tasting our creations."

I wanted an outside opinion for the purpose of comparing and ranking our results, and we would sometimes treat other people to meals at our house as well, so it was important to know whether our homemade meals suited other people's taste buds. However, it seemed like everyone else interpreted my words in a different way.

"Oh, so you want to make this a real competition, huh? You sure seem serious about this, Nao!" Yuki exclaimed. "In that case, let's keep it a secret until the deadline day for the sauce that we individually make! It'll be more fun this way!"

"Heh, I guess that means the sauce I make will be judged fairly without any biased opinions or assumptions," said Touya.

"I'm not sure if it'll be completely fair, but I'm interested to hear a professional cook's opinion on our attempts," said Natsuki.

“Yeah, I’m looking forward to finding out who made the best inspiel sauce!” Yuki exclaimed. “The competition is on!”

Uh, I don’t think this is something that serious, but I guess it’s good to be motivated, right? I just hope that motivation leads to good results for the taste of the inspiel sauce. I have a bad feeling about this...



Everyone else scattered across town on the next day in order to search for ingredients to use for inspiel sauce. I ended up heading outside as well, but it wasn’t like I had any ideas about what to search for, so I wandered around the marketplace by myself. The marketplace was bustling with activity in the morning, and there were many different ingredients that were being sold, but the vast number of options made it hard for me to decide what to purchase.

“I have the freedom to use whatever I want for my inspiel sauce, but I don’t know what to do...”

Hmm. Let’s start by trying to aim for a result that’s different from the current inspiel sauce that tastes similar to okonomi sauce. The sweetness of okonomi sauce comes from dates, but the sweetness of inspiel sauce comes from potatoes, so anything potato related is out of the question. As for the things that we didn’t use the last time...

“We didn’t use other root vegetables, right? They should be cheap, so I could give this a shot.”

Daikon, turnips, and carrots should do just fine. Vegetables by themselves won’t be fun, so I guess I’ll add some cheap spices as well, and...

“As for the last ingredients, I could just throw in some recommended ones from a stall.”

There were some stalls in the marketplace that had their recommended products placed at the front, and those products were crops that had a bountiful harvest. A good thing about these products was that they were cheap, and trusting a stall’s recommendations was a form of gambling, but that sounded like a fun choice to me. I spun around and happened to meet the eyes of an old lady that was standing behind a stall, so I walked over to see what the

stall had to offer.

“Hello,” I said. “What would you recommend from your stall?”

“Everything! However, for this time of the year, I would especially recommend purchasing this, since it tastes delicious!”

The old lady seemed like a farmer, and she showed me some vegetables that looked like onions. In fact, my Help Guide displayed them as onions when I used it, so they were probably a similar type of vegetable.

“They taste sweet and delicious if roasted whole and seasoned with just salt!”

“Oh, is that so? In that case, I’ll buy three of these.”

“Cheers! That’ll be one silver coin!”

The vegetables were really cheap even though each one was larger than my clenched fists, so I paid for the vegetables right away and moved on to the next stall. There were a lot of leaf vegetables on sale here, but most of them looked a bit wilted. That in itself wasn’t really avoidable since the vegetables weren’t being stored in a fridge, but they didn’t seem suitable to eat raw for the purposes of dishes like salads. As for the person standing behind the stall, it was a young boy, and he was probably here to sell vegetables in place of his parents.

“Hello,” I said. “What would you recommend from your stall?”

“Recommend? Well, how about these things?”

The boy pointed at some vegetables that were stacked in a box that was located at a corner of the stall, and the vegetables themselves looked like celery. I held one of them with my hands and sniffed it, and it seemed a bit different from what celery was supposed to smell like, but it still had a strong smell to it. *Let’s see what my Help Guide has to say about this. Huh? Bereoje...?*

“Uh, are these actually unpopular products?”

“O-Of course not!”

There was a tinge of panic to the boy’s voice as he denied my suspicions, but there were clearly more of these vegetables remaining compared to the other ones at the stall. On top of that, these vegetables had a unique and strong smell to them, so they probably didn’t sell well, since I was fairly sure that people like

kids would hate eating them.

“Will these vegetables become part of your meals if they don’t sell?”

The boy averted his eyes away from me after he heard my words, but I stared at him for a bit until he finally caved in and yelled to vent his frustration. “I’m sick of eating bereoje!”

Yep, I figured as much. Farmers don’t have any choice but to consume their own crops if they don’t sell after they harvested them, especially if they’re crops that you can’t preserve for a long time.

“Ha ha ha! Bereoje can easily be grown just by planting them in the corners of fields, so every stall has some for sale at this time of the year!”

The old lady laughed as she joined the conversation between me and the young boy. According to her, bereoje happened to be in season right now, and farmers would try to sell them due to the fact that they could be grown without much effort required. I looked at her stall to check and found some bereoje there as well, but the amount that she had for sale wasn’t that much, so it seemed like she was aware of the fact that they didn’t sell very well.

“Well, I know how you feel, but I can’t buy this much bereoje from you,” I said.

The amount of bereoje at the boy’s stall was too much for the purpose of making inspiel sauce, and I didn’t cook on a regular basis either, so there was no other reason for me to purchase a lot of these vegetables.

“Even buying just a little will be of great help! I just want less on my plate! I’ll even give you a discount!”

“Hmm. Well, if you insist that much, then sure, I guess.”

I didn’t like celery myself either, and the thought of having to eat celery on a daily basis seemed quite unpleasant. With that in mind, I felt bad for the boy as he lowered his head and begged me, so I ended up purchasing some bereoje. The amount I purchased was something that I could barely hold with both of my hands, and it cost me two silver coins. I wasn’t sure what the market price was for bereoje, but it seemed quite cheap to me. The old lady at the stall next to us chuckled as she watched the sale, but I wanted to believe that she was

chuckling at the boy that had been desperate to sell some bereoje instead of something like me having purchased the vegetables for an expensive price. In any case, two silver coins wasn't that much money for me, so I didn't care that much.

I ended up visiting about six more stalls afterward, and I purchased the products that the stalls recommended to me. Once I returned home, I went to the kitchen and saw Natsuki inside. It seemed like she was in the middle of cooking, as the steamer on the stove was producing some steam, and I could smell something delicious in the air as a result.

"Oh, Nao-kun, welcome back."

"I'm back. Is it just you here, Natsuki?"

"Mm. Yuki finished preparing her inspiel sauce, but Touya-kun and Haruka haven't returned yet."

"I see. There's probably nothing to worry about for Haruka, but I'm a bit worried about Touya in regard to the contents of his inspiel sauce."

There probably wasn't anything in town that could threaten Touya's life, but there was the danger of him finding some weird ingredients. It was sometimes necessary to think outside the box by bravely challenging what people considered as common sense for the purpose of creating something new that was valuable or useful, but the result of Touya's innovation was going to enter my mouth, so I could only hope that he wouldn't try to defy common sense too much.

"I'm actually kind of looking forward to finding out whether it'll be a great success or a great failure," said Natsuki. "By the way, do you want me to help you out, Nao-kun?"

"Are you done with that steamer?" I asked.

"Mm," Natsuki replied. "All I have to do is wait for a bit now."

Natsuki smiled as she asked if I needed her help, and I took her up on her offer as I thoroughly washed the ingredients that I had bought and brought back with me. I was probably supposed to keep my ingredients a secret for competition purposes, but I didn't feel like this was something I had to be very

serious about.

“Next up is to chop these ingredients, but...”

The jars had a capacity of five liters each, and the amount of vegetables that I had to chop up would depend on the amount of inspiel sauce that I wanted to make. I wouldn't have to chop up vegetables very thinly if I could simply make use of time to take its course for creating inspiel sauce, but there weren't that many days left until the deadline, so I had no choice but to do my best in order to chop up the vegetables into very thin bits.

“This is going to be a lot of work,” I said.

“Oh, actually, there's something good that you can use for this, Nao-kun,” said Natsuki. “We happen to have a food processor here.”

Natsuki seemed quite happy as she showed me something that actually looked like a food processor. The shape of it was a bit different from what I had in mind, and it was also a bit larger, but it was quite similar.

“Where did you get this, Natsuki?” I asked. “This wasn't something that you found for sale, right?”

“Haruka and Yuki managed to create this the other day via alchemy,” Natsuki replied. “I don't really mind chopping up vegetables myself, but this appliance makes it much easier to mince food.”

I wasn't someone that cooked often, but even I knew that mincing food was a lot of work. On top of that, the girls would prepare meals in one go, so it was something that would consume a lot of time. We had plenty of meat in stock, so creating regular steaks was probably the easier option, but the girls had served hamburger steaks and meatballs from time to time, and it was probably this food processor that had made it possible.

“Hamburger steaks are easier to eat for the purpose of sandwiching meat between bread, after all,” said Natsuki.

“Yeah, they really are. I know that you and the others have done your best to make meals easier to eat, but Touya's the only one that can devour steaks with ease,” I said.

The girls had attempted to make steaks easier to eat by creating thinner slices of meat or making cuts in the meat, but they weren't as easier to eat compared to hamburger steaks. However, Touya was an exception due to the fact that he had no trouble with chewing off the meat from steaks.

"Okay, I guess I'll borrow this food processor and try it out," I said.

I roughly threw some vegetables into the food processor and then sealed it with its lid. *Let's see what settings are available. High, medium, and low, huh?*

"High should be fine," I said. "Here goes."

"Oh—"

The food processor made a loud and strong sound that I hadn't expected to hear at all, and its contents turned into a liquid juice in an instant.

"I was about to say that you should be careful due to the fact that this food processor is quite powerful, but I was too late," Natsuki said.

"O-Oh, don't worry. I'm okay with the result, but I was really surprised by how powerful this food processor is," I said. "I had a weird feeling, since the lid felt very tight, so..."

The food processors that I had in mind were ones that you only had to place a lid on top, but the one that Haruka and Yuki had made was something with a lid that properly sealed it off, and it was probably because of how powerful this food processor was. Using the word "powerful" for describing kitchenware felt a bit weird to me, however.

"Safety measures are definitely needed for this," I said. "Did Haruka and Yuki injure themselves when making this appliance?"

"This is also capable of mincing gristle, so they said that they designed it to be safe for doing so," said Natsuki.

The food processor that Haruka and Yuki had made seemed like a tool that was way too powerful for household use, but it didn't change the fact that it was very convenient, especially for making juices. I threw in more ingredients and made a vegetable juice mix before I poured it into my jars.

"Okay, all that's left is to..."

I looked up as I was thinking to myself about the last thing I needed to do, and I saw Natsuki pointing at a desk that was near the window of the kitchen. There were two jars on top of that desk, and they were labeled “Yuki 1” and “Yuki 2” respectively.

“I see.”

I emulated the example in front of me and labeled my own jars “Nao 1” and “Nao 2” before I lined them up on the desk, and then I nodded to myself in satisfaction.



Aera-san and her friend had dropped by today, and the sound of clapping echoed through our kitchen.

“We have a special instructor here today who’s going to teach us some new skills,” said Yuki. “Please welcome Aera-san with thunderous applause!”

The rest of us hadn’t actually planned a special welcoming for our guests, however, so Yuki was the only one applauding.

“U-Um, hello, thanks for having me over,” said Aera.

Oh no, thank you for being kind enough to go with the flow, Aera-san. She looked a bit confused—her eyes were wandering all over the place—but she bowed regardless.

“You don’t have to force yourself to play along with Yuki, Aera-san,” said Haruka. “In any case, thank you for coming over today.”

“W-Well, I mean, I like cooking, so I appreciate this opportunity,” said Aera. “It’s been a while since I last cooked with the ingredients we’ll be using today, so I’m looking forward to it.”

Yuki was pouting. “Oh, come on, I was just trying to welcome her. Also, Luce-san is our other guest today!”

Luce-san also bowed. “Huh?! Oh, um, I’m Luce. It’s nice to meet you all.”

“Yuki, don’t confuse someone that you’re meeting for the first time,” I said. “You’re confusing *me*.”

“Yeah, and we already got to know her earlier,” said Touya.

Aera-san had introduced Luce-san to all of us when the two of them first arrived, so there wasn't any real point to introducing her again.

“I just wanted to emulate a cooking show!” Yuki exclaimed. “On a sidenote, there will be plenty of opportunities for our guests to shine today—scenes in which they'll appear unfamiliar with the ingredients they're cutting up and mixing...”

“There's no need to enact those kinds of scenes,” Natsuki said with a chuckle. “We can begin working, Aera-san.”

Aera-san put on a serious expression befitting a professional cook. “Oh, okay. Let's start with the brown eik.”

Aera-san picked up the cuts of brown eik that we had prepared and sliced them thinly, then salted them.

“The gutting procedure after you've slain brown eiks is very important, since the meat will smell bad if you don't do it properly. Let's test it out.” Aera-san quickly cooked a few slices of meat and took a bite. “Hmm, it doesn't have much of an odor to it, so you must've done a good job. There are some people out there who prefer the meat to have a pungent smell, but there aren't many of them, so this is the ideal state for brown eik meat. You can make all sorts of dishes with it, so let's try a few different ones.”

With the girls from my party helping her, Aera-san swiftly sliced up the rest of the meat. Touya, Luce-san, and I had nothing to do but watch them cook.

“By the way, Luce-san, do you usually cook?” I asked.

“Nah, I'm usually just an eater,” Luce replied with an awkward smile. “I have Aera, so...”

I nodded. “Oh yeah, I get what you mean. It's hard to be motivated to cook or be proud of your own work when there's someone close to you who's a true cook.”

Luce-san nodded back; we were clearly on the same page. “Yeah, exactly! I followed her recipes to the letter and used the same ingredients, but the results

were always very different...”

“A slight difference in cooking ability probably makes a big difference in the results,” I said.

“Yeah, it’s probably like instinct or natural aptitude,” said Luce. “Aera’s a strong adventurer as well, so she’s really amazing. However, she also has her fair share of flaws, so I kind of need to keep an eye on her, and—actually, I can’t say more than that if I want to protect my future meals...”

Luce-san suddenly interrupted herself and fell silent as she looked behind me, and when I followed her gaze, I saw Aera-san glaring at her. However, when Aera-san noticed me, she smiled awkwardly as if to pretend nothing were amiss, then resumed cooking.

“B-Brown eik can easily become tough, so the key is to avoid overcooking it. If you want to simmer the meat, it’ll take more work and time,” said Aera. “For now, let’s make two grilled dishes and one stewed dish. After seeing the process, you should be able to figure out other ways to cook it.”

Aera-san’s movements were quite smooth as she finished the preparations for the stewed dish while explaining things to the other girls. She finished the two grilled dishes in no time while waiting for the stew to simmer. Her cooking abilities were definitely those of a professional. Haruka, Natsuki, and Yuki were all better cooks than the average person, but Aera-san’s movements were even surer and more precise than theirs.

“It’ll be a while before the stew is ready, so let’s start by tasting the grilled meat,” said Aera. “Please eat it while it’s still warm.”

Aera-san seemed quite confident as she displayed the grilled dishes that she had cooked. She sliced them into bite-size portions for all of us to taste. The meat had a nice chewy texture, but it wasn’t too tough and had no traces of a weird odor. In fact, it had a unique umami flavor, and I immediately took a liking to it.

“This tastes way better than I thought it would,” I said. “I figured venison would be hard to eat, but I guess I’ve been proven wrong.”

Aera-san smiled; she seemed quite proud after hearing my honest impression

of her dishes. “I’m a cook, so I know how to prepare meat in a way that makes it delicious to eat. However, the venison is only this easy to eat because it was preserved properly. What does everyone else think?”

“It is really good,” said Haruka. “It would take some time, but I wouldn’t mind cooking this periodically.”

“I like the taste,” said Touya. “I especially like that it isn’t too soft.”

Natsuki, Yuki, and Luce-san also seemed to enjoy the dishes that Aera-san had cooked, and we finished all of the meat in no time.

“That’s good to know,” said Aera. “In that case, let’s start working on the bind viper.”

“Bind vipers aren’t exactly pleasant to look at,” said Yuki.

From our magic bags, the girls had taken a chunk of meat about fifty centimeters wide. We had already skinned it, so you wouldn’t necessarily know it was snake meat without being told, but all of us were perfectly aware, of course. Besides, it was also completely red, so we all found it pretty grotesque.

“It’s not a common ingredient, so I can understand that feeling if you’re not used to seeing it,” said Aera. “However, the bones make wonderful soup stock.”

“The bones, huh?” Natsuki asked.

“Yeah, and it’s easy to prepare too, although it takes some time,” said Aera.

According to Aera-san, all you had to do was to throw a bind viper’s vertebrae into a pan and simmer them, periodically skimming off the scum. Once the bones had become soft enough to break up, you just filtered the broth and salted it to taste. Apparently it was okay to add in things like herbs as well, but that wasn’t absolutely necessary, as the end result was a delicious, clean-tasting broth.

“I had no idea that the bones of bind vipers could be used for cooking,” I said. “I guess it’s a shame that we discarded the bones of the first viper we slew.”

Purely in the interest of saving time, we hadn’t discarded the vipers’ bones after the first one, and now that decision had led to a positive outcome.

“The book I had didn’t say anything about the bones being worth money,”

said Touya.

“As I said, making soup from the bones of a bind viper is easy, but you’ll have to let it simmer for anywhere from three to five hours, so there probably aren’t many people who use these ingredients,” said Aera. “That being the case, it’s likely that most butcher shops won’t buy the bones off you. It’s not a type of soup that people make at home, so you’ll mostly find it on the menu of slightly expensive restaurants.”

“It definitely doesn’t sound like a soup that you can casually make for dinner,” said Haruka.

“Mm. In addition, even at a restaurant, you’d have to make a lot for it to be worth the effort.” Aera-san set the bones in a pan and covered them in water, then started a fire under them before turning around to look at Luce-san. “I’m leaving this to you, Luce.”

“Sure,” said Luce. “I just need to skim the scum, right?”

“Yeah, thanks. Okay, let’s leave the soup to Luce and move on to the meat,” said Aera. “Bind viper meat is a bit chewy, so it’s not for everyone, but it tastes quite good if you slice it thinly and then grill it with salt. It’s somewhat similar to chicken neck meat, but less fatty.”

“Oh, chicken neck meat? That’s my favorite!” Touya exclaimed.

I was a bit hesitant about eating bind viper due to the color of the meat, to say nothing of the fact that it came from a viper, but that comparison made it sound a bit more appetizing to me as well.

“Yeah, it can taste delicious! However, it isn’t a commonly eaten meat due to how chewy it is,” said Aera. “In a way, if you’re eating it at home, it’s more annoying to work through an entire viper’s worth of meat than it is to deal with the bones.”

As she was talking to us, Aera-san thinly sliced the bind viper and fried it in a pan. The color of the meat changed as it cooked, eventually turning to a hue somewhere between those of beef and pork. Aera-san salted the meat and stabbed it with a fork before handing it over to me.

I accepted the fork from her and took a bite of the meat. “Hmm. The flavor is

pretty light, but it actually is really good,” I said. “I can taste the umami oozing out as I chew.”

The chewy texture of the meat was definitely similar to chicken neck, but Aera-san had mentioned that it was less fatty, so it was probably somewhat healthier. However, even in thin slices, it was really wearing my jaw out, so that was one downside.

“This doesn’t seem like something that you can eat a lot of in one sitting,” said Haruka.

“What if we mince it? Hmm. Actually, that might be difficult,” said Natsuki.

Everyone agreed that bind viper meat wasn’t meant for mass consumption—except for Touya. “Nah, I like the chewiness. In fact, I wouldn’t mind if it was even thicker.”

Aera-san looked quite surprised. “Really?! Even beastmen should have trouble chewing through this kind of meat. Do you want me to grill a thicker slice?”

“Yeah, that’d be great,” said Touya.

Aera-san sliced a steak-sized piece of meat to grill. It smelled delicious, but I wasn’t sure if Touya was actually capable of chewing through a slice that thick.

“Okay, it’s done,” said Aera. “I hope you can actually eat it...” She handed him the steak on a plate.

“Thanks for the treat!” Touya exclaimed. He stabbed his fork into it and began to chew away. “Hmm. Oh, yeah, this is great as far as I’m concerned.”

The way he was eating, it looked like he was ripping the meat apart with his fangs. I definitely couldn’t do that, and neither could the girls; they sighed when they saw how Touya was eating.

“I guess we should just sell most of our bind viper meat,” said Haruka. “Would you like some for your café, Aera-san?”

“Um, not really,” Aera replied apologetically. “The bones would be nice to have, however. I’m sorry.”

I waved my hands to indicate that it was fine. “Don’t worry about it, Aera-san.

We can just sell the meat to the Adventurers' Guild." After all, the Adventurers' Guild was the perfect place to sell materials and ingredients that weren't useful to us.

"However, I guess this means bind vipers aren't monsters that we should actively hunt," I added.

"Mm, monsters like orcs are easier to deal with," said Yuki. "Their meat is much easier to use too."

There was no reason for us to avoid bind vipers if we came across them, but they weren't valuable enough for us to go out of our way to find them. However, Aera-san smiled when she heard our opinions. "Oh, I wouldn't be so sure about that. Your opinions might change at a later time."

"Hm? Is there something more to bind viper meat, Aera-san?" I asked.

"You can look forward to finding out when you're older," Aera replied. "Now, then, the brown eik meat is done stewing."

Aera-san served the stew in deep plates. It looked somewhat like beef stew. I tried a spoonful, and the meat melted in my mouth as the fragrant smell of herbs passed through my nostrils. The viper bone broth had a rich flavor and went well with the unique taste of the brown eik meat. It was an excellent dish that would be perfect with some crusty bread. There were a lot of dishes that supposedly brought out the best in the ingredients without altering their basic flavor, but this dish that Aera-san had made was the exact opposite. She had definitely brought out the best in the ingredients, but I could also taste the fine touches that she had added as a professional cook.

"This dish has an amazing balance of flavors," said Natsuki. "I guess we're no match for you in terms of pure experience."

"Whoa, it's actually possible to make meat this soft? This really exceeded anything I imagined," said Yuki.

"It's possible as long as you take the time," said Aera. "However, it's a bit too time-consuming for most households."

Time was once again a factor that we had to consider. Our daily lives weren't that busy, but it was the girls who had to spend time cooking. *Oh, hold on.*

Maybe I could use Time Magic to reduce the cooking time? It worked for drying the dindels, so testing it out might be worthwhile.

While we were all busy sampling the stew, Aera-san had continued cooking. “Here’s another dish made from bind viper,” she said. Each portion was in a small bowl. “This amount is what’s typically served as a snack with alcohol.”

This next dish was a sweet and salty stir-fry made from thin slices of bind viper. It tasted great; in fact, it was the kind of dish that made me wish I had some rice to go with it.

“Oh, this is definitely easy to eat,” said Haruka. “None of us drink, but it certainly seems like it would go well with alcohol.”

“Mm, we can probably make these ahead of time as side dishes,” said Yuki.

“Thank you for the praise. I’d like to end things with another soup made with bind viper bones, but it looks like it’ll take a while to be ready,” said Aera.

Aera-san walked over to the pan that she’d put Luce-san in charge of earlier, then paused in thought for a moment, holding her jaw in her hands. Luce-san had already passed the scum-skimming duty to Aera-san and was busy enjoying the dishes Aera-san had prepared.

“Oh, in that case, I know a great way to make use of time while waiting!” Yuki stood and spread her hands, grinning widely. “Let the competition to see who made the best inspiel sauce begin! Yay!”

Aera-san and Luce-san both seemed very surprised by this sudden declaration, and both of them had questions.

“Huh? A competition?” Aera asked.

“By inspiel sauce, you mean that sauce that Aera makes, right?” Luce asked.

“Yeah. We all decided to try making our own versions of inspiel sauce using different ingredients,” Yuki replied.

Yuki pointed at the area near the windows, which seemed to clear things up for Aera-san; she clasped her hands together and said, “Oh, so that’s what those jars are for! I was wondering.”

I would be curious as well if I saw ten jars lined up near a window and labeled

with people's names. In fact, I was actually confused as to why neither Aera-san nor Luce-san had asked about them until now.

"I was actually wondering about those jars as well," said Luce. "I figured they were for some kind of religious ritual, so I didn't feel like it was something I should ask about."

Yuki's eyes went wide in surprise. "A ritual?! Only a crazy person would do that!"

Objectively speaking, though, it wasn't unreasonable to assume that the jars were something like bone urns. They didn't look that creepy, since they were sitting out in a bright place, but if you'd stumbled upon them in a dark cellar, you might have suspected that they contained pieces of a body.

"Don't worry, they're merely jars of inspiel sauce!" Haruka exclaimed. "There's *probably* nothing weird inside."

Aera-san and Luce-san both seemed confused. "Probably?"

"She means that we don't know how the inspiel sauce tastes," said Yuki. "That's why we're having a competition, and we're looking forward to additional opinions from the two of you, since you can be impartial."

"In that case, I don't mind acting as a judge," said Aera. "However, be warned—I won't go easy when it comes to food."

"I'm not a professional cook, so my opinion is going to be based on personal preference," said Luce. "If that's okay, then I'm willing to act as a judge too."

"Yeah, that's fine! Also, the first-place winner will be awarded a wonderful prize!" Yuki exclaimed. "Hopefully, that is," she added, cocking her head as her tone turned doubtful.

I chuckled. "What's with the sudden lack of confidence, Yuki? Did you not prepare a prize?"

"Well, I don't have anything to offer," Yuki replied. "What about you, Haruka?"

"I can't just prepare something out of nothing if you ask me with no advance warning," said Haruka. "I would have thought about it if you'd discussed it with

me beforehand, however. Hmm. How about you just grant the winner's wishes, Yuki?"

"Oh yeah, I guess that wouldn't cost anything!" Yuki exclaimed. "Aside from me potentially having to do a lot, that is!"

"I mean, you're the one who came up with the idea for this competition in the first place, Yuki," I said.

"Sure, that's true, but come on. Let's at least make it so that the winner can ask a favor from someone," said Yuki. "Otherwise it'd be sad if I won and didn't get anything, you know?"

Yuki looked at us with puppy dog eyes, and we all chuckled involuntarily.

"Hee hee, that sounds fine," said Natsuki. "Everyone else is okay with this, right?"

"Yeah, I don't mind if it's just between the five of us," I said. I was fairly sure that none of us would come up with a weird favor, so Yuki's idea sounded fine to me; it would just be a form of entertainment.

Haruka and Touya both nodded as well, wearing expressions that indicated they were fine with this idea, and we finished the preparations for the judging process. Each person had ten small plates lined up in front of them, so the total number of plates was seventy. Yuki had prepared these plates ahead of time with her Earth Magic, and each was labeled with a number from one to ten to make it easier to distinguish them from one another. A more serious competition would have required a blind test, but this was just for fun, so we told everyone ahead of time who had created which sauce.

"It'd probably be fine just to let everyone choose for themselves where they want to start, but first we might as well have each person advertise their creations," said Yuki. "Who wants to be first?"

"Anyone can go first, but the plates labeled one and two are mine, so please allow me," said Haruka. "Let's start with the plate labeled number one."

The inspiel sauce in the first plate was black in color, and it looked more viscous than any inspiel sauce I had seen before. I dipped a couple of fingertips in and put them in my mouth.

“Whoa, this is really sweet!” I exclaimed. “What is this?!”

I’d inadvertently raised my voice due to the unexpected taste. I had expected the sauce to taste sweet and salty, but Haruka’s creation was purely sweet.

“This tastes quite similar to brown sugar syrup,” said Natsuki. “The sweetness isn’t quite like that of sugar, though.”

“What did you put in this inspiel sauce, Haruka?” Yuki asked. “Sugar’s quite expensive here, right?”

“There’s actually only a single ingredient: potato,” Haruka replied. “And I only used one type of potato.”

Aera-san looked quite surprised. “That’s all? I had no idea you could get this kind of taste with just potato. Perhaps it’s the type that you used.” She closed her eyes as she took another taste of the sauce to assess it better. “Hmm. I think you might actually be able to create sweets using this sauce.”

“Mm. I guess that means my first creation is a greater success than I expected it to be,” said Haruka. “Okay, let’s move on to the plate labeled number two. I think the quality of this sauce would depend on how you used it...”

“Yeah, the sauce on that plate smells really strong even before I’ve tasted it,” I said.

The color of this inspiel sauce was blackish, just like the first, but it didn’t taste very sweet when I licked it. In addition, it caused a tingling sensation on my tongue, so I didn’t really enjoy it very much.

“I only used herbs for this sauce,” said Haruka. “I was trying to make an inspiel sauce that could be used for cooking, but...”

“Hmm. You could maybe use this like a flavoring oil,” said Natsuki.

“Yeah, it’s the type of condiment that can improve dishes if you simply mix a small amount of it into your cooking,” said Aera.

I didn’t have a positive impression of this inspiel sauce, but apparently all of the cooks here actually considered it quite good. Some ingredients used in cooking had strong odors, garlic and ginger being two examples, so it sort of made sense to me that the girls liked it. Such ingredients weren’t delicious in

their raw form, but they could dramatically change the flavor of dishes, so Haruka's second project was technically a success as well.

"I'm really impressed that you made useful variants of inspiel sauce with simple ingredients, Haruka," said Yuki. "Okay, I guess I'm up next, since the plates labeled number three and four are mine. I think one of them ended up being quite good..."

The inspiel sauce in the third plate was a light brown, while the sauce in the fourth plate had a darker color, but both of them looked quite smooth.

"The sauce in plate number three looks a bit, well, fruity, I guess? It doesn't seem like it'd be easy to use," I said.

I was a bit confused about the third sauce, and Luce-san must have agreed with me, since she nodded in response with an awkward look on her face. "Yeah, it tastes like a lighter, diluted version of the sauce we use at Aera's café."

"Hmm, yeah, I had a feeling that I messed up. I got baited by common sense and ended up with something that's too similar to the basic sauce," said Yuki. "However, I have full faith in the sauce in plate number four! Try it out!"

Yuki seemed quite confident as she urged us to try out the fourth plate, so I obeyed her and took a lick out of the one in front of me. "Oh, this kind of tastes like Worcestershire sauce!"

"Hee hee, yeah, it really does!" Yuki exclaimed. "I did my best to search for the ingredients that are used in Worcestershire sauce!"

Yeah, I can see why you're so proud of this, Yuki.

Yuki was beaming, but Haruka frowned. "Hold on, Yuki. You said you searched for the ingredients that are used in Worcestershire sauce, so does that mean you managed to find some tomatoes?"

"Yeah, I did!" Yuki replied.

"Huh?! Does that mean you can make ketchup too?" I asked.

I actually liked ketchup a lot and wanted some if it was possible to make, so I looked at Yuki with hope in my eyes, but she tilted her head in response. "Uh, I'm not sure about that. What I managed to find were dried tomatoes, so..."

“Dried tomatoes, huh? I’ve never used any myself, so I don’t know if you can use them to make ketchup,” said Haruka.

“Do you actually know how to make ketchup in the first place, Haruka?” Natsuki asked. “Tomato puree isn’t that hard to make, but turning it into ketchup is probably quite difficult...”

“Mm, that’s true,” said Haruka. “I know you need tomatoes and sugar, but I’m not sure what to do about the other seasonings and spices required.”

“Ketchup consists primarily of tomatoes and sugar, but those seasonings and spices are probably the deciding factors in the flavor,” said Natsuki.

“Are you all talking about some kind of tomato sauce? Tomatoes are dried during this season of the year, and you can make something like a sauce if you rehydrate them, but fresh tomatoes taste much better,” said Aera. “They can’t be preserved, however, so they’re probably seasonal goods.”

Some of the information Aera-san had chimed in with was very important. Haruka seemed to have noticed that as well, and she froze for a moment before carefully asking for confirmation. “So it is actually possible to obtain raw tomatoes here, Aera-san?”

“Yeah, there should be plenty available on the marketplace in a few months, I think,” said Aera. “Are they not actually grown in this region? Tomatoes are a highly perishable fruit, so they’re not exactly suited for importing from other towns or cities.”

“We don’t really know either,” said Haruka. “We arrived here in Laffan last autumn, so...”

Yuki was left alone as the other girls became absorbed in the ketchup discussion, and she pouted and poked Haruka’s cheeks for attention. “Hey, enough talk about ketchup. Let’s talk about the sauce that I made.”

“Huh? Oh yeah, it’s good,” said Haruka.

“That’s it?!” Yuki exclaimed. “I put a lot of thought into this, you know?!”

“I mean, that’s all I can say,” said Haruka. “Right, everyone?”

“Yeah, it’s definitely a usable sauce,” I said.

“It’s kind of like a variant of the sauce we’ve had, so it doesn’t really feel new or surprising,” said Touya.

Haruka asked the rest of us for our opinions, and we all casually nodded in response. The number four inspiel sauce that Yuki had made was good, but it simply tasted like what we had expected from a sauce; it didn’t seem novel by any means. The original inspiel sauce was similar to okonomi sauce, which was itself related to Worcestershire sauce, so obtaining something that tasted similar to Worcestershire sauce didn’t seem remarkable at all.

“Ugh! I worked so hard for this, and yet...!”

“Neither of the sauces you made had any surprising elements to them, Yuki.”

“I mean, yeah, that’s true, but it kind of hurts when you put it like that, Natsuki...”

“This was a good opportunity to experiment, after all. With that in mind, I used some unusual ingredients for my attempts.”

The two types of inspiel sauce that Natsuki had made were both smoother than Yuki’s, and they had a transparent, light-brown color. The one in the plate labeled number five was slightly darker, so I scooped some of it onto my fingers and licked them, and I was very surprised by the flavor.

“Wait, what?!” Yuki exclaimed in surprise. “Is this soy sauce?!”

I didn’t raise my voice, but I felt just as excited. I tasted the sauce again to confirm, and it was actually a bit different from soy sauce in terms of both smell and taste, but it was similar enough to serve as a substitute.

“Mm, this worked out better than I expected it to,” said Natsuki. “Initially, I didn’t have high expectations for this experiment...”

“What ingredients did you use, Natsuki?” I asked.

“Steamed beans, roasted wheat, and salt,” Natsuki replied. “And the sauce in the sixth plate contains just steamed beans and salt.”

“Oh, this one tastes kind of similar to miso sauce, I think,” said Touya.

The sauce in plate number six was exactly as Touya had described it, and it wasn’t that much different from the sauce in the fifth plates, but there were

probably plenty of uses for both.

“Grain products, huh? This is a really innovative way of approaching inspiel sauce,” said Aera. “It’ll add a lot of potential variety to the dishes you can cook.”

“I’ve never tasted something like this before, but it’s delicious,” said Luce.

Clearly Aera-san and Luce-san both had positive impressions of Natsuki’s contributions. With that in mind, it was probably easier to get interesting results by using a few special ingredients than by mixing a bunch of different things. I had also used unusual ingredients for my sauces, but...

“I’m up next, I guess,” I said. “However, it’s kind of awkward to share my creations right after Natsuki’s amazing results...”

I had tasted my creations ahead of time, knowing I’d have to share them with other people for this competition, but the sauce in the plate labeled number seven had very little flavor apart from some astringency, so it was hard to judge—actually, there was nothing to praise about it. I was greeted with silence after everyone tried sauce number seven, so I swiftly moved on to the next one.

“Okay, next up is sauce number eight,” I said. “It has a unique flavor, so it should be easier to criticize, at least.”

“Really, Nao?! Oh, wait, did you use a lot of bereoje in this one?” Yuki asked.

Yuki had figured out the primary ingredient right away; it was fairly obvious due to the “unique” taste of bereoje.

“That’s a vegetable that’s easily obtainable at this time of the year,” said Aera. “However, some people don’t care for the taste, so I don’t use any in the dishes I serve at my café.”

“We don’t use any in our home either, since Nao doesn’t like celery,” said Haruka. “Are you sure about this, Nao?”

“I mean, yeah, it’s not a vegetable that I’d usually buy,” I said. “Also, thanks for not using any bereoje in your cooking.”

I’d just bought the ingredients that a couple stalls at the marketplace had recommended to me. I wasn’t as young as the boy who had been placed in

charge of the stall with a lot of bereoje, but there was a chance that I would have cried as well if I had been served bereoje as a main dish.

“I think this could be used as a sauce if adjusted a bit, however,” said Natsuki.

“It’s not a taste that everyone will enjoy, but I guess you could make it work,” said Aera. “Hopefully, that is...”

Yeah, I figured there was no way to salvage the number seven sauce, even by adjusting it. Also, Aera-san, you don’t really have to mince your words.

“All right, let’s move on to the last set,” I said. “My ingredients didn’t cost much, so it doesn’t really matter!”

There was no point in agonizing over failed creations, so moving on to the remaining two plates was a better use of our time. Both of them seemed like they had the potential to be quite spicy, as they were Touya’s creations.

“Okay, it’s time to finish things off with my special sauces!” Touya exclaimed. “I’m confident that the ingredients I used are cheaper than the ones Nao used, since the concept I had in mind was reusing ingredients!”

You’re already making me uneasy, Touya. “What did you do? Did you try to get ingredients from people who were going to discard them?”

“Nah, you know me—I’m not capable of haggling,” Touya replied. “I gathered the ingredients from the woods myself.”

“Well, I’m not sure if haggling is the right word for the way some television charity shows obtain ingredients like that,” I said. “Wait, hold on, the woods?”

Apart from game, there wasn’t a lot of food to be found in the woods, so I felt uneasy about this sauce. In fact, before I heard Touya’s explanation, I had glanced at the remaining plates in front of me, and that alone had already made me very uneasy.

“Green, huh?” we all said in unison.

All of the sauces that had been displayed so far were different shades of brown, and I had assumed that inspiel sauce would turn any ingredients you added into a brown sauce. However, the last two plates of sauce were clearly green, which wasn’t a reassuring sight at all.

“Did you taste this yourself beforehand, Touya?” I asked.

“Nah, but I only used edible ingredients, so yeah,” Touya replied.

“You’re supposed to only use edible ingredients!” I exclaimed. “And you’re also supposed to taste them yourself first!”

“Me? Sure, I guess, but I’m fairly certain that these sauces are edible,” said Touya.

Honesty was one of Touya’s virtues, and while the rest of us were hesitating, he used his fingers to scoop up some of the ninth sauce without any apparent fear. However, he fell silent after licking his fingers, then stuck his tongue out. “Ugh, so bit—argh!”

“I don’t know what you’re trying to say, but I can tell that this sauce doesn’t taste good,” I said.

“Yeah, definitely,” everyone else replied.

However, today’s competition was to find out who had made the best inspiel sauce, so I had to rate Touya’s creations one way or another. I scooped a tiny amount of the sauce and licked it off my fingers.

“Ugh, this tastes really bitter, spicy, and astringent!” I exclaimed.

The sauce didn’t taste as grassy as I had expected, but it was really bad. If I’d had to describe it, the closest comparison I could think of was if someone had squeezed an unripe persimmon into bitter coffee and then melted in some wasabi for good measure.

Even Touya looked a bit unhappy with the results. “Ugh, damn it! It said this was edible when I appraised it, and yet...”

“Just what *is* this, Touya?” Haruka gave Touya an exasperated look. “Even if they’re edible, you can’t just throw in a bunch of wild plants without removing any bitter flavor. What did you do?”

“Uh, I just washed the plants and then mixed them in the food processor,” Touya replied.

It was true that wild plants were edible, but many of them had a strong, bitter taste in their raw form. You had to remove those flavors before you could use

them in cooking, or you could just use them for tempura instead. The fact that Touya hadn't done any of that and had simply mixed them together was a reckless act.

"I am curious about the bitter taste," said Natsuki. "Did you manage to find something similar to wasabi, Touya-kun?"

"Yeah, there were plenty of them growing wild, so I mixed all of their leaves and roots together," said Touya.

"Why did you do that, Touya?! You should have secured some for other uses!" I exclaimed. "In fact, they're way more valuable than this sauce you created!"

"Oh, yeah, I guess you're right," said Touya. "We managed to get some sauce that's similar to soy sauce, and the idea of dipping meat in wasabi soy sauce sounds kind of good to me."

"It's a good thing that you managed to find plants similar to wasabi, but that doesn't make this sauce acceptable," said Haruka. "This sauce has problems."

"Oh well. I don't want to use this sauce either, but I don't mind losing it, since it was basically free," said Touya. "All right, let's move on to the last one."

"Yeah, and you should be the one to taste it first, Touya," I said.

"Me, again? I mean, I get what you're saying," said Touya. "I did make it myself."

It seemed like Touya was aware that he couldn't refuse my request after how his first sauce had turned out. He licked some of the last sauce and tilted his head. "Huh? Hmm. I personally think this actually doesn't taste that bad..."

"You don't sound very confident," I said. "Well, at least you don't look like you're in pain."

I licked some of the last sauce myself to check before the girls could. I wasn't sure how to describe the sauce. It wasn't bad by any means, and it had a sort of rich and smooth flavor. The girls seemed curious after they saw how Touya and I had reacted, but after they extended their hands to taste the last sauce, they ended up tilting their heads in confusion too.

“Hmm. Is this actually umami?” Natsuki asked.

“Oh, yeah, it does taste like it!” Yuki exclaimed. “What ingredients did you use in this sauce, Touya?”

“I just used a bunch of different mushrooms that I found in the woods,” Touya replied. “That’s it.”

“Mushrooms, huh? You decided to use one of the most potentially dangerous ingredients? I see that you’re brave as usual,” I said.

Touya had probably used his Appraisal skill to distinguish which mushrooms were safe to eat, but even back on Earth, there had been some mushrooms that were dangerous just to handle, and in this world, there was the additional risk of magic, so I was impressed that Touya had been brave enough to try collecting mushrooms.

“Well, mushrooms are a rich source of umami, so it was a decent idea,” said Haruka. “You’ll have to be careful with what mushrooms you use in the future, however. By the way, there’s a poisonous mushroom known as fly agaric that *can* be delicious, so...”

“Huh?! I don’t want to eat poisonous mushrooms even if they’re delicious!” Touya exclaimed.

“Don’t worry, Touya,” said Haruka. “There’s a perfect spell for this—Cure Poison.”

“That doesn’t make it any safer! I don’t want to eat a meal that I know is poisonous,” said Touya. “Well, I actually kind of want to try eating blowfish, but...”

Blowfish were poisonous fish that supposedly had some delicious parts. If we could eat them and be sure we wouldn’t die, then...

“I’m just joking. It’s too risky to try out dangerous food,” said Haruka. “Even fly agarics are only meant to be eaten after you detox them.”

Aera-san nodded deeply. “Mm. There are some types of mushrooms that you can detox, but it’s hard to identify them. In addition, there are some mushrooms that are harmless to elves but harmful to beastmen, so you need to

be careful, Touya-san.”

“Huh, really?” Touya asked.

“Yes. One type of mushroom that beastmen especially dislike is called shitomeralga,” said Aera. “Other races can consume it without any problems, but if beastmen consume it, it causes their tail hair to fall out for some reason.”

“Seriously?!” Touya exclaimed. “Wait, there isn’t any of it inside this last sauce that I made, right?!”

After hearing that shocking information from Aera-san, Touya hastily looked into one of his jars, but there were no traces of mushrooms, as they had already been broken down by the inspiel sauce, so there was no way to tell exactly what mushrooms he had used. On top of that, if this shitomeralga was a type of mushroom that was perfectly edible for other races, I wasn’t sure if the results of the Appraisal skill would be fully informative.

“Oh, don’t worry—I’m fairly sure that those mushrooms don’t grow near Laffan,” said Aera.

“Really?” Touya sighed in relief and sat back in his chair after Aera had provided that extra information. “Whew, that’s good to know.”

Natsuki chuckled and took another taste of sauce number eight before nodding to herself. “Mm, I think it’s a good idea to check what mushrooms you used in this. I don’t think you can really call this a sauce, but umami can make things delicious even without a lot of salt, so we can use this as a condiment.”

Umami was a savory taste that was mainly composed of three compounds known as glutamate, inosinate, and guanylate. A liquid rich in umami would probably be very useful for a cook.

“This doesn’t exactly match the conditions we set for making a sauce, but I guess it can be considered a success,” said Yuki.

“I mean, if you’re going to say that, most of our creations weren’t exactly things that you can really call sauces,” I said.

“Yeah, most of them were more like condiments,” said Yuki. “Sauces are a type of condiment as well, however.”

The creations that seemed the closest to what I'd had in mind for a sauce were the ones that Yuki and Natsuki had made. *Did Yuki emphasize the word "sauce" on purpose to make me think that way? Is she really trying her hardest to win this competition?*

"Okay, it's time to vote on the sauces," said Yuki. "However, it's a bit of a hassle to vote on each one, so everybody just point at the person who you think made the most useful sauces. Cast your votes!"

The rubric that Yuki had brought up wasn't very strict, but it was a fast way to decide. Natsuki obtained five votes, Yuki obtained one, and I somehow also obtained one.

"I-I liked the sauces that Yuki-san made the most," said Luce.

It was somewhat of a conservative choice, as the sauces that Yuki had made were the closest to the original inspiel sauce in terms of taste.

"The sauces that I thought tasted the best by themselves were the ones that Haruka-san made, but the ones made by Natsuki-san have the most uses in terms of adding variety to cooking," said Aera. "Some of the other sauces seemed like they could be useful for all sorts of purposes, but I voted for the ones that probably have the most potential uses."

Aera-san had voted from a cook's perspective, and her assessment was sound and fair.

"Ugh, I figured that I couldn't win against Natsuki," Yuki muttered.

Oh, so you really were trying hard to win, Yuki. As for the one person who'd voted for me...

"I—"

Yuki clapped her hands to interrupt. "Your pity vote doesn't count, Natsuki!" Yuki exclaimed. "You're a reserved person! The final result is first place for Natsuki and second place for me!"

It was perfectly fine that Yuki had interrupted. Natsuki wasn't the type of person who would vote for herself, so it was probably true that she had voted for me out of pity even though my creations had been the worst ones.

“As your prize, Natsuki, I bestow upon you the right to order one of us to grant a wish of yours!” Yuki exclaimed. “You can only use this once, however.”

“Um, well...” Natsuki glanced at me for a moment, but I shook my head in response. She had an awkward smile on her face as she accepted the prize. “Thank you very much. I’ll make use of this prize when I get an opportunity to do so.”

The fact that the prize was the power to order one of us to obey the winner’s wishes was somewhat troubling, but I probably didn’t need to worry, since it was Natsuki who had won. Yuki was the type of person who might casually ask for the impossible, and I would have been in danger if Touya had this power because he would probably have hesitated to use it on the girls. As for Haruka, she knew me well and had for a very long time, so a wish from her would have probably been something really difficult but still feasible.

Haruka picked up where Yuki had left off, but she didn’t sound very excited. “Okay, next up is the cost-effectiveness ranking.”

“Huh?!” Yuki exclaimed. “We never planned on such a rank—”

Yuki looked very surprised by the sudden introduction of a new ranking criterion, but Haruka ignored her and continued. “Touya’s at the top in that ranking, of course. Natsuki’s second, and I’m tied for third place with Nao. That makes you last, Yuki. It’s not like there’s a punishment for being last, but you used a little bit too much money.”

Touya was at the top of the new ranking due to the fact that he hadn’t used any money at all. Natsuki had used wheat, beans, and salt, ingredients that were all fairly cheap, so that put her in second place. For one of her sauces, Haruka had only used potatoes, which were probably pretty cheap, but she had actually spent about the same amount of money as me in total. However, I wasn’t sure if that was because the herbs in her second sauce had been more expensive than she’d expected or if it was because the ingredients I had used were cheap. As for Yuki, it seemed like she had used almost the entirety of the two gold coins that each of us had been allocated. Even worse, most of her money had gone into the number three sauce, which hadn’t tasted very good.

“However, Touya worked by himself to gather his ingredients, so if we factor

in the labor cost, then he ranks below Yuki,” said Haruka. “It’s basically no different from spending money to obtain mushrooms in the marketplace, so the sauces he made are actually the ones that would be the most expensive to make.”

“Oh, I guess that makes sense,” I said. “We’d need a way to obtain those mushrooms for no real cost.” *Orc meat is technically free as well if we don’t factor in the labor cost...*

“It’s not a realistic option for my café,” said Aera. “On the other hand, the sauces that Natsuki-san made would be well suited for that purpose. Would you be willing to teach me how you made these sauces, Natsuki-san?”

“Sure, I don’t mind,” Natsuki replied. “Today you once again taught us how to make some delicious dishes, after all.”

Aera-san and Natsuki started to exchange more information, and Luce-san seemed convinced that this was worth it for both sides; she nodded to herself and muttered, “Oh, so this really is a beneficial exchange of ideas.”

It was obvious by now that Luce-san was a reasonable and level-headed person, so Aera-san’s café was in good hands as long as they continued to work together.

Aera-san asked the rest of us the recipes for all of the sauces we had made, even the ones that hadn’t tasted very good, and when we’d told her, she stood up with a satisfied expression on her face. “Today was a great experience for me! Now then, it’s time for some delicious soup to cleanse our palates!”

Cleanse our palates, huh? I mean, yeah, I need to wash away the aftertaste from the sauces Touya made, but still...

“Here’s some soup made from the bones of bind vipers,” said Aera. “It’s a light soup—just vegetables and a little salt. Please enjoy the natural taste of the ingredients.”

The soup that Aera-san had carried over from the kitchen was white and murky. As she’d said, there was nothing in it but a garnish of green vegetables. It was a simple dish, but I had just been tasting sauce after sauce that had all had overpowering flavors, so it was a refreshing change.

“All right, I’m digging in,” I said. “Mm, delicious.”

A good, simple dish deserved simple praise. The soup had a gentle flavor, full of umami, and the smell wasn’t strong or stinging. A faint trace of herbal fragrance passed through my nostrils along with a tinge of salt, and the flavor wasn’t so complex that it commanded your attention by any means, but it was somehow addictive.

“I didn’t expect this soup to be so good,” said Natsuki.

“Did you really use nothing but the bones from a bind viper?” Haruka asked.

“More or less. All I added were herbs for fragrance and a little salt,” Aera replied. “The green vegetables are just a garnish I scattered over the top.”

“With how good this soup tastes, it’s definitely worth hunting bind vipers,” said Touya.

“Isn’t it just? However, if you debone a bind viper, some branches of the Adventurers’ Guild will pay you less for the skin,” said Aera. “That is, the bones can be an extra source of money.”

Aera-san had mentioned earlier that broth made from bind viper bones was a dish that was only served at expensive restaurants. According to her, the Adventurers’ Guild would pay a decent amount of money in exchange for bind vipers with their bones intact if the guild had connections with high-end dining establishments that would buy them, but those kinds of places weren’t very common in rural towns like this one. As a result, the price of viper soup could vary greatly depending on the location of the guild branch that sold the ingredients.

“With that in mind, you probably won’t get much at the guild branch here in Laffan, but I’ll pay a proper price for a supply of bind viper bones if you bring them directly to my café,” said Aera. “I’m also willing to compensate you in the form of soup if you prefer, however. How does this idea sound to you all?”

We all looked at each other. The recipe for the bone soup seemed simple enough that even I could probably make it, but with these kinds of dishes, even the smallest of factors could dramatically affect the flavor, so I probably wouldn’t be able to recreate what Aera-san had made today.

“That’s a very attractive offer,” said Haruka. “We’ll give it some serious thought and then get back to you.”

“Okay, that’s good to know,” said Aera. “Oh, um, what now? Do you have any plans after this?”

Aera-san seemed a bit hesitant as she asked, but Natsuki nodded; she seemed to understand what Aera-san was hoping for. “Nothing in particular. If you happen to be free after this, Aera-san, would you like to join us in cooking? It’d be great if you could help us explore the potential of our new condiments for adding variety to our dishes.”

Aera-san smiled and nodded, so that must have been exactly what she had wanted to hear. “Oh, I would be more than happy to help! I wanted to try out these new sauces myself!”

All of us had already told Aera-san the recipe for each sauce, so she could probably replicate them herself if she wanted, but that would cost her money and time. Time wasn’t exactly something Aera-san had a lot of, since she was usually busy running her café, so today was a perfect opportunity for her to test things out with Natsuki and the others. It would be great if they succeeded at making even more useful sauces from their experiments, and Aera-san’s knowledge of cooking would also be very useful to us, so there was no reason not to team up, and the four cooks went into the kitchen together.

“I enjoy cooking, but I’m not a big eater myself. Luce doesn’t eat much either, so it’s not easy to come up with meals,” said Aera. “However, I also don’t want to cook too much food and end up having it go to waste...”

“Is that so, Luce-san?” I asked.

“Honestly speaking, the hardest part is trying not to put on weight,” Luce replied with an awkward chuckle.

The fact that she had enough food to be picky was somewhat of a luxury given that there were people out there in the world who struggled to find food on a daily basis, but it was still probably a serious problem for her.

“In that case, feel free to make as much as you want today, Aera-san,” said Haruka. “We have magic bags that we can use to preserve food, and we’ll cover

the cost of the ingredients as well.”

“Are you sure?! Thank you very much!” Aera exclaimed, beaming. “All right, let’s have fun cooking together!”

Aera-san accepted Haruka’s offer, and the girls spent the rest of the day cooking. Touya, Luce-san, and I had to go out to purchase ingredients multiple times over the course of the day. Aera-san’s mood seemed to rub off on the other girls, since it looked like they were all having fun with their long cooking session. As a result, they made a wide variety of dishes, including dishes from this world and dishes from Japanese, Chinese, and Western cuisine back on Earth. There were a few “interesting” dishes as well, but all of them were better than average, which was a natural result of the combined efforts of a professional cook and three girls with the Cooking skill. All of the dishes ended up inside of our magic bags, and they brightened up our dining table and camp meals for a very long time thereafter.

Chapter 3—Let’s Enjoy a Vacation?

Our inspiel sauce competition had been a success, and we hadn’t exactly idled our days away until the day of the competition either. Most of the time, our daily lives were relaxing, but we had also committed time and effort to crafting elemental metal. All of us had taken part in the process except for Touya, and Riva had also joined us as an adviser. However, Edith had taught the girls most of what they needed to do, so Riva hadn’t had much to do. In fact, after she delivered the base materials, it was more like she had simply dropped by to hang out with us. I was contributing to the process as a mage, but half of our sessions turned into occasions to chat.

As for the lone guy who’d been left out, Touya had spent his time cleaning up our yard, which also gave him a way to exercise. Summer was approaching, so weeds could easily swallow the yard if we left it alone. On top of that, we also had the mansion that Edith had bequeathed to us, so there was no shortage of places that required care and maintenance. Touya had worked hard with a hoe in his hands, and I had helped him out from time to time with my magic. However, his physical abilities as a beastman were impressive, and by the time we’d finished crafting elemental metal, he had turned our yard into an open field—one we unfortunately had no use for.



“Whoa, you sure brought a lot of elemental metal,” said Gantz. “Just how hard do you guys intend to make me work?”

Gantz-san sounded a bit exasperated, but it was just his usual banter, so Haruka didn’t seem put off; she just nodded. “We crafted a little bit extra just in case. After all, it’s better than making less and not having enough for what we want.”

“Sure, but it’s harder to work with than regular metal, you know? But I don’t really mind as long as you’re paying,” said Gantz. “Sybil has been in a good mood recently, and I have you to thank for that...”

“In that case, I suppose your wife will be happy today as well,” said Haruka. “The first thing we’d like you to make is some chain mail from elemental metal enhanced with Light Magic.”

“Of all things, that’s what you want me to make first?!” Gantz exclaimed. “You know how annoying it is to make chain mail, right? Besides, chain mail has weaknesses—doesn’t protect your arms or legs. I’d honestly recommend plate armor instead.”

Chain mail was very good at turning slashes, but it wasn’t very effective against blunt trauma from weapons like clubs—or against thin blades that could slip between the gaps in the links. You could mitigate blunt trauma to an extent by wearing an acton as cushioning under our chain mail, but being cloth, it couldn’t absorb everything, and it was more or less useless against thrusting or stabbing attacks. On top of that, we were currently using chain mail vests that only reached down as far as our butts and our crotches in the front, so Gantz-san was right that our legs and arms weren’t protected at all.

“Chain mail is pretty convenient, since it’s easy to move around while wearing it,” said Haruka. “Is there any good way to deal with its limitations?”

“Hmm. It’ll be a lot of work for me, so I almost don’t want to bring up this idea, but if you’re willing to pay a lot of money, I can make chain mail pants and shirts with long sleeves,” said Gantz. “It’ll make the mail heavier, of course, but not as heavy as plate. And if I change the materials in the acton, then it should improve the ability of the mail to absorb attacks to a certain extent. It all depends on the amount of money you’re willing to spend.”

The prospect of heavier mail bothered me a bit, but it probably wouldn’t be an issue for us now that we had all learned the Enhanced Muscles skill. The actons we were all currently wearing, which Gantz-san had made some time ago, were cotton and flax, so it was true that they left room for improvement.

“It sounds like it’d be better if we made the actons ourselves,” I said. “Are there any good materials that you can craft with alchemy for that purpose, Haruka?”

The Sewing skill was our best option for crafting actons, and there was a chance that we could create some high-quality materials through alchemy.

Haruka furrowed her brows and paused in thought for a while, then finally nodded. “Hmm. Yeah, I suppose it’s an idea worth trying out.”

“In that case, Gantz-san, please make a set of chain mail pants and shirts with long sleeves for each of us,” I said.

“All five of you?!” Gantz-san exclaimed. “That’s going to take four or five times longer than five mail vests, you know? Are you serious about this?”

The process of crafting chain mail was a tedious one—it required someone to weave rings for a long period of time—besides which elemental metal was a difficult material to work with, so I was aware that it would be a lot of work for Gantz-san, but...

“Your meticulous efforts have helped us a lot, Gantz-san,” I said. “In fact, it’s thanks to you that we’ve been able to continue our lives as adventurers without losing anyone, and we really appreciate it.”

Gantz-san fell silent for a moment. There was a slightly happy expression on his face, but he clicked his tongue in an attempt to distract us from it. “Tsk. Fine, I guess. I can probably manage if I get Tomi to help me out.” Gantz-san paused again and used his chin to point over his shoulder. “Sybil’s in the back. You girls don’t look that much different from before, but you should still go over and get your measurements taken. It’s not easy to adjust mail after it’s made. Touya, Nao, you two stay here with me.”

“Okay,” said Haruka.

The girls headed off to the back of Gantz-san’s store, and Gantz-san took our measurements, but...

“The measurements for young men around your age can change rapidly, but you two haven’t grown at all,” said Gantz.

Gantz-san was right about that in my case. Touya’s chest, arms, and legs had gotten a bit thicker, but the difference wasn’t significant enough to require a change in the size of his chain mail.

“Really?” I asked. “I thought I’d trained quite hard...”

“Eh, doesn’t matter,” Gantz replied. “Besides, I’ve heard it’s hard for elves to

build muscle.”

“What about me?” Touya asked. “I’m a beastman, so shouldn’t I be more muscular than I am?”

“There are plenty of men out there with bigger muscles, but that’s just a matter of the difference between individuals. Listen, showing off isn’t the goal for adventurers. The true winners are the ones who achieve success. You guys are definitely on that path. Besides...” Gantz-san beckoned us to come closer, and when we did, he lowered his voice before continuing. “If you get too muscular, you won’t be popular with women. There are some women who like muscular guys, but guys with physiques similar to yours have better odds with more women. That’s partly because there are so many violent and unruly adventurers out in the world.”

“I see...” we replied in unison.

Everything that Gantz-san had told us made perfect sense, so the two of us nodded. Soon after, Yuki returned from the back of the store looking a bit frustrated for some reason. Haruka and Natsuki came right after her, both of them wearing awkward grins.

I hastily moved away from Gantz-san and approached Yuki, since she seemed like she had some complaints. “What’s wrong, Yuki?”

“My height hasn’t increased at all since the last time I got measured...” Yuki replied.

“Oh, well, I bet that’s because you’re past your growth period,” I said.

Yuki’s growth had already hit a stop when we were back on Earth, and in fact, as far as I could remember, her looks hadn’t really changed at all in the past few years. I asked her why she was complaining about this now after all this time, and Natsuki nodded in agreement with me. “Mm, Nao-kun is right. It’s already been quite some time since you stopped growing, Yuki.”

“I was still clinging to hope!” Yuki exclaimed. “My body is different from before. I just wanted a few extra centimeters, that’s all!”

A few extra centimeters sounded possible, but Yuki’s wish clearly hadn’t been granted. Touya and I hadn’t grown much either, so there was a chance that

Advastlis-sama had granted us bodies that were already completely mature.

“Oh, Yuki, do you want a few extra centimeters so you’re taller than me?” Haruka asked.

Yuki deflected the question with one of her own. “...Don’t you want to grow as well, Haruka? You’ve ‘shrunk’ quite a lot, haven’t you?” she added, glancing at Haruka’s chest.

Haruka merely chuckled and looked at me before responding. “I don’t really care, honestly. Besides, it’s more convenient given our circumstances. Anyway, I’m not interested in the kinds of people who’d change their opinion of a girl based on the size of her chest, so...”

“Mm. All of you have other charming and attractive qualities,” I said.

I’d casually chimed in because this was a situation in which hesitation might well mean doom for me, but for some reason, Yuki started waving her hands around. “Oh, ‘Yuki might be short, but she has a nice figure, and she’s so charming and cute that I can’t help wanting to hug her,’ huh? You don’t have to go that far, Nao!”

“I never said anything like that,” I said. “Enough with the fake news. It’s true that you’re cute, though.”

“Oh, um...” My words seemed to have caught Yuki off guard; she stopped laughing and blushed, which drew some sharp looks from Haruka and Natsuki.

“...Natsuki, can the Treatment spell cure ear problems?” Haruka asked.

“I believe the spell that’s called for is Cure Insanity,” Natsuki replied. “However, that’s a Level 9 spell, so we can’t resolve this issue at the moment. Our only choice is to put Yuki into a hospital of some sort...”

“Oh, come on, I’m just joking! Don’t give me those scary looks, the two of you!” Yuki hid behind me and then pointed at Touya, who was chuckling at the conversation unfolding in front of us. “M-More importantly, we need to place orders for other stuff, like Touya’s equipment, right?!”

It seemed like Haruka and Natsuki were satisfied when they saw how scared Yuki was, and Haruka shrugged her shoulders before she turned to Gantz-san. “I

suppose you're right about that, Yuki. Gantz-san, we'd also like to place orders for a new set of armor made of elemental metal for Touya."

The other equipment was a shield, breastplate, gauntlets, and a few more armor pieces. Touya's current armor consisted mostly of pieces that we'd bought before grouping up with Natsuki and Yuki, and although we had paid as much as we could afford at the time, they weren't exactly high quality by our current standards.

"Oh, that's a great idea. It's obvious that Touya's current armor is cheaply made," said Gantz. "The rest of you ought to wear better armor too. Do you not plan on ordering any?"

"Leather armor is perfectly fine for the rest of us this time," Haruka replied. "We'll ask you to make some in the future if we happen to get our hands on good-quality leather, Gantz-san."

"I see. Well, chain mail made of elemental metal should be powerful enough to prevent injuries from any of the monsters you can run into near Laffan," said Gantz. "All right, time to sta—"

Haruka interrupted Gantz-san just as he was about to bring the conversation to a close. "Also, we'd like to place orders for new weapons for all of us," said Haruka. "First off, we'd like a new sword for Tou—"

Gantz-san hastily waved his hands around in a panic. "Hold on, just how many things do you want me to make?! Are you sure you've got the money?!"

"Relax, Gantz-san," said Touya. "We're actually quite rich now! Things aren't the same as before!"

Gantz-san furrowed his brow when he heard how proud Touya sounded about our financial situation, but then he smirked, as if he'd gotten an idea about the reason for Touya's attitude. "I heard a fresh supply of precious wood appeared recently. Guess it was you guys who brought some back. In that case, I don't have to hold back at all when I decide what to charge you, eh?"

"It'd be nice if you held back a bit, but we're perfectly willing to pay a reasonable price for high-quality work," said Touya.

"Nah, I won't hold back at all. But I won't rip you off either," said Gantz. "I'll

provide you works of overwhelmingly excellent quality, ha ha!” Gantz-san grinned and laughed, then turned around and yelled, “Tomi, get over here for a moment!”

He got an “Okay!” in response right away, and soon Tomi showed up.

“Oh, hello, everyone! Are you here today to place orders?” Tomi asked.

Tomi was looking back and forth between us and Gantz-san, and Gantz-san nodded with his chin. “Tomi, I’m putting you in charge of making the weapons for them. Do as you please.”

“Um, are you sure about that?” Tomi asked. “I can handle making kodachi, but a sword for Touya-kun is a different story...”

“Yeah, go ahead. I’ll help you out if needed, and I’ll break down any half-assed efforts, so you can rest easy,” said Gantz. “You’re all fine with that, right?”

We all nodded. Our party had already confirmed Tomi’s abilities for ourselves using the kodachi he’d made, and he had the Craft Aptitude: Blacksmithing skill. On top of that, if Gantz-san was going to supervise the process, there was no reason for us to worry about the quality of the final products, so all of us individually voiced what we wanted for our weapons and finished placing our orders.



Our training session the same day was longer than usual. We hadn’t experienced any actual combat for quite a while due to the fact that we’d been busy ordering furniture, creating new variations of inspiel sauce, and placing orders for weapons and armor, among other things. As a result, we changed the format of today’s training to a series of sparring sessions in which injuries were permitted in order to get over our rustiness. I wasn’t a big fan of this format, since I was the one who would suffer the most, but it was better than remaining rusty and risking death as a result.

“An opening!” I exclaimed.

“Oh, I don’t think so!” Touya exclaimed. “I’m not gonna lose to you in a sword fight, Nao!”

I thrust out my kodachi, but Touya parried it and slashed at me in return. I stepped back to dodge and aimed at his feet, but his one-handed sword clashed against my kodachi, and the latter was at a disadvantage due to its shorter length.

“Argh!”

I took a blow to the chest and flew backwards, then rolled across the ground for a few meters.

“Oh, sorry, Nao.”

Haruka dashed over to heal me, and I shook my head. “D-Don’t worry about it, Touya. I’m the one who basically charged in.”

Touya had tried to stop mid-swing, but I had run directly into his swing rather than holding myself back. In fact, if Touya had swung with full force, then I would have been writhing around in pain and spitting blood.

“Nao, wouldn’t it be better for you to use a spear when sparring with Touya?” Yuki asked. “I don’t think you stand a chance when your Swordsmanship is Level 1 and Touya’s is Level 4, you know?”

Touya’s Swordsmanship and my Spearmanship skill were both Level 4, and we both had the aptitude skills for our respective weapons. We would probably have been evenly matched if we had fought each other for real, but I would have a slight advantage because of my spear’s greater reach. In contrast, my Dagger Wielding skill was still Level 1, so our current sparring session was like a child challenging an adult to a fight.

“I mean, I’m pretty sure that I can’t beat Touya using a kodachi, but I figured that I’d be able to level up faster if I fought someone with a high-level skill,” I said.

Every morning, when I was out jogging, I would drop by the temple to donate money and check my experience points, since that was the only place where you could do so. It had become my daily routine, and I had discovered that I would gain more points from intense training sessions or defeating strong monsters. That in itself seemed fairly intuitive, and it implied that it wouldn’t be too strange if the levels of skills worked in a similar way.

“It makes sense that you can become even stronger by fighting strong opponents, but I’m worried about the injuries you might suffer, Nao-kun,” said Natsuki.

“Well, Natsuki, I’m counting on you and Haruka in that regard,” I said. “I wouldn’t be this reckless in training if you two weren’t capable of healing injuries.”

It was thanks to Natsuki and Haruka that we had all become decently strong adventurers in a short length of time. Thanks to them, we were able to train without worrying about injuries, which was a huge advantage we had over other adventurers.

“Even so, I think you should take a break,” said Haruka. “You’ve been sweating hard, Nao.”

“Yeah, you’re right about that,” I said. “I guess I’ll rest for a bit.”

It wasn’t an issue during early morning, but our yard would become quite hot once the sun was high in the sky; there was nothing blocking it. Haruka handed me a towel, and I used it to wipe the sweat that was dripping from my body. Haruka must have cooled the towel with her magic, and the sensation was refreshing.

“We’ll have to start working again soon, but it’s also going to get really hot,” I said.

I looked up at the sky, which was clear blue and pleasant to look at. What wasn’t pleasant was the idea of having to wear chain mail and actons under those sunny skies.

“It shouldn’t be as bad deeper into the woods,” said Touya. “The trees will block most of the sunlight.”

“Yeah, it’ll be better than other places,” said Haruka. “However, to be honest, it’d be nice if we could go somewhere to get away from the heat.”

“That sounds like a summer vacation,” I said. “Some people, like the French, take an entire month off, right?”

In Japan, a monthlong vacation was a luxury that only students could enjoy,

so it made me envious thinking that even French adults got that much time off. Our time as students had been cut short, after all, and we'd had no choice in the matter.

"A vacation, huh? That sounds great!" Yuki exclaimed. "Like staying in a country villa or bathing in the sea, right?"

"Yuki, just so you're aware, that's a ridiculous luxury by the standards of this world," I said.

For most people, just traveling between towns was a matter of life or death, and on a journey from Laffan to the sea, there would be obstacles all along the way in the form of national borders. There were mountainous areas fairly close to Laffan, but they sounded pretty dangerous and not at all like realistic options for a leisurely summer vacation. Even if it were somehow possible to build villas in the mountains, monsters would probably have overrun them in short order.

"Regardless, the idea of a vacation sounds good," said Haruka. "We're here in a different world, and it wouldn't be fun to spend our whole lives working."

"Well, our lives haven't exactly been relaxing, but I feel like the actual hours have been reasonable," said Touya.

"True, our work hours aren't exploitative by any means, but I'm not sure if you can call them reasonable," said Haruka.

"Yeah, I'm not sure about that either," said Yuki. "We've set aside days off here and there, but..."

Touya hadn't completely convinced the rest of us, and we all fell silent, racking our brains.

"Really? We don't have to wake up super early in the morning, and we can return home before it gets dark. We don't have a nasty boss to answer to, we take a day off work each week, plus extra days if necessary," said Touya. "And now it sounds like we're going to take a vacation due to the heat, so I feel like our working hours are very reasonable, aren't they?"

"Well, based only on what you just said, yeah," I said. "However, I feel like you can easily look at it differently depending on whether you include the hours that we spend training as part of the job."

We could start work later in the day than many people, but most days, we were up training before breakfast, and we would also spend time training after we'd returned home from the forest. All of that to increase our odds of survival, but if we considered it work, then our hours were quite long.

"But if you think about it, there's no way we would have been able to take a summer vacation if we'd lived to become adults back in Japan..." Touya pointed out.

"In this world, though, even traveling for a vacation means taking your life in your hands," I said.

"In addition, a job that requires us to risk our lives every day is intrinsically pretty exploitative," said Haruka.

"We also have no worker's comp or insurance in spite of the dangers of our job," said Natsuki.

"And no paid time off or maternity leave either," said Yuki.

In light of all the considerations we'd listed, our jobs as adventurers suddenly sounded very exploitative. If we described our sparring sessions as uncompensated "voluntary training," then that was another factor that made our job sound even worse.

"I mean, yeah, our jobs do sound exploitative if you list out all the negative factors, but there's no point complaining," said Touya.

"Hmm. I guess that's true," I said. "It's rare to hear such sensible words from you, Touya."

"What do you mean?!" Touya exclaimed. "How rude!"

We all casually ignored Touya's complaining and nodded in agreement with each other.

"In any case, it all depends on how you look at it. Things like hazard pay and paid time off are technically taken out of your salary, so it's possible to look at it as a matter of collecting your own earnings later than usual," said Haruka.

"We're responsible for ourselves as adventurers, after all."

"Yeah, it's not an issue if we just pool our money and save it," said Yuki. "It's

not like our job as adventurers is stressful by any means...”

“On top of that, it’s a very healthy job,” said Natsuki. “We don’t have to hit up a gym to stay in shape.”

“Hmm. To sum things up, if we don’t look at our current jobs as painful, then they aren’t really exploitative,” said Touya.

If we didn’t factor in the mortal peril and anxiety about the future, then our daily lives as adventurers were actually quite enjoyable. My only complaint was the lack of options for entertainment and recreation. I couldn’t read new installments of books that I had been reading back in Japan either, but there was no real point in moping about it.

“Well, in any case, it’s worth considering a long vacation,” I said. “As long as it doesn’t affect our daily lives as adventurers, that is.”



I had expected some time would pass before we returned to the subject of a vacation, but it came up again the very next day at dinner when Yuki suddenly stood up out of her chair and declared that she had a plan.

“I’ve prepared a plan that I think we can all agree on! It’s a wonderful idea for a vacation, I swear!”

“You came up with an idea right after we had that discussion yesterday, Yuki? I feel a bit uneasy about this, but go ahead and tell us,” said Haruka.

“Oh, come on. I’m sure you’ll have no choice but to agree after you hear me out!” Yuki exclaimed.

“Enough playing around, Yuki,” said Haruka. “Get to the point.”

Yuki sounded very confident about her idea, but she sat back down after Haruka scolded her. “Okay. Well, you see, it’s become quite hot recently, right? So let’s go swimming!”

“Swimming? We were talking just yesterday about how it’s not easy to travel to the sea, weren’t we?” said Haruka.

“Nao-kun mentioned that a long vacation shouldn’t affect our daily lives as adventurers, but I don’t see how your proposal meets that criterion,” said

Natsuki. “Where’s the room for compromise, Yuki?”

Haruka and Natsuki both sounded a bit exasperated, but Yuki nodded. “Mm, I’m aware that going to the sea isn’t a realistic choice, so I’m talking about going somewhere closer to home that’s relatively safe and has clean water we can swim in, and also opportunities to earn money while we’re there, so I asked Riva if she knew about any places like that!”

I was skeptical about our odds of finding such a convenient place, and now that it turned out Yuki had completely relied on someone else to look for it, the image of Riva being stumped by Yuki’s difficult request popped up in my mind, and I put my hands over my eyes at that sad thought. “Poor Riva. I feel bad for her having to deal with a difficult request like that from Yuki.”

“Oh, come on. I know it might be difficult, but we’re friends, so it’s not like I asked for the impossible,” said Yuki. “And she actually did tell me about a place that met the conditions I gave her.”

“Really now? And it’s near Laffan?” Natsuki asked.

“Yeah, but it’s only safe for people as strong as us,” said Yuki.

According to Yuki, the place she was talking about was located beyond the wetlands in the south forest where we had gone to gather the materials for mushroom withering medicine. There was a spring in the forest that produced clear, clean water, and apparently there was also a fruit in that area called obunia that could be harvested around this time of year—and used as an alchemical material. The fruit wasn’t valuable by any means, but it was a material that you could only harvest during certain times of the year, so it would be a good source of money to offset the cost of taking a day off. There were monsters in that part of the forest, however, with the result that almost nobody would visit in summer, and certainly not to go swimming, so it seemed likely that we wouldn’t have to worry about the area being too crowded.

“Um, wouldn’t that still be dangerous for us?” Natsuki asked. “Playing around in the water is one thing, but to swim, we’d have to wear swimsuits, and engaging in combat while wearing swimsuits doesn’t sound very safe.”

“That would normally be the case, but we have the Scout skill and magic too,” said Yuki. “And it can serve as good training for the future. Plus, you’d like to

see us in swimsuits, right, Nao?”

“I’m going to refrain from answering, but the idea of swimming as a form of training sounds almost too good to be true,” I said. “We won’t be able to engage in combat under ideal conditions all the time, after all.”

I was fairly sure I would be screwed no matter how I answered Yuki’s question, so not answering at all seemed like the right choice. However...

“Not answering is an answer in itself, Nao. However, are the monsters in those areas really not a threat as long as we use the Scout skill? I’m a bit worried about slash owls,” said Haruka. “You’ll work hard to deal with them, right, Nao?”

“Yeah, of course. You can count on me,” I replied. “I’ll shoot any and all of them down before they get anywhere near us.”

“In that case, I have no reason to object,” said Natsuki. “The idea of cooling down in this heat sounds good to me.”

“I’m down for it too,” said Touya. “However, if we’re going on a minivacation, let’s invite other people to join us!”

“Touya, we’re not going just to have fun—actually, I guess it’ll be half fun and half work,” I said.

“Yeah, that sounds good,” said Yuki. “Let’s invite other people like Riva to come with us as well!”

Inviting other people to join us was an idea we would usually have shot down, but our plans were to go on a little vacation and harvest materials while we were at it. It wasn’t a dangerous trip by any means, so there was no reason for the rest of us to object to Yuki’s idea, and we went around asking various people we knew if they wanted to join us.

The first person we had in mind was Riva. In fact, she was on top of the list, since she had been the one to tell Yuki about a good vacation spot. We dropped by her store and asked her if she wanted to tag along, but she seemed a bit melancholic and replied, “I want some obunia myself—actually, I need some—so I appreciate the offer. And it’s not like my store is ever busy, so I have plenty of free time.” No other customers had dropped by her store even after we had

hung around chatting with her, so it was kind of awkward.

The second and third people that we asked were Aera-san and Luce-san. We had low expectations, as they were probably busy with the café, but they were actually quite eager. Aera-san told us that she was willing to tag along if we adjusted the day of our vacation to her café's weekly closure, and Luce-san told us that she was a bit apprehensive but would tag along if Aera-san did. We promised to adjust our schedule to match theirs, so their participation was set in stone.

The fourth person we asked was Tomi, our only other male friend. I had assumed he would be more than willing to join us, since the rest of our group apart from Touya and me consisted of beautiful girls, but after much careful thought, he turned down our offer. According to Tomi, the weapons we had ordered weren't finished yet, and he didn't believe he could swim with his dwarf body. In addition, he suggested that if he tagged along, it would seem like he just wanted to see girls in swimsuits. I hadn't thought about that, but Tomi was actually completely right. Besides, there were going to be three girls with us that he'd never met, and that would make it even more awkward. I apologized to him for not being considerate and promised to go fishing with just him and Touya at a later time to make up for this.

The last person that we had in mind was Diola-san, the person we'd gotten to know best in this world. Unlike those of us who were freelance adventurers or our friends who were self-employed girls, Diola-san was an official employee of an organization, so the girls had assumed that it would be pointless to ask her if she wanted to accompany us. However, I felt like it would be cold of me not to ask her, so I gave it a shot, but Diola-san responded, "Nao-san, kindness can sometimes hurt people. Are you asking me to show my bare skin next to Haruka-san and the others?" I had been spooked when I first met Edith's ghost, but this experience was even spookier.

In preparation, we gathered information about the place Riva-san had told Yuki about, made our own swimsuits, and stocked up on food that we could bring with us. In no time, the day we'd planned for our vacation rolled around. We hadn't visited the south forest in quite a while, but it was perfectly safe for us now that we'd become stronger as adventurers, besides which Aera-san was

a former adventurer herself, so we arrived at our destination without encountering any troubles along the way.



We'd had high expectations for our vacation spot due to the fact that Riva had recommended it, and it really was a beautiful place. The spring in front of us was quite large, with beautiful and transparent water, and I could see white sand at the bottom. The surrounding trees were quite sparse, so there was plenty of sunlight shining down and brightening the area. Touya and I had already changed into our swimsuits and were standing by the spring together.

"What kind of swimsuits do you think the girls are going to wear, Nao?" Touya asked.

"No idea. They didn't show me," I replied. "However, considering how our swimsuits look, the materials they used are probably decent."

I hadn't thought about it too much when I'd changed into the swimsuit that Haruka had handed me, but the material felt every bit as elastic as a swimsuit back on Earth. It was just a pair of trunks, but they were perfectly functional. Haruka had also handed us some hoodies, so our complete outfits were quite similar to common ones back on Earth even though we were in a different world.

"In that case, I guess we can look forward to it," said Touya. "I was ready to see something like a shell diver's outfit..."

"Nah, there's no way," I said. "Right...?"

Shell diver outfits would make sense if we had to dive for a quest, but today's trip was a semi-vacation, and besides, the two of us guys were around. We had been friends with the girls long enough that we were all comfortable around each other, but even so, I wanted to believe that they cared about their appearances. As I glanced behind me at the curtains that the girls had set up as a makeshift changing room, I heard some cheerful chatter. We'd bought the curtains ages ago, but they hadn't been of much use until now. Of course, seeing the girls in swimsuits wasn't the purpose of this trip, but as a guy, I was still looking forward to it.

I felt a bit nervous as I continued to wait for the girls. At last, the first person emerged.

It was Aera-san. She seemed a bit sheepish, she lay one hand on her chest and timidly glanced up at me. “Um, Nao-san, what do you think?”

“O-Oh, um, you look good,” I replied.

My comments weren’t very concrete, but it wasn’t completely my fault. Aera-san’s swimsuit sort of resembled the most common kind of school swimsuit in Japan. Technically speaking, it was a perfect fit for her modest physique, but I was uncertain whether it was okay for me to give my honest praise.

The other girls appeared, all wearing similar one-piece swimsuits and white hoodies. Their swimsuits were all navy blue in color, but I wasn’t sure if that was a deliberate choice or if it had just been a matter of saving time and effort when they made them. I was somewhat used to seeing Haruka, Natsuki, and Yuki, so there wasn’t much for me to comment about aside from the fact that they looked cute. On the other hand, Luce-san looked *criminally dangerous*—and so, unexpectedly, did Riva. I’m not going to explain what exactly that means, however.

“Oh, Nao, Touya, where are the compliments?” Yuki asked.

She was smirking playfully, but I had no idea if she could actually tell what I was thinking. All of the girls were worth complimenting, but while I was thinking to myself, Touya smirked back at Yuki. “Where’s your name tag, Yuki? Did you forget it? Are you in fifth grade or sixth?”

“Are you implying that my figure is like an elementary schooler’s?!” Yuki exclaimed. “Well, I mean, I did want to attach name tags, but Haruka was against it, so...”

“Oh, you’re free to attach a name tag to your *own* swimsuit, Yuki,” said Haruka.

“Ugh, no, I’m not brave enough to be the only one.” Yuki seemed to be at a loss for words after Haruka abandoned her, and she covered her eyes with her hands, hamming it up. “Nao, please forgive me—I couldn’t cast aside my sense of shame just to get a laugh!”

“Uh, I mean, I wasn’t expecting that kind of thing at all,” I said. “Besides, would it even be funny?”

“You girls look perfect in those swimsuits, ha ha!” Touya exclaimed. “I can’t believe you all went with navy blue, though!”

“Oh, do you prefer the color white, Touya?” Yuki asked. “That’s a really niche fetish!”

“No, that’s not it!” Touya exclaimed. “I just think that it would’ve been better if there were a little more variety!”

“Unfortunately, there aren’t that many colors of dye available that are cheap *and* hard to see through,” said Haruka. “Do you think navy blue is too plain?”

“Nah, you all look cute,” I said.

Instead of complimenting each of the girls individually, I’d gone with a more generic statement, but they all looked pleased to hear it—except for Riva, who blushed and hugged herself as if to hide her chest. “Ugh, this is a bit embarrassing…”

Please don’t do that, Riva. Trying to hide yourself just makes it a more stimulating sight. My body almost reacted to what you just did.

“As a waitress, I’m used to the gazes of others, but I feel a bit embarrassed as well,” said Luce.

Luce-san seemed much more confident than Riva, however. She was roughly as tall as Natsuki and her chest was bigger than Riva’s. In fact, she had the most voluptuous figure of any of the girls. I was glad that Luce-san was acting normal, since it meant I didn’t have to worry about averting my gaze.

“We considered making different styles of swimsuit for each of us, but we may need to fight while wearing them, so it wasn’t a realistic idea,” said Natsuki.

“Yeah, bikinis wouldn’t work for that purpose. We considered tankinis as well, but in the end, we prioritized safety instead,” said Yuki. “These swimsuits are made from an alchemical material that’s as protective as leather. We made it with Riva’s help!”

When he heard how proud Yuki was, Touya pulled at his own swimsuit. He nodded, apparently impressed. “Whoa, that does sound amazing. One-piece swimsuits can cover ‘soft’ bellies as well, I guess.”

“Yeah, in many ways!” Yuki exclaimed. “Wait, are you saying that my belly is flabby?!”

“I never said anything like that!” Touya exclaimed. “However, if you’re concerned, then train yourself and exercise! Aim for six-pack abs!”

Touya tightened his belly muscles to show off, but Yuki stepped away from him. “Yikes, I can’t believe what you just said, Touya...”

“Recommending six-pack abs to a girl isn’t very considerate, Touya-kun,” said Natsuki. “I’m in disbelief as well.”

Yuki and Natsuki shot back at Touya with zero hesitation. Aera-san, Luce-san, and Riva didn’t say anything, but the emotions behind their eyes implied that they felt the same way. *Yeah, I guess muscular guys aren’t popular with women. Thanks for the advice, Gantz-san.*

“On the other hand, Nao doesn’t seem too muscu—oh, hm. Your muscles are tighter and harder than I thought they were,” said Haruka.

“There’s no leeway to slack off at our training,” I said. “Also, don’t just touch my muscles like that, Haruka, or I’ll touch you back to make it even.”

That was when Haruka launched her counterattack: “Oh, are you capable of doing that? Feel free to try—if you dare,” she said, smiling with absolute confidence.

Her offer was very attractive, but I was sure it was a trap. I also felt the gazes of the other girls, watching for my next move, so I ignored Haruka and took the conversation back to the place it had been before it got derailed. “If we’re talking about bellies, then Touya and I have no protection at all for ours...”

“That’s what the hoodies are for,” said Yuki. “I brought up the idea of a striped one-piece outfit, but a lot of people were against it...”

“A one-piece outfit, huh? I would have been okay with that, although I’m not exactly a fan of stripes,” I said.

If Yuki was talking about genuine competitive swimsuits, that sounded perfectly fine to me, but I definitely didn't want to wear a swimsuit like the ones that the girls were wearing.

"I would have been against red and white stripes, but solid blue would have been fine with me," said Touya. "Who was against that idea?"

"Eh, it doesn't really matter," said Haruka. "We're going to slay foes before they can even get close to us, so the protective power of our outfits won't get a workout."

"Mm. We have full faith in you, Nao-kun," said Haruka. She and Natsuki both smiled and gently touched my arms.

If they were counting on me, I wasn't going to let them down. "So far, I haven't detected any foes nearby. It doesn't seem like we need to clean up the surrounding area."

We had fought some monsters along the way, but there were fewer monsters in this area than we had expected. My Scout skill had picked up a few signals, but only inactive ones. They weren't aggressive enough to approach us from a long distance away, probably because we had gotten pretty strong. Those monsters probably weren't worth a lot of money anyway, so I was glad that there had been no need for us to deal with them.

"Well, it's nice that we don't have to fight. All right, before anything else, let's have some fun!" Touya took off his hoodie and then dashed toward the spring. "I'm going in first!" He jumped into the spring. "Whew, the water is really cold!" It sounded like he was enjoying it, though.

Jumping right in had been kind of brainless, but it was the correct course of action in this situation. I dashed toward the spring as well, jumped, flipped twice in the air, and then stretched out my body before I landed in the spring. I only made a small splash as I dove underwater. When I swam back to the surface, I grinned smugly at Touya.

"Whoa, that was really cool!" Touya exclaimed. "I'm gonna do it too!"

Touya seemed pretty excited as he got up out of the spring. He walked a ways away and then came charging back. The Enhanced Muscles and Greased

Lightning skills were obviously boosting the physical abilities he displayed; he jumped much higher than I had and flipped multiple times before diving headfirst into the water. He made a huge splash that swept over me with full force. Immediately afterward, Touya floated up to the surface with a huge grin on his face.

“Whew! How did I do?” Touya asked.

“I can’t exactly give you many points for technique or artistry, but it was a dynamic entry,” I said.

I would normally have yelled at him to be careful of his surroundings when diving, but that wouldn’t have been a very cool thing to say when we were here to have fun, so I chose to keep my mouth shut.

“Guys, you’re free to have fun, but be careful of accidents!” Haruka exclaimed.

As Haruka shouted out that warning, the girls slowly dipped their legs into the water, and we waved our hands at them.

“Yeah, we’ll be careful!” I replied. “I gotta say, though, this spring is actually quite deep.”

The bank of the spring only reached up to my knees, but only a little ways from the bank, the water was deep enough that it would have gone over my head, and it seemed to get even deeper farther out. In fact, toward the opposite end of the spring, I couldn’t see the bottom despite the clear and transparent water, so it was definitely quite deep.

“Yeah, it really is,” said Touya. “Besides, there’s sand at the bottom, so we don’t have to worry even if we hit our heads diving in.”

“Nah, Touya, you should avoid hitting your head on anything!” I exclaimed. “Haruka just warned us about being careful, didn’t she?”

“Relax, it’ll be fine,” said Touya. “I’ll swim normally for now, though.”

Touya’s words made me feel a bit uneasy, but he casually swam away from me. He was wagging his tail as he swam, and I wondered whether it provided some propulsive force.

“Whatever, I guess. I’ll swim too,” I said.

I was usually a pretty hardcore swimmer, but our objective today was to enjoy a vacation, so I swam casually too. After a bit, I started feeling tired, so I floated on my back in the water, looking up at the sky. The sunlight was quite strong, but it felt perfectly relaxing when combined with the coldness of the spring.

“Hm?”

I heard some splashing sounds behind me, so I turned around and saw Aera-san swimming toward me with her face underwater. If she continued on her present course, she was going to bump into me, so I moved by kicking my legs a little, and she swam past me with no issue. However, she immediately made a U-turn and started to swim toward me again. I dodged her again, but then she made another U-turn for some reason. This time, I stopped her head with one hand, and she raised her head out of the water to look up at me.

“Huh? Did I bump into you, Nao-san?” Aera asked.

“You did that on purpose, right, Aera-san?” I asked. “I’m fairly sure that you noticed me.”

“Hee hee. I don’t have many opportunities to hang out with you, Nao-san, so I wanted to have fun together,” said Aera.

Yep, she’s really cute. It’s hard to believe that she’s actually older than me...

“I mean, we’re here to have fun, so that’s fine,” I said. “Ugh!”

I suddenly heard some loud splashing sounds behind me right before someone’s head slammed into my ribs.

“Oh, sorry! I bumped into you, hee hee!”

Those unconvincing words came from Haruka, and she continued to push her head against me as if digging a hole.

“You definitely bumped into me on purpose!” I exclaimed. “Or rather, you used magic, right?! I swear you were using jet propulsion! You sure are talented at putting magic to all sorts of different uses!”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about,” said Haruka. “You’re just

imagining things.”

“What kind of lame excuse is that?!” I exclaimed. “You know that I can detect the movement of mana, so—ugh!”

“Oh, sorry,” said Yuki. “I lost control, hee hee!”



“You too, Yuki?!” I exclaimed. “Fine, I’m getting out of here!”

Yuki and Haruka weren’t the only ones who could use Water Magic. I attempted to propel myself using the Water Blast spell as well, but it was actually much more difficult than I had expected. *Sorry for doubting you, Yuki. I guess you really might have lost control.* I meandered through the water, going with the flow of the spell, but someone eventually appeared in my path.

I hastily did my best to warn her in time. “Riva, dodge!”

“Huh? What?!”

Unfortunately, Riva was an ordinary person, not an adventurer, so she wasn’t able to react in time. She tried to swim out of the way, but she was moving too slightly. I was certain that I was going to collide with her, but an arm suddenly reached out and pulled me away. I felt a sense of relief as I looked up, but...

“Nao-kun, you have to pay attention to your surroundings,” said Natsuki. “Do you understand?”

My sense of relief was washed away as soon as I saw who had grabbed me. Natsuki was smiling, but something about her smile was quite scary, so I obediently nodded in response. “Y-Yeah, I do. Thanks for saving me. Also, I’m sorry about almost bumping into you, Riva.”

“Don’t worry about it,” said Riva. “I was a bit surprised, but you didn’t actually bump into me.”

“Ugh, Natsuki managed to get the best situation!” Haruka exclaimed.

“Your collision wasn’t powerful enough, Haruka!” Yuki exclaimed. “If you sank Nao right as you bumped into him, then...”

What I was hearing from Yuki and Haruka spooked me. “Huh?! I’m definitely not staying here!”

I swam away, this time without resorting to magic, and got out of the water, then covered myself with my hoodie and began to prepare a bonfire to warm myself up. I took some firewood out of my magic bag and piled it up a short distance from the spring before setting it ablaze.

“The Ignite spell is really useful for times like this,” I said. “I don’t even need a

firestarter.”

Just as a precaution, I had also prepared some small branches and dry leaves that would burn easily, but only rarely did I have to avoid using the Ignite spell in order to conserve mana, and there was no real substitute for the Ignite spell, which could set fire to large pieces of wood right away. The firewood had just started to burn. I was holding my hands over it when Luce-san walked over, drying her long, red hair.

“Nao-san, are you getting ready for lunch?” Luce asked. Something about the sight of her drying her hair while wearing a hoodie really made her look like a mature woman.

“Well, not really,” I replied. “I guess I could, however.”

“In that case, I’ll help you out,” she said.

Luce-san looked to me for instructions, but I shook my head. “It’s not that much work, so don’t worry about it. Feel free to go swimming if you want, Luce-san.”

The main course for today’s lunch was grilled meat, and we had prepared onions and other vegetables to go with it. We also had tare sauce that the girls had made based on what they had learned from the inspiel sauce competition the other day. We would all be free to grill the meat to our individual preferences.

I created some blocks with my Earth Magic and placed them around the bonfire.

“It really doesn’t look like much work. Magic sure is convenient,” said Luce. “Unfortunately, I’m not as young as you and the others, Nao-san, so I need to rest. Aera’s different, of course.”

“Oh, please, you’re young enough, Luce-san,” I said. “I don’t think you look that different from the other girls.”

“Hee hee, thanks for the compliment,” said Luce. “I’m already twenty-three, but I appreciate it.”

“I feel like that’s like a tiny margin of error,” I said. “Besides, Riva’s around

your age as well.”

I had brought up Riva casually, but that seemed to change something for Luce-san. “Huh? Really? She looks like *that* even though she’s in her twenties...?”

“U-Uh, yeah,” I said. “If I recall correctly, I think she said she was twenty-two years old.”

Luce-san seemed shocked and started to mutter something about a one-year age difference. Being a wise man, I looked away from her and placed some nets on the blocks around the fire. Next, I unfolded a table and lined up the ingredients on top of it: meat and vegetables, but I also added some seafood given the special occasion. *Seafood’s the correct term, right? I’ve never heard anyone say riverfood before.* I set out some valley crabs, shelled shrimp, and yamame trout.

No sooner had I finished than Aera-san walked over.

“Nao-san, I’ll help out too—whoa! Valley crabs, shelled shrimp, and even yamame trout? They’re all very expensive on the market,” said Aera. “Are you really sure about providing such high-class ingredients for today’s lunch?”

“We’re here to have fun, so I don’t mind,” I said. “But I don’t know how to cook these ingredients, so I will need your help.”

“Of course! You can count on me!” Aera exclaimed. “Luce will also help ou—huh? What are you muttering about?”

Aera-san sounded a bit confused. Luce-san was staring off into the distance, but she suddenly wheeled around and closed in on Aera-san. “Hey, Aera, I’m not sure if you knew this or not, but Riva-san’s around our age.”

“Oh, really? What about it?” Aera asked. “And your face is way too close.”

“Ugh, I knew an elf wouldn’t be able to relate!” Luce exclaimed. “I can’t believe she has such plump skin at that age! She must have some secret!”

Aera-san pushed Luce-san’s face away, but it still seemed like Luce-san was leaking some kind of ominous energy. Aera-san sighed; she had an exasperated expression.

Riva happened to show up right after that, like a butterfly flying into a spiderweb.

“Wh-Whoa, are these high-class ingredients? I can’t believe there are so many things here that I’ve never eaten before,” said Riva.

Riva was short on money all the time, so naturally, she seemed quite happy to see these delicious, expensive ingredients. However, she was so distracted by the food that she failed to notice the imminent danger approaching her.

“Hey, Riva-san...”

Luce-san snuck up on Riva and placed her hands on her shoulders. Riva’s bunny ears stood up straight as her body flinched at the sudden contact. “Eep! Huh?! Wh-What’s going on, Luce-san?! Did I do something wrong?!”

“Can you teach me the secrets behind this plump skin of yours?” She rapidly squished Riva’s cheeks.

Riva shivered at the implications behind Luce-san’s words before hastily answering, “S-Secrets? U-Um, I don’t really have any skin care secrets. I use some skin cream that I made with alchemy and I drink some medicine to improve my stomach health, but that’s about it...”

“Those sound like exactly the secrets I want to know!” Luce exclaimed. “I-Is that skin cream available for purchase at your store?”

“Yes, it is. However, it doesn’t sell well,” Riva replied. “I normally end up using the products myself before they go bad.”

“Ugh, I can’t believe such a wonderful store was hidden right under my nose here in Laffan this entire time!” Luce exclaimed. “How mu—”

The look in Luce-san’s eyes was turning spookier by the minute, but Aera-san forcefully pulled her away from Riva. “You need to calm down, Luce. Healthy skin is something you can achieve naturally through a balanced diet and proper amounts of exercise and sleep.”

“I don’t want to hear it from you, Aera!” Luce exclaimed. “The food that you cook is delicious, but it’s a huge threat to beauty!”

“Are you sure about that? It hasn’t really affected me,” said Aera.

“Ugh, I can’t believe there’s such a huge difference between you and me even though we both eat a lot of samples!” Luce exclaimed.

Luce-san clenched her teeth in frustration as she looked at Aera-san, and Riva-san hesitantly put in, “Um, Aera-san used to be an adventurer, right? I think that’s the reason. Adventurers are strong in all sorts of ways, after all.”

“...I wanted to avoid facing that reality!” Luce exclaimed. “There’s no way I can become an adventurer at this point in my life!” She buried her head in her hands.

Aera-san had a gentle smile on her face as she placed her own hands on Luce-san’s shoulders. “You know, there are people out there who are willing to die for beauty, so...”

“I don’t want to die, so that’s pointless!” Luce exclaimed. “That being the case, please provide me with some medicine that can improve my skin *safely*, Riva!”

“Well, there aren’t any medicines with instantaneous effects,” said Riva. “However, I do have some in stock at my store that could be of use...”

While Luce-san was trying to obtain information about how to improve her looks, the other four people had gotten out of the spring. I wasn’t sure if it was because they were hungry or because they’d overheard the discussion, but they all seemed a bit confused when they walked over and looked at Luce-san.

“Aera-san, what happened to Luce-san?” Haruka asked.

“Don’t worry about it,” Aera replied, sounding a bit embarrassed. “More importantly, how about lunch? Nao-san put out a lot of ingredients.”

Luce-san was still talking enthusiastically with Riva, and the other girls looked back and forth between the two for a few moments before they decided not to get involved and instead helped Aera-san prepare lunch. However, today’s main course was simply grilled meat, so all they had to do was prepare the seafood for cooking and place the ingredients on the nets, and then their work was done. In no time at all, a delicious smell began to permeate the air, and Riva’s attention turned to the food. She started giving Luce-san half-hearted, distracted answers. Luce-san soon gave up, and both of them walked over to

where the rest of us were.

“This looks like it’s going to turn into a very fancy lunch,” said Riva. “Is it really okay for me to join you?”

“It’s not like we’re going to leave you out, Riva,” said Yuki. “Feel free to eat as much as you want! There’s plenty of food aside from orc meat!”

“And this time, we’ve seasoned the food differently, so please let us know what you think,” said Natsuki.

“Of course!” Riva exclaimed. “Thank you so much for the food!”

“Everyone else can feel free to start eating as well,” said Haruka. “However, be careful of undercooking your food if you don’t want to upset your stomach.”

As I looked around at all the food cooking on the nets, I noticed out of the corner of my eye that Riva was beaming as she reached out toward the food. Crabs and shrimp were perfectly delicious, but I was more interested in meat today, especially since we actually had tare sauce for dipping. The girls had made it through a long process of trial and error, so I was very curious.

I picked up some orc ribs and dipped them into the tare sauce before taking a bite. “Whoa, this is delicious. It definitely tastes like tare sauce. It’s very different from the inspiel sauce that we’ve used before.”

“It’s the product of a lot of hard work on our part,” said Haruka. “It can taste very different depending on which cut that you eat it with, so feel free to try it out.”

“We also used a lot of vegetables with strong smells, like garlic and scallions, which worries me a bit as a girl,” said Yuki. “However, we’ll all end up smelling the same after we eat, so it doesn’t really matter!”

“The strong smell is exactly what makes it good!” Touya exclaimed. “Forget about the future for now!”

Touya was eating a thin slice of tongue with garlic and salt, and it was emitting a strong odor. However, the girls didn’t seem to mind, so there wasn’t any need for me to hold back either. I tried out all sorts of food, including tongue, tenderloin, spare ribs, bind viper meat, and fish. Aera-san and Luce-san

looked like they were both enjoying the food, and Riva, with her frugal lifestyle, seemed especially determined to take advantage of this opportunity...

“I can’t believe how delicious this is,” Riva muttered as she stuffed herself. “It’s been quite a while since I last ate such delicious food...”

Aera-san seemed a bit confused at Riva’s sad words. “Do you not cook for yourself, Riva-san?”

“U-Um, well, it’s more like that I can’t really afford to,” said Riva. “I don’t get many customers for my store...”

“Oh, really?” Aera asked. “I heard that you were a proficient alchemist, so...”

“Well, I’m fairly confident in my abilities, but there doesn’t seem to be much demand for alchemical products,” said Riva.

Really? I feel like you could easily earn a tidy sum depending on how you sold your products. The other girls seemed to share my thoughts, since they were all looking at Riva with exasperated expressions on their faces.

“The main problem with Riva’s store is its atmosphere,” said Haruka. “It doesn’t really come off as welcoming to normal people.”

“W-Well, it’s an alchemist’s store,” said Riva. “It’s kind of meant to be that way, so...”

“Your customer base is way too small, Riva. Targeting adventurers and people with niche interests isn’t exactly good for business,” said Haruka. “Alchemy can produce all sorts of convenient products and medicines, so I feel like you’d be better off if you targeted the general populace as your customer base.”

Luce-san nodded deeply—a natural response given that she had been enthusiastically conversing with Riva earlier. “Yeah, exactly, Riva-san! I’m fairly sure there’s plenty of demand out there for the medicine you described to me earlier! Or rather, even I can afford the prices that you mentioned, so it makes no sense that the medicine you make isn’t selling well! Why is it that you barely have any customers?”

“The exterior of Riva’s store is the biggest problem,” said Touya. “There’s no way ordinary girls would be brave enough to enter her store as first-time

customers. I bet even some adventurers would be scared away.”

The rest of us apart from Aera-san nodded in response to Touya’s words. We had gotten acquainted with Riva through Diola-san’s introduction, but if we’d never taken on that quest, then it was highly unlikely that we would have ever entered her store even if we’d walked by.

“Hmm, that’s a shame. In the last town where I stayed, I could have spread the word about Riva-san’s store, but I don’t know that many people here in Laffan yet,” said Luce. “What about your acquaintances, Riva-san?”

“Um, I’m sorry to disappoint you, but I’m a very shy person,” said Riva. “I’m not good at talking to people face-to-face.”

“Huh, really? You were able to talk with me just fine, though,” said Luce.

“Well, um, that’s kind of because Haruka-san’s party introduced us,” said Riva. “In addition, Luce-san, you’re very, uh...”

Riva was evasive and avoided spelling things out, her eyes fixed on the ground, but Luce-san didn’t seem to be bothered; in fact, she smiled. “Yeah, assertiveness is one of my positive traits! Let me know if there’s anything I can do to help you out!”

“Luce’s a bit too assertive at times, but she’s definitely good at making friends,” said Aera.

“We can help you out too if you need it, Riva. It felt like it wouldn’t be right to interfere with your store considering that you had strong feelings about what you wanted it to be, but we’re more than willing to help out however we can,” said Yuki. “As far as finding new customers, though, we don’t really have connections that we can hit up.”

“If the basic problem is that you’re not good at dealing with people, there’s also the option of hiring someone to tend to your store for you,” said Haruka.

After she’d heard everyone’s promises of help, Riva raised her head and smiled. “Thank you all very much for the encouragement. I’ll give it some thought.”

“Mm. You definitely want to get to the point of earning a more stable income.

That way you won't have to stuff yourself with free meat just so you can go without buying food for a while," I said teasingly.

The smile on Riva's face quickly turned to an abashed one, and her ears drooped. "Ugh, Nao-san, please don't mention that kind of thing even if you notice it."

The rest of the girls all laughed when they saw Riva's reaction.

"Feel free to eat as much as you want, Riva," said Natsuki. "However, we'll have to work after this, so I think it would be a good idea to make sure that you can still move after lunch."

"Oh, come on, you too, Natsuki-san? Believe me, I only ended up immobilized last time because it had been a while since I'd last had meat," said Riva. She clenched her fists tightly. "I'll be fine this time!"

I felt a bit uneasy about Riva's words, considering how little she'd accomplished after we finished the quest for mushroom withering medicine. *If it comes down to it, I guess we can just make her sit out and rest.*

"By the way, I didn't ask about the details ahead of time, but what are we going to gather here today?" Aera asked.

"We're going to gather some obunia fruits," Riva replied. "Do you know what obunia is, Aera-san?"

Aera-san paused in thought but eventually shook her head. "I know what obunia is, but I've never heard of the fruit. Even back when I was still an adventurer, I don't recall seeing any quests posted for obunia fruit."

"Obunia fruits can only be gathered during certain times of the year, but it's not very expensive as far as alchemical materials go," said Riva. "They're purple fruits of about this size, and they're found at the bottom of springs. They're not easy to find, so good luck."

The circle that Riva made with her fingers was roughly the size of a table tennis ball. I had memories of looking for small balls at the bottom of pools during my childhood, but the spring was much deeper, so it definitely didn't sound like an easy task.

“By the way, what are they used for?” Touya asked.

Touya’s question was a casual one, but Riva looked down and seemed a bit embarrassed as she answered. “They’re used in stomach medicine. T-To be specific, it’ll improve your bowel movements, and your skin will also become healthier...”

Luce-san leaned forward excitedly the moment she heard Riva’s words. “We definitely need to do our best to find these obunia fruits! Will you make some medicine for me at a discount if I find some myself, Riva-san?”

“Y-Yeah, sure. I can give you a discount based on the cost of the raw materials,” said Riva.

Riva seemed overwhelmed by Luce-san’s excitement. *Hmm. I guess this is something that girls really care about.*

“Hey, would it be a good idea to give some of that medicine to Diola-san too?” I asked.

The girls had exasperated looks on their faces.

“Drop that idea, Nao,” said Haruka. “If you try it, you’ll be in for an even scarier experience.”

“We’ll bring her some as a mere souvenir once it’s complete, so it’s best for you not to worry about it, Nao-kun,” said Natsuki.

An even scarier experience? I don’t like the sound of that at all. I obediently nodded and swore to myself that I wouldn’t say anything to Diola-san about this.

We took a longer break than usual after lunch, which helped Riva recover her stamina. When our break was over, all of us dove into the spring. Apparently obunia fruits could be found at the bottom of the spring, so I slowly swam around searching, but my vision was too blurry to make anything out. I couldn’t see all the way to the bottom with my head out of the water either. *Hmm, this seems a bit too hard. Perhaps we should have prepared swimming goggles or aquascopes. It might be possible to find some if we dive all the way to the bottom, but that doesn’t sound very efficient considering how large this spring is.*

I had doubts about whether we could actually find a decent amount of fruit, and unfortunately, my doubts were ultimately proven right. The eight of us spent about an hour searching for obunia fruits and found no more than five. This was technically half a vacation and half a work trip, but that didn't change the fact that our search hadn't been very productive, so we all gathered to discuss our options.

"Can't we just pluck obunia fruits directly from the trees that they grow on?" Touya asked. "We have people like Nao who are good at climbing trees..."

Touya looked up in search of any obunia trees that had fruit hanging from their branches, but Riva shook her head. "The obunia is a type of underwater flower, and there aren't any growing in this spring."

According to Riva, the obunia was a very strange plant. Most plants that produced fruits would only drop them after they were ripe, but obunia bore fruits underwater. They separated from the plant when they were half-ripe and floated away with the current. The fruits slowly ripened as they floated along, and eventually, they came to rest and finished ripening. As a result, you couldn't harvest obunia fruits simply by finding the trees they grew on, and the fact that the ripe fruits could end up at all sorts of places was a real hassle.

"Well, this is supposed to be a place where a lot of obunia fruits end up," said Riva. "However, we found too few given the amount of time that we spent searching. I wonder if something like the flow of water has changed..."

"It's also possible that someone else got here before us and harvested them," said Haruka. "How likely do you think, Riva?"

"Unlikely, I think. I'm probably the only alchemist in Laffan," Riva replied. "It's technically possible that other adventurers came here to harvest obunia fruits and brought their haul with them to Kelg, but it wouldn't really be an efficient method of earning money considering the amount of time it would take."

According to Riva, obunia fruits weren't so valuable that normal adventurers would go out of their way to search for them.

"In that case, why aren't there any here?" Yuki asked. "They're supposed to follow underground rivers to this spring, right? Did they get stuck somewhere along the way?"

“Underground rivers, huh? Oh yeah, I remember seeing a huge hole over there on the other side of the spring,” said Touya. “I wonder if obunia fruits flow here from there.”

“Oh, that place? I didn’t get anywhere close to there,” I said. “I had a bad feeling about it. But it might be worth investigating.”

We had set our belongings down by the west side of the spring. The spring would get deeper the farther we swam to the northeast. By the middle of the spring, the water was deep enough that light didn’t reach the bottom, and Touya was pointing to a place way beyond that, closer to the other side of the spring.

“I could cast the Breathe Water spell. That way, we’d all be capable of diving underwater for an extended period of time,” said Haruka. “Shall we give it a try?”

Luce-san declined to participate as soon as she heard Haruka’s idea, but she wasn’t an adventurer, so that was a natural reaction. Aera-san volunteered to stay behind to protect Luce, and my party was going to move as a group, so that left only one person.

“What about you, Riva?” I asked. “Just to be clear, you don’t have to force yourself to tag along.”

Riva paused in thought, then finally nodded to herself as if she’d made up her mind, but she still seemed a bit uneasy as she looked at our faces. “U-Um, I’ll tag along. I’ll be safe with your party, right?”

“Yeah, probably,” Haruka replied. “At the very least, I can guarantee that you won’t drown.”

“We don’t have any experience with underwater combat ourselves,” said Yuki. “It’s not like we’re sure we’ll have to fight underwater, though.”

Haruka and Yuki’s responses were pretty ambiguous, and Riva seemed more nervous than before.

“Come on, don’t scare her,” I said. “Relax, Riva. I’ll help you escape before combat breaks out if it comes to that.”

“I’m counting on you,” said Riva. She bowed. “I can’t really help out in combat at all, so...”

My Scout skill would make it easy enough to help Riva escape, so I gently patted her on the back to indicate that there was no need for her to worry. After that, we all donned our hoodies just in case and grabbed our weapons, then entered the spring once again.

“Okay, here goes,” said Haruka. *“Breathe Water.”*

I waited for Haruka to finish casting the spell on everyone before I dove underwater. I was a bit nervous, since it was my first time experiencing the Breathe Water spell, but I was also a little excited. In any case, it seemed like the spell worked just fine, and my vision was also perfectly clear. I wasn’t sure whether or not it was a side effect of the spell, but I could see as well as if I were wearing goggles. *Man, if the spell is this good, I wish Haruka had used it on me earlier—wait, hold on. If I recall correctly, Haruka, Yuki, and Natsuki found the five obunia fruits that we currently have, right?* I had a feeling that I had arrived at a hidden truth, but I ignored it and continued to swim through the spring.

Eventually, I reached a depth where the light of the sun couldn’t reach. I looked in Natsuki’s direction, and she nodded back and cast the Light spell to illuminate the surrounding area. It must have been possible to cast magic underwater without any issues.

Now that we had a source of light, I swam even deeper, and soon I saw a huge hole at the bottom of the spring. It had a diameter of about two meters, and there seemed to be cold water flowing out of it—so I surmised based on the way the temperature dropped as I swam closer to the hole. Colder temperatures could slow down your movements and could even be life-threatening in some cases. I had to protect myself somehow, so I tested out the Resist Cold spell, which I had learned recently. The spell slightly warmed the water around me, exactly as I had expected. I cast the Resist Cold spell on the others as well before we swam into the hole.

The interior of the hole was sort of like an underwater cave. The space opened up as we swam through it; the widest areas had a diameter of over ten

meters. It was easy for us to move around, but that also meant we had a wider area to search for obunia fruits.

The mages in the party activated additional Light spells before we split up to search the place. Only a few minutes had passed when Riva flapped her arms and legs around to catch everyone else's attention. I looked at where she was pointing and saw a bunch of obunia fruits in a gap between some rocks, as if someone had gathered them there.

However, the obunia fruits weren't the only things there. There were also some red circular objects about the same size as the fruits. My Scout skill had reacted to those objects as well, so I felt like we should be careful. I looked at the others, and they nodded; it seemed like they all felt the same way.

However, one person seemed to have a different idea. I noticed that Riva was happily swimming toward the area with the obunia fruits and unknown objects. It seemed like she wasn't very good at swimming—her rabbit tail wagged around awkwardly, so—*wait, no, that's not important right now!* I hastily kicked a wall toward Riva, and once I closed the distance, I wrapped my arms around her. I felt a soft sensation against my hands, and Riva's body froze up, but I had to get her away first, so I cast the Water Blast spell to propel us away from the area. *Man, I sure didn't think playing around with Yuki earlier would turn out to be useful.* Riva seemed very surprised at the sudden turn of events, but I ignored her reaction as I accelerated toward the surface of the spring, and the others followed me as well.

"Whew!"

I hadn't struggled to breathe underwater at all, but I still took a deep breath when I surfaced. Yuki, Haruka, Natsuki, and Touya appeared alongside me in that order.

"Hmm. There was a foe nearby, right, Nao?" Haruka asked.

"Yeah," I replied. "There was something in there against the wall."

Riva blinked in surprise. "Huh? There was a foe? Did everyone else notice as well?"

"Of course. We're all adventurers, after all," said Yuki. She glared at me.

“More importantly, Nao, you can let go of Riva now.”

“Oh, right, my bad,” I said. “I completely forgot.”

I let go of Riva, and she seemed a bit embarrassed as she slid away from me.

“However, Riva, it wasn’t wise of you to approach the obunia fruits in that situation,” I said.

“U-Um, I’m really sorry,” said Riva. “I was just really happy that we’d managed to find a lot, so...”

“I know how you feel, but it turned out to be harder to detect signals with my Scout skill underwater than I had expected,” I said. “I can’t detect as far and wide as I can on land.”

“You too, Nao? My nose and ears weren’t as powerful either,” said Touya. “We really need to be careful underwater.”

It was harder to move underwater than on land, and there was also a chance that some of our skills wouldn’t be as effective. We had the Breathe Water spell, but that was no reason to let our guard down. What we really needed was to spend some time cautiously testing out our skills underwater.

“So, did anyone actually catch sight of the foe down there?” I asked.

“Not on my end, unfortunately,” said Natsuki. “All I saw was a shadow that was larger than a human body.”

“Oh, well, I technically managed to check, since I happened to succeed at appraising it,” said Touya. “The foe down there was an emperor salmon. It’s actually classified as a fish rather than a monster, but I think it was over two meters long.”

“A salmon?! Damn, that sounds absolutely massive!” I exclaimed.

If Touya had been able to appraise the foe accurately, then it must’ve been mentioned in one of the books that he’d read, probably the one with the title *A Guide to Gutting for Animals & Monsters*. Fish were classified as animals, so it made sense that some would be listed in that book. I was quite surprised that the book had turned out to be so useful to us.

“Oh, is that why you were slower than the rest of us to get back to the

surface, Touya?” Yuki asked.

“Yeah. I figured that I could escape just fine after getting a look, since I was the farthest away,” Touya replied. “By the way, those red spheres were actually emperor salmon eggs, so they’re salmon roe, right?”

“Well, most of the salmon roe that people eat has been salt-dried or cured,” said Haruka. “I personally don’t think it’s all that great.”

“Mm. When it comes to salmon roe, the texture matters a great deal,” said Natsuki. “With that in mind, those enormous ones aren’t exactly suitable...”

“I guess we should look forward to the emperor salmon itself,” said Yuki. “Eating salmon sashimi sounds kind of scary, since we could get struck with food poisoning, so salt-cured smoked salmon sounds better. It’ll probably taste great even if you put it in sandwiches.”

“Oh, smoked salmon? Just hearing that makes me feel really motivated!” Touya exclaimed. “I’ve always wanted to eat a lot of thin slices of smoked salmon until I’m completely full!”

“I sort of know how you feel, but that’s too much salt content, Touya,” I said.

“Oh, are you all already thinking about what to do after slaying the emperor salmon? I guess that confidence comes from being an adventurer.” Riva had a slightly exasperated look as she heard our discussion about how to eat emperor salmon, but she nodded to herself in the end and provided us with some useful information. “The eggs of emperor salmon can be used to make a nutritional tonic, and they’re a wonderful type of medicine with all sorts of effects such as fair skin, improved eye health, weight loss, and muscle growth. These effects aren’t extremely potent, however.”

“It’d be a very dangerous medicine if it had extremely potent effects!” Yuki exclaimed. “Hmm. These tonics sound kind of similar to food supplements.”

“It seems like it’ll be worth gathering the emperor salmon eggs,” said Natsuki. “I’m kind of curious about why obunia fruits were gathered there, however.”

“It’s possible the emperor salmon thought the obunia fruits were its own eggs and gathered them there,” said Touya. “That area was quite dark, after all.”

“I mean, it’s true that we wouldn’t have been able to see down there at all without the Light spell, but I’m not sure if salmon usually behave that way,” I said. “Well, considering the fact that it was all the way down there, then I guess there’s no point in comparing emperor salmon with regular salmon.”

“There’s also the possibility that the flow of water carried all of them there,” said Haruka. “The emperor salmon eggs and the obunia fruits are quite similar to each other in shape, after all.”

Oh, right, there’s the possibility that the water there was just stagnant. Hmm. That actually sounds more likely to me.

“In any case, let’s go and try to slay the emperor salmon,” I said. “It might be dangerous, Riva, so you should head back to where Aera-san and Luce-san are at.”

“O-Okay! Please be careful!” Riva exclaimed.

We saw Riva off as she nodded to us and swam away, and then we started to discuss with each other about how to deal with the emperor salmon.

“The emperor salmon is bigger than Touya at the very least, right? If we think of it as being similar to a giant tuna, then it seems kind of strong,” I said.

“It probably attacks other things by biting on them,” said Yuki. “It’s not a monster, so maybe it’s not actually that scary.”

“Mm, salmon aren’t exactly well-known for having powerful jaws,” said Natsuki. “I’m not sure if the same applies to emperor salmon, however.”

According to Natsuki, there were some aquatic animals out there such as orcas that were capable of crushing the shells of sea turtles by biting on them, but salmon would primarily feed on small fish, so it was unlikely that their bites were dangerous to us. However, we were in a different world, and this was a factor that we had to keep in mind.

“You know, now that I think about it, girls in swimsuits near waterside areas remind me of staple things to go with this situation such as squids and octopuses,” said Touya. “Anything with tentacles could work, honestly.”

I had some similar thoughts, Touya, but saying that out loud like an idiot is

just going to get you cold looks from the girls, my dude.

“What do you mean by staple things, Touya? I think it’s also possible that you’ll be the one developing a new genre by battling a giant fish by yourself,” said Haruka. “I recall seeing a show like that before, after all. Do you want to give it a try? We’ll watch over your valiant attempts.”

“Those kinds of shows featured pole and line fishing, right?! Battling a giant fish directly sounds way too niche!” Touya exclaimed.

“It’ll be a new genre, just as Haruka mentioned,” said Natsuki. “You’ll definitely be able to get a lot of views if you record and upload a video.”

“Yeah, probably, but there’s nowhere for me to upload such videos!” Touya exclaimed.

Are you implying that you would have been willing to do this if you could upload a video somewhere, Touya?

“Well, that’s enough joking for now,” I said. “More importantly, the main issue for underwater combat is the fact that most of our magic can’t really be used underwater.”

“Yeah, that really is a big problem. We were able to use the Light spell just fine, so I think the Fire Arrow spell should work as well, but we might ruin the rare taste of smoked salmon if we accidentally burn it,” said Yuki. “Perhaps we can deliciously make the emperor salmon faint by using the Stone Missile spell instead.”

I had a feeling that Yuki’s definition of a spell being usable was a bit different from mine, and her choice of the word “deliciously” also sounded like it had a different meaning behind it.

“Mm. After some more thought, I think the best way to approach this would be to have Touya finish off the emperor salmon by spiking its brain to paralyze it,” said Yuki.

“Is this all for the sake of eating it?! Well, I mean, I’m looking forward to eating some smoked salmon myself, but I think the most realistic method would be to freeze it to death inside water,” said Touya. “Directly freezing a living creature might be hard, but it shouldn’t be hard to freeze the water around it,

right?”

Spells under the freezing category included the Cool spell from Fire Magic and the Freeze spell from Water Magic. These two spells were similar to each other, but the Water Magic spell was more efficient at freezing something. However, the most important thing for us was the fact that both me and Haruka could use such spells.

“Our foe is just a fish, so I’m pretty sure that it won’t be hard for Nao and Haruka to work together and freeze the water around the emperor salmon until it can’t move anymore,” said Touya.

“Oh, that makes sense,” I said. “I’m surprised to hear such an intelligent idea from you, Touya.”

“Thanks, but you didn’t have to include the word ‘surprised,’ Nao,” said Touya.

A more detailed plan would have probably been needed if our foe was a monster, but an emperor salmon was just a large fish. I planned things ahead of time with Haruka for the sake of freezing the water around an emperor salmon, and that resulted in a new, fresh addition to our diets.

Side Story—Tomi's Fishing Trip

I had finished work for the day, so I was resting at my inn room, but I suddenly heard the sound of someone knocking on my door.

"Hm? I wonder who it is."

I didn't have many acquaintances in this world, and the only people I knew aside from Gantz-san were Touya-kun and his party, and they had left Laffan recently for a fishing trip. With that in mind, I felt somewhat confused as I opened my door, but...

"Huh? Touya-kun? What happened to your fishing trip?" I asked. "Are you guys already back?"

"Yeah, we just got back," Touya replied. "You've helped us out a lot, so I dropped by to give you some souvenirs. Here you go."

Touya-kun handed me a leather bag that had two frozen yamame trout inside of it, and both of them were huge ones with lengths of over thirty centimeters. On top of that, they both looked quite firm, so they were probably very delicious.

"Whoa, I'm really amazed!" I exclaimed. "It's rare to come across such large sizes when fishing, you know?" *I'm actually kind of envious. They probably had a lot of fun fishing these yamame trout considering how large they are.*

"It was all thanks to the fly lure that you taught us about," said Touya. "Well, I wish I could say that was the case, but the fish bit at our hooks every cast."

Touya-kun chuckled as he briefly described his experiences, so I asked him for further details, and apparently he had caught so many fish easily that it was hard to tell if the fly lures had actually been useful or not. On top of that, it seemed like the same thing had applied to the girls as well, even though it was their first time fishing.

"In a way, I think it probably wouldn't be a completely satisfying experience for someone who likes fishing," said Touya.

“I guess what you mean is that anyone can catch a lot of fish even if they’re not good at fishing,” I said. “With that in mind, then yeah, it’s possible that some people might be unable to fully enjoy the experience.”

There were some anglers out there that enjoyed the back-and-forth with fish and prioritized that over their catch. I was the type of angler that would eat whatever I had caught, but there were also a decent number of anglers out there that would release what they had caught instead.

“How dangerous was the area that you headed to for your fishing trip?” I asked. “Is it safe enough for someone like me to visit?”

“Our fishing trip wasn’t dangerous this time, but it doesn’t change the fact that we can’t just casually bring you with us,” Touya replied. “You’re responsible for yourself if you become an adventurer and head there alone, but if you’re tagging along with us, then...”

I had some hopes as I asked Touya-kun if he thought it was safe for me, but he smiled awkwardly in response. *Yeah, I guess it’s normal to avoid being casual about taking responsibility for someone else’s life.* Haruka-san had some harsh words for me when we had first met in this world, but all of it was perfectly logical. She wasn’t a completely cold person by any means, but she probably wouldn’t be able to sleep well if I died as a result of her allowing me to tag along with her party. I wasn’t exactly willing to put my life on the line for the sake of fishing either, so I had no choice but to become strong enough myself in order to avoid holding them back.

“Hey, Touya-kun, what do I have to do in order to become stronger?” I asked.

“Hm? Well, you work out every day naturally through blacksmithing work, and you have both the Enhanced Muscles and the Indomitable skills, right? In that case, the other things that you need are stamina, speed, and experience with combat,” Touya replied. “With all of that in mind, you can start by jogging each day from now on.”

According to Touya-kun, he and his party would jog for quite a long distance each day before breakfast. It seemed like Haruka-san’s policy for their party was survival as their highest priority, so they had trained themselves with an emphasis on building stamina for the purpose of managing to flee from combat

safely instead of a focus on practicing their abilities to defeat foes.

“Well, we haven’t had to flee from combat so far, ha ha ha!”

“Um, does that mean you and your party are strong, Touya-kun?”

I asked Touya for confirmation after he laughed cheerfully, but the answer I received from him was something I hadn’t expected to hear at all. “Nah, that’s not it. We just don’t go near dangerous things. It’s best to avoid getting into a situation where you have to flee in the first place, right? We only fight foes weaker than us, so I guess you can say we’re experts at bullying the weak.”

“Ha ha, maybe. You guys still earn a lot of money, though, right?” I asked.

Touya-kun had described his party’s actions in a somewhat negative way, but there was nothing wrong with avoiding danger if they were still capable of earning a decent amount of money. Safe quests were more or less limited to ones inside of town, and it was only possible to barely earn enough for survival via those kinds of quests. The first quest I had attempted had been a fairly decent-paying one, but it wasn’t enough to stay at a decent inn like The Slumbering Bear while being able to save up for proper adventurer equipment. On the other hand, Touya-kun and his party had stayed at this inn and managed to successfully save up for the sake of obtaining proper equipment as adventurers, so...

“Yeah, we’ve become able to earn decent amounts nowadays,” Touya replied. “However, it was a struggle in the beginning. In fact, my initial weapon was a wooden sword.”

“W-Wait, really?” I asked. “You were using a normal wooden sword that wasn’t special in any way?” *That sounds like a mere stick or a wooden club to me. Did you really face monsters with just a club, Touya-kun? If so, then you’re a really brave guy...*

“Yeah, we couldn’t afford proper weapons back then,” Touya replied. “The beginning was the most dangerous time for us—actually, now that I think about it, maybe that’s not the case. Haruka prioritized maintaining a decent safety margin for our actions, after all.”

All of us had started in this world with just ten large silver coins, and Haruka-

san had lent me some extra money, but their party had had no one to borrow money from in the beginning. With that in mind, Haruka-san had probably had to make do with what they had until they managed to stabilize their income, so I was extremely amazed by the fact that she had pulled off a feat like that.

“I feel like we were a bit too careful, but it worked out in the end, so yeah,” said Touya.

“Does that mean you and your party didn’t get into any dangerous situations at all?” I asked.

“Nah, there were some situations like that,” Touya replied. “We fought some strong foes from time to time, and we got injured plenty of times as well. Honestly speaking, I think the person in my party that felt the greatest sense of danger in combat was Nao.”

“Is that so?” I asked.

“Yeah. I’m someone who fights on the front line, but I’m tough and durable, right? On the other hand, Nao’s an elf, so he’s much more fragile than me, and elves are typically meant to be positioned at the back line as they cast magic,” Touya replied. “However, he’s a guy as well, so he had to put his life on the line when the girls were in danger.”

According to Touya-kun, it seemed like Natsuki-san and Yuki-san actually had tougher bodies than Nao-kun due to racial differences. It seemed like Nao-kun had suffered some serious injuries before as well, so the life of an adventurer didn’t sound easy at all.



I added jogging to my daily routine after the day that Touya-kun had recommended it to me. My limbs had become much shorter compared to my original body back on Earth, so the sight of me jogging was somewhat lame due to the fact it was kind of like someone stomping around noisily. However, I completely agreed with the opinion that the ability to flee quickly was very important, so I forced myself to do my best to continue my new daily routine. I bumped into Touya-kun’s party during my jogging sessions from time to time, but all of them were jogging much faster than I was. In fact, it seemed like they were merely jogging lightly, but they were much faster than I was and sped past

me with ease. The difference between me and them made me keenly aware of the fact that I would have definitely held them back if I'd tagged along with them as is, and they definitely wouldn't have tolerated a situation where they failed to flee from something due to me being slow in an emergency. It seemed like the very least that I had to aim for was the ability to run a full marathon like an athlete that was capable of participating in the Olympics, but they were asking for quite a lot. I had been fairly sure that this was something an ordinary person wouldn't be capable of, but it seemed like Touya-kun's party were all able to run at such speeds with enough energy left for combat, so I couldn't really complain.

I also attempted to improve my combat abilities at the same time as I trained my legs for running. I was a complete amateur, as I hadn't picked any combat skills, so the weapon that I chose in order to make use of my muscles and blacksmithing skills was a war hammer. War hammers were weapons that wouldn't really require that much maintenance if you weren't picky, and they were durable enough that they wouldn't break even if you accidentally smashed the ground or a rock with them. On top of that, they were also very effective against hard and tough foes. I had been slightly conflicted about what would look better on me as a dwarf between an axe and a war hammer, but Gantz-san had told me that war hammers were easier to use, and it seemed like he had some experience with using a war hammer himself, so that was the main reason why I had settled with using a war hammer.

After I had decided on my weapon, I listened to the advice that Gantz-san would give me from time to time as I spent time swinging around a war hammer for training. However, after some time, I felt an urge to test out my abilities in actual combat, but I wasn't confident enough to attempt that alone, so I decided to visit Touya-kun's house. It seemed like his party had moved into this house a few days ago, and he had told me about the location of their new house when they checked out of The Slumbering Bear, but...

"Whoa, this is a really big house..."

The site of the house in front of me was surrounded by fences, and it had a splendid-looking front gate as well. Touya-kun had told me that I would be able to tell it was their house upon seeing it due to how big it was, and he was

completely right about that. Their house was in a plot of land that was much bigger than any of the nearby houses, but the house itself seemed somewhat small compared to the rest of the plot.

“This isn’t the wrong place, right? Is it really okay for me to enter?”

It looked like the front gate was locked with a bolt-on lock from inside, so it wasn’t possible to enter through there, and I couldn’t see anything that looked like a doorbell in the vicinity either. It was probably possible for me to climb over the gates, but I wasn’t sure if that would count as trespassing or not. It was rare to get caught by the police even if you trespassed on private property back in Japan, but things weren’t that lenient in this world. In fact, it was perfectly fine here to treat trespassers as bandits that were asking for death. However, it seemed like actually killing a trespasser would cause a lot of issues that you had to deal with, so such “bandits” that weren’t armed would merely get beaten up before being turned in to the authorities.

“Ugh, what am I supposed to do...?”

Man, I wish they had opened the gates or set up a doorbell ahead of time. I complained to myself in my mind as I looked inside, and I saw the silhouette of someone swinging a sword in the distance.

“Touya-kun!”

It was possible that this would be my last opportunity for a while, so I clenched the gates and yelled Touya-kun’s name, and it seemed like he heard me, as he stopped swinging and came over. “Oh, what’s up, Tomi? Are you here to hang out and chill? Feel free to come on in.”

Touya-kun wiped his sweat with a towel as he casually invited me to enter, but I chuckled in response. “Your gates are locked, so I can’t enter, and I couldn’t find a doorbell either. Isn’t this an issue for you guys when someone drops by?”

“The people that we know just open the gates themselves, and there’s a knocker on the doors of our house itself, so not really,” Touya replied. “I’ll open the gates for you right now, but feel free to open the gates yourself the next time, Tomi. By the way, what are you here for today? I don’t mind if you’re just here to hang out, but you’re usually busy with work at this time of the day,

right?”

“Work’s not that busy today, so I’m actually free in the afternoon,” I replied. “Um, this might be asking for a lot, but I want to attempt slaying goblins, so can you tag along with me, Touya-kun?”

“Goblins, huh? Oh, so you’re working hard for the sake of becoming strong enough to go fishing,” said Touya.

“Yeah, and I also want to become strong enough to protect myself to a certain extent,” I said.

“Hmm. That’s a good mentality, but you’re basically asking me to guard you if I tag along, right? There’s nothing in it for me to slay goblins, after all,” said Touya.

“U-Um, yeah, I guess that’s true...”

Touya-kun smiled as he pointed out what I was actually asking from him, and I looked away out of embarrassment. I had done some research ahead of time on goblins, and I’d found out that slaying goblins wasn’t a good source of money. It seemed like the magicites from them were the only things that were worth anything, and even those magicites were only worth about 250 Rea each. Those potential earnings weren’t too bad for any of us in the beginning, but it wasn’t worth it all now for Touya-kun’s party, since they were capable of earning money to afford a large house. With all of that in mind, my request was essentially for Touya-kun to tag along with me for protection because I was too scared to attempt slaying goblins alone, and I was essentially asking him to do it for free despite the fact that this would normally be an escort quest that required a fitting monetary reward.

“I guess I’m asking for too much, right?” I asked.

“Yeah, I’d normally tell you to pay for this,” said Touya. “I’m an adventurer, after all.”

“Mm, I figured as much...”

I wouldn’t have felt very pleased if someone had asked me to make a sword for them free of charge because I was their friend, so Touya-kun’s words made perfect sense to me. With that in mind, it was only proper to pay Touya-kun if I

wanted him to tag along with me.

“Okay, in that case—”

“Don’t worry, I’ll tag along with you.”

“Huh...?”

“I’m saying that I’ll tag along with you for free, Tomi.”

I was absolutely shocked by what I’d just heard from Touya-kun, and then he repeated himself before adding that there was a condition that I had to accept.

“Oh, I’m glad to hear that there’s a condition!”

I felt extremely relieved after I heard Touya’s additional words. He had helped me a lot up until now, and it would have felt very painful if he actually tagged along with me for free. I didn’t want to become even more indebted to him than I was now, after all. However, I had initially hoped that he would tag along with me for free, so it was somewhat of an awkward feeling.

“You’re actually glad to hear that there’s a condition, huh? Oh well. In any case, the condition is that I’m the only one that’s going to tag along with you,” said Touya. “The others are busy, after all.”

“Yeah, that’s perfectly fine with me,” I said.

Touya-kun’s party was already one of the top adventurer parties in Laffan, and apparently their adventurer ranks were all Rank 4 now as well. With that in mind, the fee that someone would have to pay for an escort quest would probably be quite expensive under normal circumstances, so I was very glad that even one member of their party was willing to tag along with me for free.

“What about things on your end, though?” I asked. “Aren’t you busy as well?”

“I don’t have any crafting-type skills, so there’s not much for me to do,” Touya replied. “Well, I technically do have the Blacksmithing skill, but that’s not really something I can do casually.”

“Really? I feel like there’s plenty of space in this yard for you to set up a furnace if you wanted to.”

“Think about it this way, Tomi. Do you really think there’s any reason for me

to go through that much effort when I can just come to you or Gantz-san for blacksmithing products?”

I inadvertently apologized when I saw the bitter expression on Touya-kun’s face. “Oh, um, sorry...”

“Don’t worry about it. I was also told that I shouldn’t try to set up blacksmithing facilities at home, so nothing would have changed even if you weren’t around, Tomi,” said Touya. “It’s kind of like a hobby for me, so I’ll probably just do some casual blacksmithing out in the open when I feel like it. My Blacksmithing skill is only Level 1, after all.”

“What if you just drop by Gantz-san’s store if you want to practice blacksmithing? I’m sure Gantz-san wouldn’t really mind if you asked,” I said.

“Hmm. Nah, I’ll pass. I’m fairly confident that I’ll be of more use to my party if I spend time swinging around my sword as training instead of trying to improve my abilities at blacksmithing,” said Touya. “It’s my job to stand at the front line for the sake of protecting the rest of my party, after all.”

Touya didn’t seem to hesitate at all as he laughed in response, and I sighed out of admiration after I heard his words. The fact that everyone in Touya-kun’s party dedicated themselves to specific roles was probably why they were so strong. Tanaka-kun and Takahashi-kun had had land mine skills and had died rather quickly, but it was possible that they wouldn’t have met an untimely end if we had discussed things together and been more careful. However, in the end, both of them had recklessly rushed to their deaths. *Man, just thinking about this in itself makes me feel melancholic.*

Touya seemed to notice that I was feeling melancholic, and he asked me a question in a cheerful tone, as if to help me move on. “By the way, what about you, Tomi? Are things going well for you?”

“Yeah, though it’s mostly thanks to your party as a result of all the orders you guys placed, such as for things like kodachi.” The crafting process for a kodachi had been quite difficult, but it was interesting and fun, and the end results were some decent products. “However, I’ve continued to do more research since then, so I’m fairly confident that I’ll be able to craft even better things the next time you guys place an order.”

“Yeah, we’ll drop by at some point to place some new orders,” said Touya. “By the way, are you capable of crafting some tools for daily necessities, Tomi? My party’s focusing on improving the quality of our lives right now, so...”

“Oh, hmm.”

The current priority of Touya-kun’s party made sense to me due to the fact that they had purchased such a large and good-quality house, and I was actually a bit envious of them. The salary that Gantz-san paid me was enough to afford renting a normal house if I wanted to, but there wasn’t any reason for me to move out at the moment. The previous inn I had stayed at was quite bad, but I had no problems with The Slumbering Bear. I would have to do all sorts of chores such as cooking and cleaning if I lived alone, after all. I wasn’t proud of this by any means, but I didn’t really know how to cook. It hadn’t been an issue back in Japan thanks to the existence of convenience stores and supermarkets, but that wasn’t the case in this world. In fact, if I attempted to live alone, then I was fairly confident that I would only be able to cook meals as bad as the disgusting ones that were served at stalls.

“Daily necessities, huh? What do you have in mind?” I asked.

“Uh, I’m not sure yet, but I remember the girls mentioning the other day that they struggled with mincing ingredients,” Touya replied.

“Kitchenware?!” I had been a bit worried that they were going to ask me to attempt something that was really hard to make, but the response I received from Touya-kun was something I hadn’t been expecting at all. “Well, even things like pots and kettles are made for sale at Gantz-san’s store, but you’re talking about something that you can spin the handle of in order to mix and mince things, right? I don’t really know what the structure of such tools is like, but it’s probably very complex, so I’m not sure if it’s possible to make similar things.”

“Oh, I was just thinking that we would be able to eat hamburger steaks on a frequent basis if we had that kind of tool, so yeah,” said Touya.

“Ugh, you get to eat hamburger steaks that were handmade by girls?! I’m so envious of you!” I exclaimed.

All I get to eat is meals made by the middle-aged dude at The Slumbering

Bear, and yet Touya-kun gets to eat something way better! Well, I mean, the meals served at The Slumbering Bear taste quite good, and I sometimes go to Aera-san's café for meals as well, so I technically do get to eat meals that were made by a beautiful girl. However, I also want to eat meals that were made by Haruka-san, Natsuki-san, and Yuki-san! Hamburger steaks that were handmade by beautiful girls are an absolutely extravagant treat, Touya-kun!

"Yeah, the food that they cook tastes really delicious," said Touya. "Nao and I can't really cook ourselves, so we really appreciate it."

Dude, meals made by beautiful girls have value regardless of whether they're delicious or not. Well, I don't want to get treated as some kind of pervert, so I'm not going to say this out loud.

"Okay, fine, I'm willing to attempt crafting a tool that can mince food or anything you want me to do, regardless of how hard it might be," I said. "In exchange, can you invite me over for meals from time to time?"

"We haven't actually decided as a party whether we want to order anything yet," said Touya. "However, I don't mind asking the others about it for you when the topic gets brought up. Is that okay with you?"

"Yeah, the possibility of this happening is more than enough," I said.

There was no way I would have ever been blessed with such an opportunity back in Japan, so I was more than happy to merely have a chance at making this dream come true. In addition, if I managed to succeed at making any tools that Touya-kun's party placed orders with me for, then there was also the option of selling such tools to other people.

"More importantly, let's get going," said Touya. "We can go to either the south forest or the east forest. Where do you want to go?"

"Um, I don't really know the difference between those two areas," I said. "Which area is better?"

Touya-kun seemed to hesitate a bit as he answered my question. "Well, it's easier to find goblins in the south forest, but..."

"Is there a problem?" I asked.

“Well, we might come across land mines there,” said Touya.

“Land mines? Oh, right, our other classmates!” I exclaimed.

It seemed like Touya-kun’s party had bumped into some of our other classmates a while ago, and those classmates had tried to invite the girls to join them and completely ignored Touya-kun and Nao-kun during their attempt, but the girls had obviously rejected that offer. On top of that, it seemed like those classmates had also pretended to apologize during their next meeting and instead told Touya-kun’s party something along the lines of that they should become their subordinates while they still could because they would eventually become stronger than Touya-kun’s party due to the fact that they had EXP skills.

“Yikes, that’s really cringe,” I said. “The demerit of having EXP skills is that you level up slower, right?”

“Mm. There are no other demerits to those kinds of skills, however, so they would have been able to do just fine if they worked hard, but yeah,” said Touya. “Now that I think about it, your initial reaction to us was quite mild compared to those guys.”

“I’m very sorry for how I acted back then,” I said.

I felt really embarrassed about the fact that I had acted as if it were only natural for them to help me out at the time. In fact, I hadn’t thought at all about what I could do for them in return, so I had only thought about how they could help me out instead. However, Touya-kun’s party helped me out a lot in the end despite my poor initial attitude, so...

“Don’t worry about it, Tomi. You were down bad at the time, so I can’t really blame you,” said Touya. “We would have been down to guard you all the way to town if it was after we had grouped up with Yuki and Natsuki, but they were more important to us, so I’m sorry about that.”

“I mean, that makes perfect sense to me. Between someone like me who you guys barely knew and your best friends that you had no idea about what kind of situation they were in, then it’s only natural to prioritize the latter,” I said. “The fact that you guys were still willing to lend me money at the time ended up helping me out, so I really appreciate it.”

“I’m glad to hear that. Haruka’s a very self-disciplined person, so she usually doesn’t show any signs of it on the outside, but I’m pretty sure she was quite nervous and frustrated at the time, so she wasn’t as composed as she might have appeared to be.”

It seemed like Haruka-san, Touya-kun, and Nao-kun had been transported near Laffan in the beginning, while Natsuki-san and Yuki-san had been transported near Sarstedt. They had probably felt quite uneasy when they couldn’t find Natsuki-san and Yuki-san in Laffan, so I felt very impressed by the fact that they’d taken their time to prepare first before heading toward Sarstedt to search for them, especially since they had done all of this while I had been wandering around a forest without any concrete plan and ended up collapsing on the ground.

“By the way, those other classmates with land mine skills attacked us when we entered the south forest,” said Touya. “They gathered a large number of monsters and tried to bait them toward us.”

“Huh?! D-Did things turn out oka— Well, I guess the fact that you’re here means that everything went fine,” I said.

“Yeah, we slew all of the monsters that attacked us! The actual guys with land mine skills managed to get away, however.” Touya-kun smiled at first as he gave me a thumbs up, but he seemed a bit frustrated, as he clicked his tongue afterward. “It seems like they haven’t returned to Laffan, so it’s unlikely that we’ll encounter them, but it’ll still be annoying if they attack us again. We can definitely slay them with ease as a full party, but I won’t be able to protect you by myself while fighting back.”

“In that case, avoiding the south forest sounds like a good idea,” I said. “I don’t want to die, so...”

“Mm. Well, in any case, we should be able to find goblins in the east forest after walking for a few hours,” said Touya.

“A few hours? I guess that means there aren’t actually that many goblins out there,” I said.

“Well, yeah. Nobody could rest at ease while walking on highways if goblins were everywhere, after all,” said Touya.

Oh, yeah, now that I think about it, I don't remember encountering any goblins during my first few days of survival out in the east forest. With that in mind, I guess being able to find goblins after a few hours isn't too bad.

"Okay, let's head to the east forest," said Touya. "Are you ready, Tomi?"

"Yeah. I'm counting on you, Touya-kun!" I exclaimed.

My first experience with actual combat was coming up, and I energized myself for motivation as I bowed and replied to Touya-kun.

Today was my first time visiting the east forest after I had been saved by Touya-kun's party. There hadn't been any reason for me to come back up until now, and I also had bad memories about the east forest. I sort of wanted to make a proper grave for Tanaka-kun and Takahashi-kun if it was possible, but their dead bodies had been blasted away by magic, and it seemed like only nobles and rich people had personal graves in this world. Cremation was the most common method of dealing with a dead body, and the remaining bones would then be crushed before being buried at cemeteries that were managed by temples. With all of that in mind, I clasped my hands together to pray briefly at the entrance of the east forest before I caught up with Touya-kun.

Touya-kun seemed to have noticed my actions and looked at me with curiosity in his eyes. "Hmm. I'm surprised that you went out of your way to pray for our dead classmates that were with you, Tomi."

"Well, we spent a few days together, so yeah," I replied. "However, we didn't really know each other before then, and the way things ended was kind of awkward, but still."

"I see. Personally speaking, I wouldn't care that much at all if I heard about any of our classmates dying," said Touya. "I didn't hang out with any of them outside of school, after all. In fact, I'm probably better friends with Gantz-san than I was with our classmates."

"You and your party were attacked by some of our other classmates, so I can understand how you feel about this. I guess it's kind of a normal attitude to have, however," I said. "Most of our classmates are people that we probably wouldn't have met again back on Earth after graduating from high school, after all. In a way, we sort of 'graduated' from the land of the living there."

“If that’s the case, then that would make the world we’re in now the afterlife, and I guess that sort of fits considering the fact that there are monsters in this world,” said Touya. “Well, I guess I’ll show you a famous specialty of this world known as goblins. We’ll have to traverse fairly deep in the forest, however. Do you have enough stamina for this?”

“Yeah, I’m fine,” I replied. “I’ve been training myself via jogging every day, after all.”

Touya-kun nodded after he heard my response and started walking at a fast pace farther into the forest, and about an hour passed before he stopped and turned around to look at me. “There are three goblins that are twenty meters ahead of us. Can you take them on by yourself?”

“I’m not sure, but I’ll give it a try,” I replied. “You’ll back me up if I’m in danger, right?”

“Yeah, that’s what I’m here for,” Touya replied. “You can trust me, Tomi.”

Touya-kun nodded firmly when I asked him for confirmation, so I headed toward the direction that Touya-kun was pointing at. I tried my best to not make any noises as I walked, and I eventually saw some enemies once I had reached within ten meters of them.

“So these are goblins, huh?”

I had heard about goblins before, but it was my first time actually seeing some in person. The goblins were almost as short as a dwarf like myself, and they had thin physiques with skin that was a mix of gray and green. They also had sharp and long fingernails, and their faces were somewhat similar to elongate reptile faces. I wasn’t sure if it was because I had successfully snuck up on them, but it seemed like the goblins hadn’t noticed me yet. My heart was pounding very fast, and my hands were shaking as well, but I managed to overcome my nervousness by telling myself that I could do this as I clenched my war hammer tightly and ran toward the goblins. The goblins noticed me and tried to turn around, but I had already swung up my war hammer by then.

“Yaaa!”

I swung down my war hammer at the head of one of the goblins, and it made

a watery crushing noise as the goblin's head disappeared and scattered some sort of liquid on my face.

"Huh?"

My mind blanked out completely for a moment as I failed to process what had just happened and stood still, and then the headless body of the goblin collapsed to the ground.

"Don't space out!"

I snapped back to my senses when I heard Touya-kun's voice and looked up to see one of the other goblins swinging down their fingernails at me. However, the head of that goblin was parted from its body in the next moment as it flew up in the air, and the person that had performed this feat was Touya-kun, so it seemed like he had arrived at my side in an instant while I was spaced out.

"Try to kill one more goblin, Tomi!"

"O-Okay!"

I tried to hold back the nauseous feeling that was rushing up my throat as I faced off against a goblin that was squeaking at me as an act of intimidation. Our heights were about the same, but I could reach farther with my war hammer compared to the unarmed goblin.

"I can do this, I can do this!"

I swung around my war hammer with full force at the body of the goblin, and I felt something being crushed by my weapon as the goblin's body flew back quite far and eventually stopped moving after it collapsed to the ground.

"Mm, you definitely have enough raw strength, Tomi. Or rather, this is a bit overkill for goblins."

"Ugh, bleurgh..."

The things I had been holding back burst out of my throat right after I had confirmed that the goblin was dead.

"Look, I know how you feel, Tomi, but you'll die if you let your guard down."

"I'm, ugh, sorry. I'll keep that in mind."

I tried to hold back from vomiting as I somehow responded to Touya-kun's words. *Ugh, the liquid all over my face feels so disgusting...*

"Oh well. Wash your face first before doing anything else."

Touya-kun splashed some water on my head, and I really appreciated it as I used that water to wash my face and wiped off the pieces that had flown to my face. It wasn't enough to completely clean myself, but it was probably better than before. After that, I looked around my surroundings and saw a grotesque sight all over the place, so something sour and acidic rushed up my throat once again as I vomited out all of it.

"Ugh. Wait, what? There are more goblins?"

There were five dead goblins on the ground, but there had only been three of them in the beginning, so...

"Two more goblins arrived, so yeah," said Touya. "Well, I noticed from the beginning that there were two more nearby, and I decided not to say anything in case you were able to slay all of them, but..."

It seemed like Touya-kun had slain the other two goblins while I was busy vomiting. I hadn't noticed the presence of the two other goblins at all, so Touya-kun was actually completely serious when he had told me that I would die if I let my guard down, and I definitely would have died if Touya-kun hadn't helped me out.

"Thanks for the help, Touya-kun."

"Well, like I said earlier, that's what I'm here for. By the way, the one over there is a hobgoblin."

I looked at the place that Touya-kun was pointing at and saw a headless dead body. It didn't really look that different from a regular goblin at first, but the dead body looked a bit more muscular compared to the thin and skinny bodies of regular goblins. It seemed like hobgoblins were much stronger than regular goblins based on the information that I had gathered ahead of time, but they were probably still easy prey for Touya-kun. He had slain one while I was briefly distracted from vomiting, after all.

"Next up is to extract the magicites from these goblins. Are you capable of

this, Tomi?”

“Um, the magicites are located inside of their heads, right?”

“Mm. I see you’ve done your homework. Yeah, the magicites are located under their brains. I’ll extract one first to show you as an example.”

Touya-kun used his sword to split the head of a goblin in half, and then he used the tip of his sword to dig out some kind of small rock. After that, he poured some water on it before he picked it up and threw the rock at me.

“Whoa!”

I caught the rock with my hands before I looked at it and saw a blackish rock that had some luster, and it was about as big as the tip of a little finger.

“That magicite is worth 250 Rea, so it’s basically just pocket money,” said Touya. “My party sometimes ignores the dead bodies of goblins due to the fact that it’s a hassle to extract the magicites.”

I was aware about this ahead of time, but goblins really weren’t worth hunting down. My first battle against goblins had turned out fairly smooth, but that was thanks to some help from Touya-kun, and he had also taught me how to extract the magicites from them.

“By the way, the hobgoblin over there has a magicite that’s worth six hundred Rea, so they’re a bit better than regular goblins,” said Touya.

Touya-kun casually kicked some chopped-off heads to gather them in one place as he was talking to me. All three of the goblins that he had slain had been beheaded by him. On the other hand, the head of one of the goblins I had slain had been scattered everywhere, and the other one had its body caved in by my war hammer before it died and collapsed to the ground.

“All right, it’s your turn to give it a try, Tomi!”

“Um, Touya-kun, I’m really impressed that you’re able to do this without hesitating at all.”

“Well, I’m used to it by now. It had been quite hard at first for everyone in my party to muster the courage for splitting open the heads of goblins, so we hadn’t extracted the magicites in the beginning.”

“Oh, I figured as much.”

The bodies of goblins weren't completely humanoid, but the idea of having to split open the head of something felt a bit disgusting to me. However, I couldn't avoid doing this, so I pulled out my knife and faced the severed head that Touya-kun had rolled over to me.

“Ugh...”

“Tomi, the thing in front of you is just a lump of meat. You've split the heads of fish in half before, right? Just treat this the same as that.”

“Oh, that's a great idea!”

I felt a bit better after I heard Touya-kun's words. I was quite familiar with sticking kitchen knives into fish heads, and blood would sometimes scatter as a result, so if I treated the magicite extraction process as something similar, then it wouldn't be too hard for me to pull off, so...

“Okay, let's do this!”

I rolled up my sleeves and clenched my knife before I stuck it into the severed goblin head, and I somehow pulled off the magicite extraction process after I had braced myself for it. I ended up with regular goblin magicites and one hobgoblin magicite for a total of sixteen hundred Rea, and Touya-kun told me that it was all mine as a gift for my first successful battle against goblins, so it was a decent reward for a few hours of work. However, I was completely aware of the fact that this wouldn't have been possible without Touya-kun's help, so I wasn't stupid enough to assume that even I could easily earn money from adventurer work like this.

“All right, it's time to head back to Laffan for today,” said Touya. “It's dangerous to stay out after it gets dark, after all.”

“Oh, right. Uh, is it dangerous even for you guys at night, Touya-kun?” I asked.

Touya-kun had slain goblins in no time while I was distracted, so I was curious if nocturnal monsters were dangerous to him, but he casually shook his head in response to my question. “Nah, it's not hard to deal with monsters at night. Well, that's if I ignore your presence, so...”

I didn't want to die yet, so I hastily agreed with Touya-kun's idea to head back to Laffan. "Okay, let's return to town!"

Touya-kun chuckled and nodded when he saw my reaction. "Yeah. In any case, we should be fine even at night, but neither of us have prepared any sources of light, so yeah. That's never been an issue for me due to the fact that Haruka can deal with this, but I can't use magic myself, and we can't really retrieve magicites when it's dark, so..."

"Oh, right. I guess that's something you have to prepare for if you don't have a mage around," I said.

"Yeah, and there's also a bunch of other things you need to prepare such as water in that situation," said Touya. "Adventurer work wouldn't be as easy as it is for me if it weren't for the others in my party."

It seemed like Touya-kun had only brought one small bag with him today because he had planned on returning to town after a few hours. I had only retrieved some magicites today from goblins, but I would have needed to bring back other things like meat if I had slain other monsters. With all of that in mind, the fact that you could skip out on preparing things such as water and torches if you had a mage in your party was a very significant factor.

"Well, none of this is really relevant to you, since you're not an adventurer," said Touya. "In any case, how did you feel about actually experiencing combat today?"

"Um, it'll be quite hard to get used to the grotesque sights caused by combat, but the goblins were much weaker than I thought they would be," I replied.

"Yeah, the Enhanced Muscles skill combined with a war hammer was quite powerful," said Touya. "You managed to smash and blow off the head of a goblin in one hit, after all."

I had a flashback to the sight of my first kill and the things that had scattered all over my face after I heard Touya-kun's words. "Ugh, did I use too much strength...?"

"I mean, going all out is better than receiving a counterattack due to holding back," said Touya. "However, if you don't want to get covered by liquids and

pieces scattering all over the place, then you might want to factor in things such as the location and direction.”

I had been able to slay the second goblin in one hit as well by aiming at its body, but blood hadn’t scattered all over the place as a result. With that in mind, aiming at the head of goblins from above was probably a bad choice.

“Well, in any case, messy results like earlier will only happen with goblins,” said Touya. “You probably won’t be able to smash the heads of other monsters like orcs. In addition, you wouldn’t even be able to reach the heads of orcs due to your height.”

“P-Please, I don’t plan on fighting any orcs in the future at all!” I exclaimed.

My goal was to become somewhat strong enough to protect myself for the sake of fishing trips, and nothing more than that. I was able to survive on a daily basis via blacksmithing work, so there was no need for me to go out of my way to smash open the heads of goblins for money.

“Mm, I guess it’s true that you won’t encounter orcs if you just go somewhere nearby for fishing,” said Touya. “What do you plan on doing tomorrow? If you can take the day off, then I can tag along with you for the entire day.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, it seems like the others are going to be busy tomorrow as well,” said Touya. “I don’t know when I’ll be free again after that, however.”

It seemed like Touya-kun would take days off from time to time, but those days off were for the sake of resting. With that in mind, I couldn’t exactly ask him to tag along with me to the forests on such days, so tomorrow was my best opportunity. Today’s events hadn’t exactly been easy on me, but that wasn’t enough of a reason to pass over such a good opportunity, so...

“I’ll have to discuss things first with Gantz-san, but can you tag along with me if I’m allowed to take the day off tomorrow, Touya-kun?” I asked.

“Yeah, sure,” Touya replied. “I’ll be training in my yard tomorrow as well, so drop by if you’re free tomorrow.”

I nodded and expressed my thanks to Touya-kun after I heard his casual and

friendly words.



I asked Gantz-san if I could take the day off today even though I'd had half of the day off yesterday, and he told me that I was free to do whatever I wanted to because there wasn't really much for him to teach me in terms of technical skills and abilities. I prepared for today's trip right after that and visited Touya-kun's house, and I saw Touya-kun from afar training inside the yard just as he had told me yesterday. It seemed like his party had earned a lot of money, so I felt like there wouldn't be anything wrong for him to relax a bit more, but his diligence was probably one of the reasons behind why his party was capable of safely earning a lot of money.

"Touya-kun!"

I called out to him from outside of the gates, and he sheathed his sword before he wiped his sweat with a towel. "You're here, huh? Are you done preparing?"

"Yeah, I'm ready to go whenever!" I exclaimed.

Touya-kun nodded after he heard my words, and then he picked up a backpack that was next to him before he walked over outside of his house. He had only brought a small bag and his weapon with him yesterday, so it was a lot more luggage than before.

"I see that you're bringing a lot more with you today, Touya-kun," I said.

"Well, we're going to be inside of a forest all day today, so yeah," said Touya. "We'll need to eat lunch outside, and we'll also need to bring back materials if we encounter monsters that aren't goblins, so this backpack is necessary."

"Lunch? Oh!"

I had completely forgotten about preparing for lunch. Yesterday had been a learning experience for me, and I had stocked up on plenty of towels and water, but food had slipped my mind.

"Sorry, but can I go buy some food right now?"

"Hm? Did you forget to prepare some yourself, Tomi? I can share some of

mine with you if you want. I have enough on me for two people, after all.”

“Really?! That’d be great!”

I was fairly sure that the food Touya-kun had on him was homemade by the girls, but it wasn’t exactly something I could directly ask him about.

“Y-Yeah, relax, dude. I’m perfectly okay with sharing my food with you.”

“Oh, okay, sorry for getting really close to you.”

I had reflexively huddled up close to Touya-kun when I heard that he was willing to share his food with me, so I hastily backed off in case he changed his mind as a result.

“Okay, Tomi, let’s get going. You’re fine with the east forest just like yesterday, right?”

“Yeah, of course!”

I replied enthusiastically to Touya-kun’s question, and then we headed toward the east forest.



I had been able to remain much calmer during my second battle compared to the previous day. In fact, I hadn’t scattered any brain fluids due to using too much strength, and I hadn’t failed to notice any foes either due to not being alert. I had successfully slain three goblins in one battle on my second try, so it was a decent result for my second day at combat. I went through two more battles after that, and the number of goblins I had slain today had added up to twelve in total as a result. I had received some attacks from goblins during the battles, but I hadn’t suffered any real injuries thanks to my Level 2 Indomitable skill, so goblins definitely were weak monsters considering the fact even I was able to fight them with ease after a few tries.

“Okay, it’s about time for lunch,” said Touya. “You’re hungry by now, right?”

“Yeah, I am,” I replied. “Lunch now sounds like a great idea!”

I voiced my agreement with Touya-kun’s idea, and then we sat down at a slightly open space for the sake of eating lunch. However, I hadn’t brought any food with me, so I needed Touya-kun to share some of his food.

“Here you go, Tomi,” said Touya. “It’s some simple food, but you’ll have to put up with it.”

Touya-kun handed me a hamburger, and it had about as many ingredients as a cheap hamburger would have, but it was much thicker in volume. In fact, one of these hamburgers looked like they would be enough to feel full after eating them.

“Whoa, this looks delicious!” I exclaimed. “Did the girls in your party make this?”

“I snatched these hamburgers from the kitchen, so probably,” Touya replied.

“Huh? Is that actually okay? Won’t you get yelled at later for this?” *Surely it’s a bad idea to snatch food without asking permission first, right?*

“Eh, it should be fine,” Touya replied. “Hopefully, that is...”

I felt a bit uneasy after I heard Touya-kun’s words, but not eating the food in front of me wasn’t exactly an option. Touya-kun was completely responsible for this, so I decided not to worry about the circumstances behind today’s lunch.

“Okay, time to dig in. Whoa, this tastes really good!” I exclaimed.

It was a shame that the hamburger was cold, but the buns, meat, and the sauce were all very delicious. The hamburger tasted much better than any of the ones I had eaten before from fast-food restaurants, and I was very confident that it was probably one of the best tasting foods in Laffan. *Ugh, I’m so envious of you, Touya-kun!*



“I guess the girls in your party really are good at cooking, Touya-kun,” I said. “Did they get any cooking-related skills to this?”

“Mm. They were already good at cooking to begin with, but the skills that they have definitely are a factor for how good their cooking tastes,” Touya replied.

“I see. With that in mind, cooking-related skills might actually be some of the most useful ones that were available to us,” I said.

Blacksmithing wasn't guaranteed to be useful because it wasn't easy to become an apprentice, but cooking-related skills could help someone get hired as a cook for a dining hall, and it could also help someone if they wanted to start a stall of their own, so cooking-related skills were much better than other skills for crafts and arts. In addition, the food served at stalls in Laffan was all quite bad, so it wouldn't be too hard to become a very popular stall.

“Yeah, I guess you might be right about that, Tomi,” said Touya. “I've barely used my Blacksmithing skill, after all.”

“Mm. My own Blacksmithing skill would have also been useless if I hadn't received help from you, Touya-kun,” I said.

Gantz-san had allowed me to become his apprentice thanks to my Blacksmithing and Craft Aptitude: Blacksmithing skills, but it was only because I had been granted an opportunity to show off my abilities. If Touya-kun hadn't introduced me to Gantz-san, then my life would have been a very frugal one that consisted of taking on day labor for survival.

“Now, then, we should discuss what to do during the afternoon,” said Touya. “Have you gotten used to combat a bit by now, Tomi?”

“Hmm, yeah, it's been somewhat easy so far,” I replied. “Goblins really are weak.”

“Oh, yeah, I figured you would end up with that kind of impression.” Touya-kun seemed a bit troubled as he scratched his head after he heard my response. “You're not wrong about that, but don't think about trying to slay goblins by yourself, Tomi.”

“Why’s that? Is it because it’s dangerous?” I asked.

The attacks from goblins weren’t strong at all, so I felt like I could easily take on up to four or five goblins at once.

“Yeah, it is. Hmm. Wanna try walking around by yourself in the afternoon, Tomi?” Touya asked. “I’ll just follow you from behind.”

Touya-kun brought up an idea after he saw that I wasn’t completely convinced by his words. *Alone, huh? That reminds me of when I was wandering alone by myself after the other two guys died. I felt really lonely and uneasy back then, but...*

“Um, what do you exactly mean from behind, Touya-kun?” I asked.

“I mean that I’ll be behind you by a few dozen meters,” Touya replied. “I’ll stay close enough to be able to help you if you’re in danger, so don’t worry.”

“Hmm. Okay, I’ll give it a shot,” I said. “I’m counting on you when it comes down to it, Touya-kun.”

“Yeah, I got your back,” said Touya. “Now, then, let’s go!”

Touya-kun seemed confident as he smiled and encouraged me, but I still felt a bit uneasy as I walked farther into the forest.



We had walked for about an hour from where we had sat down for lunch, but we hadn’t encountered any foes yet. I looked behind me from time to time to check Touya-kun’s position, and he waved back at me whenever he noticed that I was looking at him, but it felt kind of awkward.

“I guess there really aren’t that many monsters in the east forest...”

Touya-kun had guided me to the location of goblins when we were walking together, but my only choice when leading the way was to wander around blindly. However, I had heard about how it was dangerous to wander deeper into the forest without thinking, so this was something I had to be careful about.

“Where are the gob—?”

I felt a sudden impact on my head and felt dizzy as I staggered for a bit. *Huh?! Did I just get attacked?!* I clenched my war hammer tightly to brace for combat, but I felt another impact on my right arm after that. My strength loosened as a result, and my war hammer fell out of my hands. I looked around to see the culprit, and I saw three goblins around me.

“Ugh, when did they get here?!”

I bent down to try and pick up my war hammer, but I felt another impact on my head right before I could reach it. I hastily covered my head with my hands to protect it, but I was then smacked on my arms, back, and legs by wooden sticks. I tried to swing around my arms to chase away the goblins, but they didn’t stop attacking me, and I fell down on the ground as the goblins continued to swing down their wooden sticks at me. *Ugh, it hurts!*

“H-Help me, Touya-kun!”

It was kind of shameful to ask for help against goblins, especially after what I had said to Touya-kun earlier, but none of that had crossed my mind as I yelled for help due to the fact that I felt my life was in danger. However, my plea was met with silence.

“Touya-kun?!”

Is he too far away to hear me?! Yikes, this is really bad! I covered my head with my left hand as I used my right to search around the ground for my war hammer.

“Oh, finally, I found it!”

I grabbed my hammer with my right hand and swung it at the goblins, but there was no way to land an accurate hit by blindly swinging it around, and my weapon fell out of my hands once again after I received a few more attacks on my right arm. I felt like I was actually in grave danger at this rate, but the attacks from the goblins suddenly stopped right after that.

“Huh...?”

I nervously looked up around my surroundings and saw three headless goblins on the ground, and Touya-kun was standing next to them with a sword in his hands.

“Yo, Tomi. Do you now understand how scary it is if you get ambushed by goblins?”

Touya-kun carried his sword on his shoulders as he casually talked to me, but I yelled at him without thinking. “Scary? What are you talking about?! Didn’t you say that you would help me?!”

“Yeah, I did. I helped you before you suffered any serious injuries, right?”

“Wha—?”

Touya-kun shrugged off my fury when he replied to me, and he was technically correct. I had bumps and bruises all over my body, but I hadn’t suffered any serious injuries. It was probably thanks to the fact that I had the Indomitable skill, but there was a chance I would have died in combat against mere goblins if Touya-kun hadn’t helped me out, so...

“You seemed like you had this idea that you would be fine no matter what against goblins, Tomi, so I figured this would be a good lesson for you.”

“W-Well, I mean...”

Touya-kun was actually right about the fact that I had felt that way to a certain extent. I had no intention of ignoring his warnings and exploring forests by myself, but if I had never obtained opportunities to fight against goblins with his help in a timeline where he never had free time, then...

“Honestly speaking, Nao’s Scout skill is a major reason as to how my party has managed to survive so far. I’m able to scout out foes to a certain extent myself nowadays, but I’m not as good at it as Nao is, so scouting is very crucial,” said Touya. “You’ve just experienced it for yourself, but it’s very dangerous if you get ambushed and caught off guard by foes, even if they’re weaker than you.”

“Yeah, you’re right...”

I had definitely been in danger due to the fact that I was essentially a punching bag for the three goblins earlier. In fact, if one of those goblins had been a hobgoblin, then there was a chance that I would have died very quickly.

“Also, just so you know, I rarely venture into forests by myself,” said Touya. “It’s possible to encounter dangerous monsters even in the shallow areas of

forests, after all. I told you before about how my party and I encountered a wipe bear, right?”

“Yeah, I remember that,” I said. “Okay, I’ve learned my lesson! I definitely won’t venture into forests by myself!”

Touya-kun had told me before that it had been quite dangerous for him, Nao-kun, and Haruka-san as a party of three during their first battle against a wipe bear. It seemed like wipe bears were capable of easily killing parties composed of rookie adventurers as well, so there was no way I could survive if I encountered a wipe bear by myself. On top of that, Touya-kun’s party had encountered a wipe bear in the shallow areas of the forest, so...

“In that case, I guess it was worth forcing myself to be harsh on you by putting you through a scary experience,” said Touya. “I could have waited a bit longer if Haruka was around, but...”

“Longer than you already waited?! No, please, I really have learned my lesson!” I exclaimed.

“Really? I’ll take your word for it, then. You should be strong enough now to tag along with us for fishing trips, so all you need to do now is to train your legs for running faster and longer,” said Touya. “If you want to become better at combat, then I suggest trying to recruit party members at the Adventurers’ Guild. I don’t think it’ll be easy for you if you want to do adventurer work along with blacksmithing work, however.”

I hastily shook my head after I heard Touya-kun’s words. “Nah, I’m completely satisfied with what I’ve experienced! Honestly speaking, I don’t think I’m suited for adventurer work, so...”

I had felt slightly confident after I had initially slain some goblins with relative ease, but I was sure now that I wasn’t suited for combat. However, if Touya-kun thought that I was sufficiently strong enough for me to tag along for fishing trips, then that was all that mattered to me. All I had to do from now on was to continue jogging and to practice swinging around my war hammer from time to time as training.

“All right, let’s head back to town,” said Touya. “I’ll ask you if you want to tag along when it’s time for my party’s next fishing trip, but keep in mind that I

don't know when it'll happen."

"Sure, that sounds great!" I exclaimed. "Thanks a lot, Touya-kun!"

I felt very excited after I heard Touya-kun's words, and he chuckled as he nodded in response. *Heh heh heh, my dream of going out fishing is about to come true! The fishing tools that I worked on during my free time are going to be useful soon! Hopefully, that is.*



I had moved on from my brief stint as an adventurer and had spent some time on trying to make a tool that could mince food. The shape and structure of such a tool required casting instead of forging for its creation method, so I had used wax as I attempted to craft molds every day. I had spent most of my time on this work instead of other tasks, but my current project was something that didn't overlap with Gantz-san's business, so he had actually encouraged me to continue working on it. There would be too much supply if both of us only made weapons the entire time, after all. In fact, my ideal was to become a blacksmith who only made very few but high-quality works for the few connoisseurs that were aware of my existence.

However, such a business model wouldn't be good for profit purposes. It was necessary to craft products that could be sold on a daily basis for money in order to survive, and I also wanted to craft some unique products if possible so that I wouldn't cause any trouble for Gantz-san once I was ready to become an independent blacksmith. All of those ideas had been on my mind as I worked hard at my new project, but I hadn't made much progress. However, that was a natural result due to the fact that the only thing I knew about the tool that I was trying to make was that it was something that could mince things after you spun around the handle attached to it, so I had no idea about its actual internal structure. I was fairly sure that there was some sort of blade inside that would spin around and mince things like meat into very small pieces, but I wasn't sure how that was supposed to work.

My days of no real progress toward a concrete result continued for a while, and Touya-kun's party dropped by on one of those days. It seemed like they were here to place orders for new weapons made of elemental metal, and they

wanted a new sword for Touya-kun, a new kodachi for everyone except Touya-kun, and a new naginata for Natsuki-san. I was very happy to take on their orders due to the fact that it was an opportunity to make use of the research I had carried out up until now to improve the weapons that I crafted. I hadn't crafted a naginata before, so some trial and error was required for it, but that was also a fun part of crafting weapons. However, there was something on my mind that I was curious about.

"Touya-kun, didn't you tell me before that you guys might place orders for tools that can be used for daily necessities?" I asked.

Touya-kun scratched his head in an awkward way when he heard my question. "Oh, right. Sorry, but the arts and crafts skills that the girls have turned out to be much better than I had expected, so..."

"Um, does that mean I don't need to make a tool that can mince food anymore?" I asked. "I've been working hard on trying to develop one, but..."

Natsuki-san gave Touya-kun a stern look after she heard my words. "Touya-kun, did you ask Tomi-kun to make such a tool?"

"Well, uh, kinda, yeah," Touya replied. "I figured we could eat a lot more hamburger steaks if we had such a tool, so..."

"We've already made a magical device for that in the form of a food processor, Touya," said Haruka.

"Oh, a food processor!" I exclaimed. "Yeah, that kind of tool can definitely be used to mince food, and its structure isn't that complex either."

I had seen food processors before myself due to the fact there was one in my house back in Japan. A shaft with a blade attached would spin around to mince whatever was inside, so its structure was very simple. On top of that, if theirs was a magical device, then it could continue to spin as long as it was supplied with mana. *Man, Haruka-san really is smart. On the other hand, I couldn't come up with anything despite how hard I racked my brains for ideas. Sure, Touya-kun didn't straight out say that they were absolutely going to place an order for one, but still...*

"So, does that mean your party doesn't need a specialized tool for mincing

food?” I asked.

“Are you talking about something like a mincer? Well, if you’re capable of crafting a proper one, then I think it’s worthwhile due to the fact that mincers can evenly mince food into pieces of the same size,” said Natsuki.

“Mm, yeah. Food processors can become really messy if you overuse them, after all,” said Yuki.

Oh, so that tool is called a mincer? I see. A mincer can be worthwhile, huh? In that case, I’d like to make one, but I don’t know its struc— Oh, hmm.

“Natsuki-san, do you know the structure of a mincer?” I asked.

“The structure? Well, yes, I technically do know,” Natsuki replied.

Natsuki-san casually replied affirmatively to my question, and she swiftly drew a diagram after I had handed a piece of paper over to her. *Whoa, Natsuki-san really is capable of almost anything. I didn’t expect her to be this good at drawing.*

“Oh, so does meat get sent inside through the spiral part of the machine?” I asked.

“Mm. It’s somewhat similar to how you can push something like a wooden screw inside by spinning it,” Natsuki replied. “There’s a propeller blade inside that’ll grind and mince the meat, and the pieces will be cut evenly to match the size of the hole that they fall out of.”

“Are gears needed as well?” I asked. “Can you directly attach a handle to the spiral part?”

“The gear ratio will affect the power of the machine, so they’re needed if you want to make something compact,” Natsuki replied. “You can make up for it to a certain extent if you extend the length of the handle, however.”

“Hmm, I see,” I said. “I guess I’ll have to do some research and experiments to test things out.”

Someone like Touya-kun was capable of forcibly spinning around a handle, but that wasn’t exactly an option for an ordinary person. If it were possible to skip out on gears by extending the handle, then the machine would become

cheaper to make, so it was something worth testing out.

“Do you think you can make a mincer, Tomi?” Nao asked. “Based on its structure, it’s not something you can make by just hitting metal with a hammer, right?”

The image of someone hitting metal with a hammer would appear in my head when I thought of the word blacksmith, so Nao-kun’s question made perfect sense to me. In fact, it was probably due to the fact that the image of a swordsmith was too deeply ingrained in the minds of most Japanese people.

“It’s something that has to be made through metal casting, Nao-kun,” I said. “This involves making a mold and then pouring liquid metal into that mold.”

“Oh, I thought blacksmithing only involved hammering metal, but I guess that’s part of blacksmithing as well,” said Nao.

“It’s cheaper to make household appliances that way, so yeah,” I said. “Gantz-san doesn’t really do it often, however.”

“Most of our household appliances were ones made through metal casting, Nao-kun,” said Natsuki. “They’re all a bit heavy, however.”

“Really? I don’t use them most of the time, so I never really noticed,” said Nao.

“In any case, I’ll do my best at trying to make a mincer,” I said. “Having a mincer should make things like meat scraps easier to eat, and I might be able to sell mincers to places like butcher shops and dining halls as well.”

“I’d love to have a mincer if you manage to succeed at making one,” said Nao. “Sandwiching meat between bread makes it easier to eat, but that’s all. Grilled meat by itself isn’t exactly easy to chew through, but that doesn’t seem to be an issue for Touya.”

“It’s probably because he’s a beastman,” said Haruka. “Scoring is something we’ve done for meat, but I guess that’s not enough.”

It seemed like there were definitely some racial differences at hand in regard to food and drinks. After all, ale tasted very delicious to me, but it had apparently tasted bad to everyone in Nao-kun’s party. Their party was a mixed

one that was composed of two elves, two humans, and one beastman, so something like a mincer would probably be very useful for them. *Mm, giving them a mincer for free as a present after I succeed at making one sounds like a great idea to me! This'll be one way for me to pay them back for all the help they've provided me, after all. It'd be great if they shared some hamburgers that were handmade by the girls after I give them a mincer as a present, of course, but I'm not exactly asking for something like that in return or anything, ha ha!*



The kodachi and the naginata I had finished felt like satisfactory works for my current abilities and expertise at blacksmithing. It had been my first time working with elemental metal, and it was a very high-quality metal that was probably very sturdy due to the fact that it didn't seem damaged at all even when I swung a log of wood at it with full force. It would be a traumatizing experience for me if one of the weapons I had made broke down and caused the death of my friends, so sturdiness was very important. I started to work on making a mincer after I had finished crafting the weapons, but I struggled and suffered through a lot of hardships during the process. There were two major problems, and one of them was the creation of a helix spiral design with a uniform shape. It had to be uniform and stable in order to be acceptable, and it couldn't be something that wouldn't spin due to interfering with outside parts. It also couldn't be something that was completely straight, and the size of the gap between the insides and the outer frame had to work well with the shape of the helix spiral in order to send meat inside.

In the end, I somehow managed to resolve everything related to the first major problem, but the second major problem I had to deal with was the strength of the structure itself. The normal types of metal that were used for metal casting weren't durable enough for this purpose due to the fact that the metal would bend and snap after a few uses. On top of that, a lot of strength and power would be required to grind and mince hard slices of meat, so the metal would become twisted if the handle were spun around forcibly. I wanted to use white iron in order to solve the durability issue and for the sake of rustproofing, but that wasn't an option due to the fact that there were issues with melting temperature and the fluidity of white iron that made it unusable

for metal casting purposes.

In the end, progress on the development of a mincer had been very slow throughout the whole process, and I was only able to complete making a mincer after I had requested help from Gantz-san. It seemed like he knew someone who was very talented at metal casting, so he had asked him for some advice to pass on to me, and that advice turned out to be the last piece in the puzzle for me. It was a shame that I hadn't been able to complete this project by myself, but the girls were very happy when they received a mincer as a gift from me, and it seemed like they had put it to great use for cooking, so everything had worked out in the end. I wanted to eat some of their cooking as well, but that wasn't exactly something I could ask for directly. I felt like we had become close enough to consider each other as friends, but I wasn't shameless enough to drop by uninvited and ask for food, so my only choice was to wait for an invitation. *Man, I hope they host birthday parties. If they do, then I'll do my best to choose good birthday gifts if they invite me over!*



Touya-kun suddenly visited me one day and asked me about when I was free. "Hey, Tomi, when's your next day off?"

"Huh? Well, I can take any day off if I ask Gantz-san about it, but otherwise I don't really have any usual days off," I replied.

Working every day was actually normal in this world. It was the only way to earn enough money for savings if you only took on day labor jobs, and the measly amount of savings as a result of that would easily disappear if you couldn't work one day if you got sick, so life was a struggle in this world. My salary was better than that of someone that took on day labor jobs, but I had been working almost without taking any days off for the sake of my future. Saving up money was necessary for starting my own store eventually, after all.

"Oh, I see," said Touya. "I was going to ask you if you wanted to tag along for fishing if you were free, but..."

"Fishing?!" I exclaimed. "Is your party going out for a fishing trip again, Touya-kun?!"

I don't know when an opportunity like this will come again if I miss it, so I

definitely need to somehow adjust my schedule to take a day off! My efforts at training and becoming strong enough to slay goblins were all for the sake of going fishing, after all!

“Nah, that’s not exactly it,” said Touya. “It’s just that the girls told me to take you with us guys, so...”

According to Touya-kun, he and Nao-kun were the only ones that were going fishing, and the main objective of their trip was to take me along with them. It seemed like the girls had heard from Touya-kun about why I had started training myself and why I had worked on developing a mincer, and they had apparently told Touya-kun to take me for a fishing trip because he had gotten my hopes up for one.

“Oh, um, sorry about that,” I said.

I had given them a mincer as a gift to thank them for all of the help that they had provided me up until now, so I felt a bit sorry after I heard Touya-kun’s words. However, there technically were some ulterior motives behind my gift. I had actually hoped for handmade cooking by the girls as something in return, but a fishing trip was perfectly fine with me as well.

“Wait, hold on, that means you’re going to let me tag along for a fishing trip, right?!”

I asked Touya-kun for confirmation after I had finally realized what he was talking about, and he grinned in response. “Yeah! Get ready in three seconds, Tomi!”

“Okay!”

Touya-kun had been joking about the three seconds part, of course, and I headed out for my first fishing trip in this world three days later. The plan was for a day trip due to the fact that Nao-kun and Touya-kun were worried about camping outside while I was with them, unfortunately. However, we had headed out of Laffan early in the morning while it was still dark and ran toward our destination, so we managed to arrive there by dawn, and that provided us plenty of time for a large haul of fish. *Man, I’m really glad I continued jogging as part of my daily routine!* The fishing experience itself hadn’t been very challenging due to the abundance of fish that would bite every time I cast my

line, but it had definitely been a fun experience, and the guys took me along with them from time to time for fishing trips in the future from that day onward.

Chapter 4—A Great Falling Star Deep within the Forests?!

The weapons and armor we had placed orders for were completed around the same time that Diola-san had been put into a good mood thanks to the medicine that the girls had given her as souvenirs. All of our chain mail, and Touya's armor, including partial armor pieces and gauntlets, had been upgraded to versions that were made of elemental metal enhanced by Light Magic. None of our armor had any special properties such as regenerative effects, but elemental metal enhanced by Light Magic was more well-rounded than the other types that were only strong against a specific element. On top of that, Light was extremely effective against undead monsters, so this was why we had decided on elemental metal enhanced by Light Magic.

As for our weapons, the tip of my spear and Touya's sword had been crafted with elemental metal enhanced by Light Magic. It seemed like any type of elemental metal would work for slaying undead monsters, but elemental metal enhanced by Light Magic was the most effective against undead monsters, so that was the reasoning behind our decision. Natsuki's naginata had been crafted with elemental metal enhanced by Wind Magic, and it seemed she had specifically asked Tomi for this due to the fact that she was concerned about how she hadn't been able to slice through a bind viper. However, her new naginata was a very effective solution to that problem, since it had allowed her to cut off the neck of a bind viper with ease. As for Haruka and Yuki, both of their new weapons were a kodachi. The two kodachi had been crafted with elemental metal enhanced with Fire Magic and Water Magic respectively, and it seemed like the bodies of the blades themselves were a bit thinner this time thanks to the use of better materials, so they looked closer to the image of a kodachi that I had in my mind.

In addition, both Natsuki and I had obtained a kodachi that had been crafted with elemental metal enhanced by Earth Magic and Wind magic respectively, and these kodachi were meant to be sidearms that could be used as substitute

weapons if needed. The only weapon we hadn't been able to upgrade was Haruka's bow, but we had obtained some arrows made with elemental metal to compensate for that. I wasn't sure how effective the arrows would be due to the fact that Haruka's bow was the same as before, but it was better than nothing. Gantz-san had also praised all of our new equipment, since he had told us that they were the best that we could purchase with money in Laffan. We were all glad to hear that we had obtained such reliable and high-quality products, and we endured the heat as we resumed our exploration of the north forest after we had received everything that we had ordered.

"Whew. Man, it sure has become hot recently," said Touya.

There were a lot of tall trees deep within the forests, so it was relatively cool here compared to other areas, but moving around a lot would cause you to sweat, and that especially applied to Touya due to the fact that he was the frontline fighter of our party.

"Well, it should feel a bit better now compared to before," said Yuki. "We worked hard to improve the actons under our armor, after all!"

Haruka, Yuki, and Riva had cooperated to craft some new actons for us to wear under our chain mail. They had used the ideas and knowledge that they had obtained from making swimsuits to improve how resistant an acton was against stabbing attacks to a certain extent, along with improved shock and impact resistance. On top of that, they had also applied a cooling function that worked by consuming a small amount of mana from the wearer. It wasn't exactly enough to make the wearer not feel the heat at all, but it was a huge difference compared to the previous actons that we had been using. In addition, we had the option of using magic to cool or clean ourselves whenever we wanted to, and we also had access to cool water thanks to our magic, so we were much better off compared to other adventurers. We were used to comfortable lives back in modern-day Earth, so the luxury that our magic provided and offered was what made it possible for us to remain active during the hot times of the year in this different world.

"Oh yeah, you're right. Thanks a lot." Touya lowered his head toward Yuki to indicate that he agreed with her opinion, but it seemed like he had some other complaints. "However, I still wish we had an air conditioner. Is there a spell that

can provide similar effects, Nao?”

“Well, there technically is a spell called Air Conditioning that works opposite of the Warmth spell, but there’s no point in using it while moving around outside,” I said.

I had tested out the Warmth spell during winter, and it was a spell that warmed the air around the caster. It was something that would be very useful indoors or inside a tent, but the air would cool down again after a while, and there was almost no point using it outside due to the fact that the warm air would get blown away instantly. It was probably possible to continuously warm the air around if I dedicated a lot of my mana to it, but that would consume my mana very quickly and cripple my ability to contribute to combat, and the downside of the Warmth spell also applied to the Air Conditioning spell.

“The Resist Heat spell might work for what you want, Touya, but it’s a spell that kind of blocks the sensation of heat upon touch instead of affecting the air in your surroundings, so yeah,” I said. “On top of that, I can’t actually use it yet due to the fact that it’s a Level 6 spell.”

“The Resist Cold spell was very effective inside of the spring a while back, wasn’t it? Does anyone know the reason behind that?” Yuki asked.

“Well, to describe it in simple terms, the Resist Cold spell just needs to provide insulation,” Haruka replied. “However, insulation by itself isn’t enough for the opposite purpose, since you’ll have to block off infrared light as well.”

“In addition, insulation will also make your body unable to adjust its temperature through sweat, right?” Natsuki asked. “Or rather, I’m curious about how much you can feel the weather if you use the Resist Heat spell.”

“Yeah, the Resist Heat spell could be used in summer as well if it has a thermoregulation function,” said Haruka. “Hmm...”

A lot of ideas had been brought up, but there was no way to test any of them due to the fact that I wasn’t able to use the Resist Heat spell yet, so I stopped the discussion between the girls by raising my hand to catch their attention. “We can try to scientifically test and prove things at another time. I detected some foes, so let’s deal with that right now. They’re probably skeletons, however.”

“Again? We’ve encountered a lot of them recently,” said Touya.

The foes I had detected with my Scout skill were five skeletons. We hadn’t really encountered many of these undead monsters while we had been harvesting precious wood, but we had started to encounter them more frequently as we ventured deeper into the forest, and we’d found out for ourselves about how effective elemental metal enhanced by Light Magic was against undead monsters. In fact, our new weapons were able to destroy skeletons in one hit, and skeletons were actually a fairly effective source of money due to the fact there was no need to clean up after slaying some, so we slew the skeletons that I had detected and retrieved their magicites once again.

“There’s nothing for us to peel off skeletons, but their magicites are worth eight gold coins each, so it’s pretty decent,” said Touya.

“Yeah, and we don’t have to gut them up eith—a shadow ghost!” I exclaimed.

“Perish!” Touya exclaimed.

Touya yelled in a flashy way as he swung his sword at the place I had pointed at, and I heard something that sounded like a wail right after that before a magicite dropped to the ground.

“Yep, shadow ghosts are weak and easy to deal with now if we can detect them!” Touya exclaimed.

Shadow ghosts were harder to detect compared to other monsters, but I had become able to detect them if one was nearby as a result of my training with Natsuki by using my Scout skill against her Sneak skill. On top of that, shadow ghosts were easy to slay after successfully detecting them, and Touya seemed quite happy as he picked up the magicite that had dropped from the shadow ghost.

“Well, it’s thanks to our new elemental metal weapons,” said Yuki. “Besides, we never got to test out exactly how effective the amulet is, so...”

“Huh?! Are you telling me to receive an attack from a shadow ghost on purpose?!” Touya exclaimed. “It feels really uncomfortable, you know?”

“Nah, that’s not what I’m saying, but I guess I’m a bit disappointed,” said Yuki.

Yuki lifted her index finger to her lips and tilted her head after she heard Touya's complaint, and Natsuki chuckled when she saw that before she chimed in. "Not having to make use of the amulet is the best case scenario. The large number of undead monsters that we've encountered recently does bother me, however."

"Maybe it's because we're in a different area of the forests," said Haruka. "We haven't encountered any weak monsters here, after all."

Orcs had replaced goblins in terms of how common it was to encounter them in the area of the forests that we were in, and it meant that we couldn't let our guard down, but it was a positive for us in terms of earnings due to the fact that orcs were a good source of both meat and experience points.

"By the way, have you all visited the temple?" I asked. "I visit almost every day, so..."

Jogging was part of my daily routine before the morning training session, and I would drop by the temple on the way to check up and donate money. I had encountered Ishuca-san during most of my visits as well, despite the fact that I would drop by early in the morning, so I had to stay alert the entire time.

"Whoa, that's really often!" Touya exclaimed. "I only drop by once every few days, so..."

"If I recall correctly, the rest of us have only dropped by about two or three times after our first visit," said Yuki. "Drastic changes probably won't happen that often, after all."

"Or rather, why do you drop by the temple so often, Nao?" Haruka asked. "Is it for the sake of seeing Ishu—?"

I hastily raised my voice to interrupt Haruka's words as she started to glare at me. "I drop by to check my experience points! I'm just curious about what actions increase my experience points and by how much, that's all!"

I had discovered from my visits that slaying monsters wasn't actually absolutely necessary for the purpose of earning experience points. It was possible to earn experience points through training as well, and it was also possible to earn a small amount of experience points even without training.

However, slaying monsters would provide the most experience points, and the amount you earned would scale with how fierce your training sessions or battles against monsters were. It seemed like you would earn around 1,000 EXP from a day of hard work, and a relaxing day would yield around 500 EXP instead. I had spent a lot of my own money to investigate this, but it wasn't exactly a waste of money considering the fact that my money would be used to fund an orphanage. On top of that, my intellectual curiosity had been satisfied as well, so I had no regrets about my actions.

"On a sidenote, I've gained three levels since our first visit to the temple," I said.

"Oh, really? I guess that probably means the rest of us have also leveled up by that much," said Yuki.

"Yeah. The number of experience points we've earned is probably fairly even, after all," said Haruka.

"It doesn't really feel like we've leveled up, however," said Touya.

"Really? We're definitely stronger than before," said Yuki. "We struggled against foes like orcs initially, after all."

"Mm. I'm probably capable of cleaving an orc in half with one attack nowadays," said Natsuki. "I'm not going to attempt it, however."

Touya seemed a bit disappointed at first about the fact that he didn't feel like we had leveled up, but Yuki and Natsuki refuted his opinion, and he nodded in response as if he'd realized something after he heard their words. "Oh, right, it's not like we instantly become stronger after leveling up like in games. Now that I think about it, I've also become able to circulate mana through my weapon nowadays, so..."

"Yeah, the Enhanced Muscles and Indomitable skills are really useful," I said.

All of us had become able to circulate mana through our bodies after we had learned the Enhanced Muscles and Indomitable skills, and we would maintain those two skills throughout combat. It was a natural course of action for us due to the fact that those two skills would improve the potency of our attacks and would help prevent injuries, but we had realized one day that mana was flowing

through our elemental metal weapons as well. I wasn't sure if it was the same thing as what Touya had mentioned before about wrapping mana around weapons, but it was very effective. In fact, circulating mana through a weapon had made Touya's sword capable of slicing through monsters even though his sword was more or less a blunt weapon, so there was a chance that you could become capable of impossible feats like slicing through a huge tree if you mastered this. However, it seemed like Touya completely believed in that and had continued training to become better at it.

"I've become able to fight at close range if needed thanks to this new ability," said Haruka. "I can slay orcs now with my kodachi, after all."

"Well, honestly speaking, I'd prefer if you remained in the back line, Haruka," I said.

The Enhanced Muscles and Indomitable skills were quite powerful when used by Haruka thanks to the large amount of mana that she had, but they didn't make her as durable and tough as someone like Touya, so I wanted Haruka's backup from the back line instead as much as possible.

However, it seemed like Yuki wasn't happy when she heard my words even though they were from a completely practical standpoint, and she pouted in response. "Huh? What's with the special treatment for Haruka? Natsuki's a powerful frontline combatant, so I can understand why you didn't mention her, but what about me, Nao?"

"Well, I mean, you're sort of like a gag character, Yuki, so I think you'll be fine," I said. "You'd probably just roll around while making comedic sound effects even if you got kicked by an orc before saying 'Whoops, I'm down!' or something like that."

"Please, there's no way I'd be fine!" Yuki exclaimed. "I'd probably die if that happ— Actually, I probably wouldn't die, but it would hurt a lot!"

Yeah, all of us would probably survive even if we received a direct kick from an orc thanks to the Indomitable skill. I had my bones broken from such a kick before, but I'd probably be fine now. I have no intention of testing it out, however.

"Yeah, I was just joking, but it's true that Haruka is the weakest person among

us physically, right? We need someone to be aware of everyone's situation as a whole, and I figured that Haruka would be best suited for the role due to the fact that she can provide backup from long range," I said.

"Hmm, yeah, I guess you're right about the fact that such a role is very important," said Yuki. "The person responsible for that role needs to be able to provide backup on the fly and to be capable of making the decision to retreat if needed, and it'd be hard for someone like Touya to fulfill this role, so..."

"Right. Honestly speaking, there's no way I can check and confirm what's happening to everyone else while I'm swinging around my sword, so I'm definitely not a good fit for that role," said Touya.

Some characters in fictional stories would serve the role of a leader in battle that gave out instructions to their party as a whole while fighting on the front line, but such a feat wasn't possible unless you were much stronger than the foes that you were fighting against. It was too dangerous to look away from an armed foe in front of you, so only a superhuman would be capable of doing that while giving out instructions. On the other hand, all of us were ordinary people, so the role of a leader who gave out instructions was something that was best for someone in the back line to fulfill and take on.

"Personally speaking, I feel at ease when I know that Haruka's behind me at the back line," said Natsuki. "We would have nobody to heal injuries if both of us got knocked out, and we can also count on your magic and arrows for backup, Haruka."

"Well, just to be clear, I'll only participate in close combat when it's safe enough to do so," said Haruka.

"In that case, I'm fine with that," I said. "Hm?"

I had detected some unknown signal with my Scout skill, so I raised my hand and made a sign to stop moving. We had been casually chatting with each other, but it seemed like everyone was still alert, as they responded to my sign immediately and stopped in their tracks before they held up their weapons.

"What is it?" Haruka asked. "Did you detect an orc leader?"

"Oh, is it time for some high-quality meat?" Touya asked. "My stomach is

ready whenever.”

“The value of meat from orc leaders is the same as meat from regular orcs, but meat from orc leaders tastes a bit better for some reason,” said Yuki.

Something that had really surprised me after we had ventured into the deep areas of the forests was the fact that it was possible to casually encounter orc leaders here. There were far fewer of them compared to regular orcs, but it was still possible to encounter orc leaders from time to time. However, such orc leaders weren’t that much of a threat to us compared to before. One orc leader would usually be accompanied by a group of a few orcs, but if we slew the orcs before the orc leader could get close to us, then all we had to do after that was to surround and gang up on the remaining orc leader for an easy victory. Elemental metal weapons could slice through the hard skin of orc leaders with ease, and we could also use magic. With all of that in mind, Touya was right to treat orc leaders as a source of high-quality meat that we would come across from time to time. There was no need to be too careful if the signal I had detected was an orc leader, but...

“Nah, it’s something different,” I said. “It’s something stronger than an orc leader, but as for what it is...”

Orc captains were the next tier of orcs, but one was supposedly as strong as four orc leaders, and the signal I had detected with my Scout skill didn’t seem that strong. On top of that, I had only detected one signal, so the chances of it being an orc captain were highly unlikely due to the fact that it wasn’t accompanied by a group of regular orcs. With all of that in mind, the process of elimination narrowed it down to one monster.

“Mm, yeah, it’s probably an ogre,” I said.

“Finally, huh? What’s the plan?” Touya asked. “We can technically win in combat against an ogre, right?”

“The situation we’re in isn’t too bad,” said Natsuki. “None of us are exhausted right now, after all.”

“The reference materials that we read before described ogres as monsters that rookies have no chance against, however,” I said.

If we made the decision to retreat in order to avoid ogres, then that would mean we had to venture back to the shallower areas of the forests. On the other hand, it also wasn't easy to make the decision to challenge a new foe when we were aware of the fact that it was a dangerous monster. All of us fell silent and paused in thought for a while, but it seemed like time wasn't a luxury that was available to us.

"Yikes, the ogre noticed us!" I exclaimed. "It's very fast as well!"

The signal my Scout skill had detected suddenly started to approach our location at a very fast speed. We were fairly far from the ogre's initial position, but it seemed like the range that the ogre could detect other living beings was much farther than I had expected it to be.

"Whoa, seriously?! It really is superfast!" Touya exclaimed.

"Mm, this is quite unexpected," said Natsuki.

It seemed like Touya and Natsuki were able to detect the ogre too as it got closer to us, and Touya drew out his sword while Natsuki stood next to him as she held up the naginata in her hands. The ogre appeared within our line of vision right after that, and it looked slightly smaller than an orc. However, its body looked much tougher, and it had a rusty sword in its right hand. The ogre also had two horns on its head, so it looked like a mix between a gorilla and a Japanese yōkai known as an oni.

"My Appraisal skill says that it's an ogre!" Touya exclaimed.

The ogre reacted to Touya's voice and dashed in his direction as if to ram into him, but it leaped into the air right before contact.

"Huh?!"

The ogre used one of the trees nearby as a platform to jump off as it headed toward our back line. *Are ogres smart enough to know that taking down the back line first is the right thing to do?!* Even orc leaders hadn't ignored the frontline members, but the ogre had aimed for our back line right away. The back line of any party would usually consist of members that couldn't handle close-range combat, so aiming for the back line members first was the correct choice of action from a tactical standpoint. However, that only applied if it was

actually possible to carry out successfully. The ogre had made a grave mistake due to the fact that none of the back line members in our party were only capable of fighting from afar. I swiftly lunged my spear at the ogre, but it parried my attack with its sword. However, an arrow that Haruka had shot at about the same time as my attack landed on its left shoulder as Yuki swung her kodachi and sliced through the left leg of the ogre.

“AAARRRGGGHHH!”

The ogre screamed as it lost its balance and fell toward the ground, and I lunged at it once again with my spear. However, the ogre leaped back up nimbly into the air, despite the fact that one of its legs was severely injured. In fact, it had leaped about two meters into the air, so its legs were quite powerful, but that was another grave mistake from the ogre.

“Take this!”

Touya dashed toward the ogre in an instant and grabbed its right leg before he swung his arm down with full force toward the ground. A loud dull sound vibrated through our surroundings upon impact along with the ogre’s death throes, but that was cut short right away after Natsuki sliced through the ogre’s head with her naginata. A brief moment of silence dawned upon us as the ogre’s head flew into the air before it fell and rolled around on the ground, and blood gushed out from the dead body of the ogre right after that. Natsuki breathed a sigh of relief after she confirmed that the ogre was dead, and then she relaxed the focused expression she had on her face before she cleaned the blood on her naginata.

“Whew,” said Natsuki. “I felt slightly panicked, but everything turned out fine in the end.”

“I didn’t think the ogre would completely ignore us,” said Touya. “Sorry about that.”

“Don’t worry about it,” I said. “It was our first time fighting an ogre, after all.”

It seemed like Touya was aware that he had messed up as someone on the front line due to the fact that he hadn’t been able to stop the ogre, and I casually told him that he wasn’t at fault for being unable to respond to the ogre’s movements, but Haruka had a serious expression on her face as she

shook her head in response. “I’m not trying to blame Touya, but it’s true that he let his guard down.”

“Mm. I wasn’t underestimating the ogre by any means in my mind, but I wasn’t able to react to the ogre on the fly either,” said Natsuki.

The ogre had made use of the trees in our surroundings for its movements, but it was a fact that it had nimbly leaped over Touya’s head despite having a huge body of over three meters in length. Our initial assumptions about the ogre had been too optimistic, and we had been completely caught off guard. On top of that, the ogre had been talented enough to parry my spear despite the fact that it had been in the air with no stable footing, so ogres were definitely very formidable foes.

“Well, Natsuki, both you and Touya managed to react fairly fast after being caught off guard, right? Touya was especially fast when he dashed toward the ogre,” I said. “Were you fast due to the Greased Lightning skill, Touya? You were much faster than I had expected, after all.”

I was a bit confused about Touya’s speed due to the fact that we had the same level for the Greased Lightning skill, but the response from Touya was something much more than what I had in mind. “Hmm. I’m not completely sure about this, but I think it was the result of three skills being combined together, and those three skills are Greased Lightning, Fleetness, and Charge.”

“Oh, right, you have multiple skills with similar effects,” I said. “What’s the difference between those three skills?”

“Yeah. Well, it kind of feels like Greased Lightning improves my agility, Fleetness improves my running speed, and Charge provides me something like instantaneous force,” said Touya. “The Charge skill probably has some other additional effects, however.”

Touya replied to my question right away, so it seemed like he had thought about this before. *Hmm...*

Haruka summarized Touya’s words while I was lost in thought for a bit. “Basically, Greased Lightning is for side-to-side jumps, Fleetness is for sprinting, and Charge is for explosive leg strength, right?”

“Yeah, those sound like perfect examples to describe them,” said Touya.

The examples that Haruka brought up were definitely quite different from each other, and I was able to understand a bit more thanks to those examples.

“The ogre we just fought was probably very powerful in those categories,” said Yuki. “It leaped quite high in the air, after all. We ended up being able to slay the ogre with ease, but overall, it felt a bit stronger than an orc leader.”

“By the way, ogres are roughly worth about ten thousand Rea less than orc leaders,” said Touya.

According to Touya, the magicites from ogres were worth more than the ones from orc leaders, but the pelt was the only other material from ogres that could be sold. The meat from orc leaders could be sold as well, so it seemed like orc leaders were more valuable if you factored that in as well.

“Ugh, yeah, I don’t really want to fight ogres if possible,” said Yuki.

The sad reality was that profit wasn’t always directly related to how powerful and dangerous a foe was, and Yuki grimaced as she stuffed the ogre’s dead body along with its sword into one of our magic bags.

On the other hand, Touya clenched his fists and seemed quite motivated. “Really? I want to have a revenge match against an ogre. Next time, I’ll slay an ogre without letting it get past me to the back line!”

“In that case, we’re counting on you to deal with the next ogre that we encounter,” said Yuki. “The rest of us will watch and see how you fare against one.”

“Yeah, leave it to me!” Touya exclaimed. “Where’s the next ogre, Nao?”

“It’s not possible to just encounter an ogre out of nowhere on demand, Touya!” I exclaimed. “Well, that’s what I would say usually, but I’ve detected some unknown signals again with my Scout skill. Just what is this...?”

I scolded Touya as he looked at me with excitement in his eyes before I frowned at the new signals that my Scout skill had detected. Based on what we had found out from our research back at Laffan, ogres were supposed to be the last unknown monster that we hadn’t encountered yet up until now. However,

we had also encountered monsters like skeletons, and we hadn't discovered any information beforehand about their presence in the forests, so...

"We've encountered a lot of undead monsters recently," I said. "Could they possibly be things like zombies...?"

"Zombies, huh? They probably smell really bad," said Yuki.

Everyone else grimaced after they heard the theory that had slipped out of my mouth. I had become somewhat used to seeing grotesque sights by now thanks to our gutting experiences with animals and monsters, but the idea of fighting against rotting corpses that could move around was quite unpleasant to me as well.

"Well, surely they aren't zombies," I said. "There's no way, right?"

My words were based on wishful thinking, but I was met with silence from everyone else.

"Are you trying to jinx us, Nao?" Touya asked.

"There's many phrases for this, such as 'speak of the devil' and so on, so yeah," said Yuki.

"Well, it's also possible that the new signals Nao has detected aren't actually zombies," said Haruka. "Do you want to go check and confirm, Nao?"

Haruka had a worried expression on her face as she asked me what I wanted to do, and I paused in thought for a while. If we applied the example of Schrödinger's cat to this, then the result wouldn't be confirmed as long as we didn't check for ourselves, and the theoretical cat would live. However, that was just a thought experiment, so nothing would actually change in reality even if we chose not to confirm things today.

"Let's just go confirm what these new signals actually are," I said. "We can just flee if we can't actually fight the new foes, after all."

If we confirmed what the new signals actually were, then I would be able to know that they were zombies the next time my Scout skill detected the signals, and it was also possible that they were actually completely different monsters. *I hope they're different, that is. Well, I've probably jinxed us really bad by now,*

but still.

“Well, I hope we’re actually able to flee if needed,” said Touya. “They might be very agile zombies, after all.”

“Agile zombies? Are you trying to say there might be zombies that are as fast as athletes?” I asked.

There was a chance that rotten bodies that ran as fast as athletes would turn into skeletons eventually after running for a while.

“I mean, that’s actually one of the better scenarios,” said Touya. “It’s possible that there might be zombies that can nimbly leap around on all fours like wild animals, after all.”

“Can you really call something like that a zombie? It sounds quite different from the image of a typical zombie in my head,” I said.

I wouldn’t react much if I saw a scalp ape leap around on all fours, but if I saw zombies performing such a feat, then that would be like having to go through a sanity check with low sanity.

“What you’ve described sounds like an alien creature, Touya-kun,” said Natsuki. “Are zombies aliens?”

“I dunno, it’s just something that I saw in a movie,” said Touya. “Well, the Purification spell should work even if they are alien-like creatures, right?”

“We’ll see what we can do,” said Haruka. “However, if they actually turn out to be agile zombies, then good luck, Touya.”

“Mm, undead monsters need to be kept within range of the Purification spell,” said Natsuki.

“Yikes, seriously? That sucks,” said Touya.

Touya grimaced after he heard the replies to his question, but it was a fact that it would be difficult to wipe out a group of undead monsters with the Purification spell in one go if they were very agile, so someone had to hold back and keep them in one place. Natsuki was one of our frontline members, but she wouldn’t be able to help out with that if she had to use magic, so the role would fall on Touya’s shoulders. On top of that, I would probably have to help him out

as well, so hopefully the zombies weren't agile ones.

"Zombies, huh? Is there any kind of medicine that can block off bad smells?" Touya asked. "NBC suits could work as well."

"Please, there's no way we could move around flexibly while wearing those kinds of suits," I said. "Just bear with it, Touya."

I wasn't sure if it was possible to make such suits in this different world, but there was no way we could fight properly while wearing a coarse and stiff suit. If we needed some protective equipment that we could wear without hindering our movements, then something like a gas mask was the most we could make and wear.

"I have a powerful and sensitive nose, so strong smells are really uncomfortable for me," said Touya.

"Well, we can use the Alchemy skill to create a medicine that can temporarily make your sense of smell numb," said Haruka. "However, I'm not sure if you'll be able to fight properly while you've lost one of your five senses. There's also the option of using a clothespin instead."

"Are you telling me to put a clothespin on my nose and try to fight like that? Ugh. Well, I guess I have no choice but to bear with whatever strong smell that we come across." Touya sighed as if he had resigned himself to his fate and started walking in the direction that I had mentioned, but he stopped after a few minutes and wiggled his nose for a bit before he frowned at what he had discovered. "Something smells really bad and strong here. Yeah, Nao, the new monsters that you detected probably are zombies, so I present you with the title of second-class jinxer!"

"That doesn't make me happy at all!" I exclaimed. "Also, why second-class?!"

"It's because you jinxed us in a bad way," Touya replied. "By the way, the good type of jinx is first-class, and harem protagonists have that kind of jinx."

"Don't randomly make up weird titles out of nowhere!" I exclaimed.

Man, if we're going to talk about jinxes, then I wish I had that first-class type of jinx. I wonder if there's some way to obtain it. Touya and I bantered with each other for a while, and we arrived at our destination in no time.

“Yeah, I figured things would turn out this way,” I said.

“I would have actually been surprised if these monsters weren’t zombies,” said Touya. “However, they’re lumping around sluggishly, so they look like typical zombies.”

I had no intention of describing what was ahead of us in detail, but it was a very vomit-inducing sight. There were seven dead bodies that were dragging their legs around, and their arms were hanging down while some kind of liquid was dripping down from their rotten bodies, so it was painful both to our eyes and our noses. The only saving grace was the fact that it seemed like there weren’t any insects around the zombies, and it was probably because the zombies were monsters. If there were maggots all over the zombies, then we would have definitely avoided approaching them and would have burned them all to a crisp with overwhelming firepower from afar.

“Yuck, no, I can’t,” said Yuki. “I’m not doing close-range combat with *these* monsters unless I absolutely have to in order to survive.”

“Mm, I feel the same way,” said Haruka. “Can you handle combat with those zombies, Touya?”

“Well, I’d prefer not to if possible,” Touya replied. “I know you can clean me up afterward with the Purification spell, but I don’t want to get splashed by rotten liquids.”

“Yeah, you’ll definitely get splashed if you smash your sword into those zombies, Touya,” I said.

My spear and Natsuki’s naginata could attack the zombies from a distance to a certain extent, but Touya’s attacks with his sword would be point-blank. It wouldn’t be too bad if it were easy to slay the zombies, but it would be awful if they could crawl toward us after their head or legs had been chopped off. I felt like weapons made of elemental metal enhanced by Light Magic would allow us to slay zombies relatively easily, but I didn’t really want to test things out.

“Let’s use the Purification spell to deal with those zombies,” said Natsuki. “I’d like to avoid having to extract magicites from rotten meat, after all.”

Nobody had any objections to Natsuki’s opinion, so she used her Purification

spell in a wide area of effect to cover all the zombies. The rotten meat of the zombies started to disappear as the bones underneath showed up, but the zombies continued to squirm around. Natsuki grimaced when she saw that, but the zombies completely disappeared in an instant after Haruka used her own Purification spell as well, and the only things that remained were seven magicites on the ground. It felt like the rotten smell in the air from the zombies had completely disappeared as well, but I wasn't sure if it was because my nose had become used to the smell or if it was because the Purification spell had cleansed the smell as well.

"It seems like zombies are slightly stronger than skeletons," said Natsuki. "The same amount of potency that I used against skeletons wasn't enough to finish off the zombies right away."

"I think it's probably because zombies have more parts that need to be purified and cleansed," said Haruka. "Zombies have both meat and bones, after all."

"Yeah, maybe," said Touya. "As for my conclusion about zombies..."

"Hm? What is it?" Haruka asked.

"I'm counting on you girls to deal with zombies again in the future when needed!" Touya exclaimed.

Touya grinned as he tapped Haruka and Natsuki on their shoulders, so it seemed like he had no intention of fighting any zombies himself, and I felt the exact same way. It would be a different story if it wasn't possible to easily slay zombies with the Purification spell, but that wasn't the case, so it would be stupid to force ourselves to fight against zombies in close-range combat.

"Well, I don't really mind," said Haruka. "We would still need to use the Purification spell on both the zombies and the people fighting them even if we slew them in close-range combat, after all."

"Mm. With that in mind, it's better to just use the Purification spell right away from afar," said Natsuki.

"We would have to extract the magicites ourselves as well, so dealing with zombies from afar is definitely better," said Yuki. "Okay, I've picked up all seven

magicites. I wonder how much they're worth in total."

The magicites from the zombies were about as large as the ones from skeletons. However, the signals from zombies that I had detected with my Scout skill felt slightly stronger than the ones from skeletons, and it seemed like the zombies were also harder to purify than skeletons, so the magicites from zombies were probably worth more money.

"*Appraisal*. Oh, by the way, my Appraisal skill now shows me the value of magicites," said Touya. "Maybe this is thanks to the fact that we went to the temple and prayed there. Okay, it seems like these magicites are worth nineteen hundred Rea each."

"I'm not really sure," I said. "The Appraisal skill is a skill that has levels, so..."

It was possible that skills could mutate into something different from the original base skill, but the new function of Touya's Appraisal skill was probably a result of his skill having leveled up. However, the skills that we had were things that had been granted to us by Advastlis-sama, so...

"In any case, it's a convenient new function to have. Our total earnings from seven zombies add up to about a little bit over thirteen gold coins, so undead monsters are actually a decent source of money considering the amount of time it takes to slay them," said Touya. "They're not really challenging in terms of combat, however."

"Oh, do you want it to be challenging, Touya?" I asked. "It would have been a nightmare to slay zombies without the Purification spell, you know?"

"Nah, it's not like I want to fight zombies," Touya replied. "It's just that I wanted to have a revenge match against an ogre, that's all."

"In that case, I have good news for you," I said. "Another opportunity to fight against an ogre is right around the corner."

"Wait, did you really detect another ogre with your Scout skill? I didn't think they were actually that common," said Touya. "Yikes, the deeper areas of the forests really are dangerous."

"What do you want to do, Touya? Do you want to fight the ogre?" I asked. "We don't have much time left if you want to avoid it."

I had been on alert with my Scout skill after our first encounter with an ogre, so I had successfully detected another ogre from farther away this time, but it was a matter of time before the ogre detected us as well.

Touya licked his lips and responded to me with a slightly ferocious-looking smile when I glanced at him for an answer. “I’m down for this challenge, of course! Everyone else okay with this?”

“Go ahead, Touya,” said Haruka. “Just try not to get injured.”

The girls had slightly exasperated looks on their faces as they shrugged in response to Touya, and Touya confirmed that everyone else had stepped back before he held up his weapon and stepped forward for his challenge.

In the end, Touya’s battle with the ogre had finished very quickly. Both of them had charged at each other right away, but Touya had succeeded in inflicting a blow to the ogre’s legs, and that blow had decided the fight. The scariest thing about an ogre was how powerful its legs were, so they weren’t hard to deal with alone if you managed to injure an ogre’s legs. In fact, after the initial blow, Touya had seamlessly fought the ogre with ease, and he won without suffering any injuries.

“Hell yeah, I succeeded at getting my revenge!” Touya exclaimed. “There are no scary foes left in this forest that we can’t deal with!”

Touya seemed very happy as he raised both of his arms up in the air, but his declaration of victory was a very careless mistake due to the fact that it was an easy way to jinx ourselves. The girls had some awkward and uncomfortable expressions on their faces, so it seemed like I wasn’t the only one who had such thoughts.

“Yikes, I can’t believe you’ve jinxed us this time, Touya,” said Yuki. “Time to celebrate with a party tonight!”

“What do you mean by that?!” Touya exclaimed. “Look, to be clear, it’s not like I actually want to encounter challenging foes, okay?”

“I didn’t want to encounter zombies myself either, but you know what happened,” I said. “This is the power of jinxes, Touya.”

“Nah, there’s no way the same type of jinx will happen twice in a row,” said

Touya. “Right, guys?”

“...I think it’s a good time to head back to Laffan for today,” said Haruka.

“Mm. It’s best to avoid danger, after all,” said Natsuki.

Nobody responded to Touya’s question as we hurried back to Laffan, but it seemed like the jinx that Touya had set up wasn’t that easy to avoid. I detected a signal with my Scout skill, so I stopped in my tracks and sighed deeply. “Ugh. All right, Touya. I present you with the title of second-class jinxer!”

“I don’t want that title!” Touya exclaimed. “Or rather, seriously? Did you really detect a new powerful foe?”

“Yeah, I think so,” I said. “There’s only one signal, but it seems very powerful, and it’s positioned on our path back home.”

The signal I had detected felt much stronger than an orc leader’s signal, and I almost thought that my Scout skill was broken as a result. However, my Scout skill had saved our lives many times up until now, so I had no choice but to face the reality in front of me.

“Should we avoid this new foe?” Natsuki asked. “Or rather, can we actually avoid it?”

“We might be able to if we make a long detour, but we’d have to go through areas that we haven’t explored before in order to do that,” I said.

We had been exploring the forests without a map, but we hadn’t been walking out aimlessly at all. We had made sure the route that we had walked through was safe as we marked signs along the way, and we would follow those signs back and forth to make sure that we were walking through the same route each time. All of this had been necessary for the sake of not getting lost in the forests, and it had also reduced the risks of our journey back to town while we were tired from exploring the forests.

“Hmm. I’m not sure what’s more dangerous between unknown areas and an unknown foe,” said Haruka. “How about we just go check the foe that Nao detected first?”

Nobody had any strong evidence for either option, so everyone else passively

agreed to Haruka's idea. We headed toward the direction of the signal that I had detected with my Scout skill, but we started to whisper to each other after we found out what the new foe looked like.

"Dude, Nao, this foe looks way too challenging!" Touya exclaimed quietly.

"Yeah, but why are you saying that to me? Sure, it definitely looks more powerful than I had expected, but it's not my fault," I said.

The new foe looked like a type of boar, but its body was as huge as a dump truck, and we were able to clearly see it from afar as a result. Its body length was about six meters, and its height was probably at least three meters. On top of that, it had extremely long tusks that were completely straight and extended out in front of it, and those tusks looked very dangerous. The tusks were also shining with a yellowish red hue, and I would definitely die in one hit if I was pierced by those giant tusks. I wasn't sure if it was okay to actually classify this new foe as a type of boar, so I used my Help Guide for confirmation, but it seemed like the new foe was called a lava boar. *Huh? Wait, hold on, since when did the Help Guide actually display the specific name of something?*

"Uh, Haruka, the display window from my Help Guide is telling me that the new foe is a lava boar," I said. "Is it the same for you?"

"Really? Let me check," said Haruka. "Oh yeah, it's the same for me as well. This is strange..."

We had used our Help Guide on tusk boars before, but it had only displayed a window that told us they were edible animals at the time. The Help Guide was a skill that had no levels next to it, so I had been sure that it was something that couldn't change up until now. *Hmm. Could this be some kind of bonus gift from Advastlis-sama as thanks for us praying to him sincerely?*

"Enough of that for now," said Touya. "We need to discuss what to do first. Its tusks are as thick as one Yuki, after all."

"True, but why did you use me as a unit of measurement, Touya?" Yuki asked.

"Its legs are thick as well, and they're probably as much as three Yuki in total," said Touya.

"Again, why are you using me as a unit of measurement?" Yuki asked.

“As for its weight—”

“You better not finish that sentence, Touya,” said Yuki.

Yuki sounded absolutely serious, and Touya fell silent after he heard Yuki’s words.

“Well, I’ll definitely get crushed easily if that lava boar manages to stomp over me with its legs,” said Yuki.

“Mm, that’s what would happen normally in that situation,” said Natsuki. “I’m not sure how much of a difference our level ups will make, however.”

“I feel like the safer option would be to make a long detour, but it’s probably too late now,” said Haruka.

Haruka sounded kind of nervous when she mentioned that it was too late to avoid the lava boar, and it seemed like the boar had detected us when I observed it again, so she was completely right about that. The lava boar started to take some steps toward us, and it wasn’t very fast, but it was very intimidating. However, we had no time to discuss with each other about our next course of action. The lava boar had only seemed slow at first due to its huge body, and it reached our location in an instant after it started running at us. All of us managed to dodge left and right in time, and the boar sped past where we had been and caused thunderous sounds of destruction as it destroyed the trees in the vicinity. A couple of trees that were thicker than my body collapsed to the ground as a result of the boar’s rampage, and we were cut off from each other due to those trees.

“Damn it, let’s retreat for now!” Touya exclaimed. “I’ll be the rear guard—”

“No, I’ll be the rear guard!” I exclaimed. “Clear the way for us in the front, Touya!”

We had no time to discuss things further, so Touya started running right away. I tried to provide him with backup by scattering a few Fire Arrows at the lava boar, but the lava boar reacted with a roar, and my Fire Arrows were wiped out as soon as its roar echoed through the forest.

“Seriously?!” The sight of a roar wiping out my Fire Arrows was unbelievable, but I ignored it as I started running as well.

“W-We’ve invoked the wrath of a boar god!” Yuki exclaimed.

“You sure seem to be a bit unfazed by this, Yuki!” I exclaimed. “Stop joking around and hurry up!”

I dodged through the Fire Arrows that Yuki and Haruka had fired at the lava boar and stopped behind them.

“Any effect?!” I asked.

“Nope!” Yuki exclaimed. “The Fire Arrows get deflected by its fur even if they land on the lava boar!”

“We probably need to use a lot of mana if we want to pierce through its fur with our Fire Arrows,” said Haruka.

I glanced behind me and aimed a Fire Arrow at the lava boar’s eyes, but the lava boar only seemed mildly annoyed as it swung its tusks to deflect my Fire Arrow. The lava boar’s tusks looked really scary and dangerous from the front, and I felt some chills down my spine due to the fact that the tusks looked like a ram that was aiming at me.

“Lower body strength really is what matters for protecting your own life!” Yuki exclaimed. “I’m glad I didn’t skip out on jogging before our training sessions!”

“Now’s not the time to chat about that!” I exclaimed. “Run like your life depends on it!”

“I don’t plan on dying, but I’m doing my best to run!” Yuki exclaimed.

Touya cleared the way for us in the front due to the fact that he was the fastest person among us, and the rest of us ran through that path. Yuki had started out a bit slow, but she was more petite than Haruka and had more stamina than her as well. On top of that, Yuki had also copied the Fleetness skill from Touya, so she managed to catch up to Haruka right away and pulled on her hand to help her run faster.

“Th-Than—”

“You don’t have to speak!” Yuki exclaimed. “Keep it up!”

I confirmed that Yuki and Haruka were running a bit faster before I looked

behind me at the lava boar. I was aware that it was still chasing us due to the sounds its huge body was making, and I thought we had an advantage inside the forest due to the fact that the lava boar's body was huge, but it snapped trees as thick as my body with ease. On top of that, it also wasn't dodging any trees that were even thicker than my body, so the lava boar seemed like a runaway dump truck, but it was more like a battle tank in terms of how powerful it was.

"Ugh, what a waste of precious wood!" Yuki exclaimed.

"C-Can we somehow make use of this lava boar to cut down trees for us?" Touya asked.

I heard some stupid words from Touya in the front, but Haruka jabbed back at him with some surprisingly rational words. "Of course not! There are probably cracks in the trees that the lava boar knocked down, and those cracks will ruin the value of the precious wood!"

"Run faster if you have time to joke around!" I exclaimed. "*Fireball!*"

I tested out the Fireball spell due to the fact that it had more explosive power than a Fire Arrow, but it seemed like it wasn't enough to even slightly burn the lava boar's fur. The lava boar had slowed down a bit after my Fireball landed on it, but its fur was still glossy, and its cuticles were probably undamaged as well. It seemed like it was possible to slow down the lava boar to a certain extent with the Fireball spell, but it wasn't significant enough to make a huge difference. We had managed to continue running from the lava boar so far thanks to Touya's excellent choice of a path for us to run through and his forceful destruction of the greenery that Natsuki aided with using her naginata, but I wasn't sure how long we could keep this up. *Should we force ourselves to actually fight the lava boar? There's a limit to our mana, so...*

However, Touya yelled something as soon as I started thinking about the idea of fighting the lava boar. "There's a cave! Let's hide inside it!"

I saw something that looked like a small opening in the surface of a mountain right after I heard Touya's words. I couldn't see inside of the cave due to the fact that it looked dark inside, but Touya leaped inside of the cave without hesitating at all. Natsuki slowed down for a moment to make sure that the rest

of us had caught up before we all entered the cave together, and then we looked behind us.

“It’s not chasing us inside, huh?” said Natsuki.

“Yeah. It’s just wandering around outside of the cave,” I said.

The lava boar had suddenly stopped in its tracks near the cave for some reason. It didn’t stick its head into the cave, but it didn’t seem like it had abandoned its intention of hunting us down, as it walked around in a circle outside.

“The lava boar seems quite intelligent,” said Yuki. “We’d be able to attack it without being counterattacked if it stuck its snout into this cave.”

“Mm, it’d be really easy to deal with if it were stupid enough to try to charge in,” said Haruka. “*Light.*”

Haruka lit up the insides of the cave with her Light spell, and it seemed like the entrance of the cave had a width and height that were both about two meters. The cave passageway looked like its wideness scaled with how deep you ventured into it, and it seemed to continue quite far. It was thanks to this that the cave wasn’t very tight even though there were five of us inside, but the walls of the cave seemed a bit weird to me.

“This cave doesn’t look like a natural one at all,” I said. “Is it a mine tunnel?”

There were carving traces on the walls that looked like they had been made with chisels and pickaxes, and the ground was easy to walk on as well due to the fact that it was quite flat. It wouldn’t be strange in this different world if there were monsters out there that would burrow through mountains to make their own nests, but the tunnel we were in was probably a man-made one.

“A mine tunnel, huh? I have an idea of what this tunnel might be,” said Yuki. “Remember Edith?”

A scowl appeared on Touya’s face after he heard the words that Yuki muttered. “...Is this the mine that caused Edith’s death?”

“We can investigate this place if you want,” said Haruka. “If this is the mine you’re thinking of, then there should be some traces left here.”

“Well, the lava boar doesn’t seem like it’ll go away, so let’s explore a bit for now,” said Touya.

Touya started walking first before the rest of us followed him as we explored the cave, and it was definitely man-made. The passageway in the cave was a straight road for the most part, and there were some gentle curves and diverging paths, but all of them were blocked off with debris. We were able to continue on a straight path thanks to that, but it only lasted for a few minutes as we eventually reached an end with two paths ahead of us on the left and right.

“Hmm. We should probably map out this place as we explore it,” said Yuki. “I’ll give it a try.”

Touya led the way in front, while I was at the back as the rear guard, and Yuki was in the middle as she took out some paper and a pen to draw a map.

“What’s the plan? Should we go left, or should we go right?” I asked. “They both look more or less the same in terms of size, so...”

“I think it doesn’t really matter,” Touya replied. “There’s no real reason for this, but let’s just go left first for now.”

Touya had walked on the left path for a few dozen meters before my Scout skill detected something. “You said that there was no real reason for choosing the left path first, but you still managed to score, huh? As expected from a second-class jinxer, I suppose.”

“You’re still going on about that, Nao?!” Touya exclaimed. “Or rather, did you detect a foe?!”

“It seems like it’s possible to encounter monsters inside caves as well,” said Natsuki. “*Light.*”

Natsuki added an extra source of light and sent it forward, and it revealed five skeletons that were wearing ragged clothes, and they also had what looked like the remains of pickaxes in their hands. Only two of the pickaxes still had their tips intact, while two of the other ones looked like broken sticks, and the last one sort of looked like a hammer. The skeletons rattled their bones as they moved slowly, but they were walking toward us.

“Are these skeletons the remains of miners that died a long time ago?” Haruka asked.

“Based on what they have on them, yeah,” Touya replied. “With that in mind, please put them to rest, Natsuki.”

The skeletons didn’t seem especially strong, and Touya could probably slay them easily by swinging around his sword, but that sight seemed to have appeared in his mind as he sighed and turned around to look at Natsuki for help.

“Very well,” said Natsuki. “*Purification.*”

Light flowed out from underneath the skeletons after Natsuki muttered the name of the spell, and magicites along with the remains of pickaxes fell to the ground after that. Touya had a slightly gloomy expression on his face as he picked up the objects on the ground and threw them into our magic bags before we continued exploring the path that we were on.

“Well, I guess this confirms that we’re in an abandoned mine,” I said. “The walls around here look like they’re very hard.”

“Yeah, it would probably be very difficult to dig through these walls via manual labor. With that in mind, that’s probably the reason why a large number of laborers were sent here,” said Yuki. “Most of them had probably been arrested on false charges and were forced to do heavy labor, so I can see why and how they became undead monsters.”

“Oh, hmm. Now that I think about it, it’s possible that this abandoned mine is the source of the undead monsters that we’ve encountered so far in the forests,” said Natsuki.

There had been no information about sightings of undead monsters in the areas of the forests that we had been exploring, but we had encountered and slain a large number of undead monsters up until now. I had no idea about exactly how much labor was needed for the development of a mine, but there were probably many more undead monsters ahead here. The undead monsters were the remains of people that had been forced to work here against their will, so they had probably been full of resentment as they died.

I felt some chills down my spine and rubbed my arms after I thought about the fates of the dead miners, and Haruka seemed a bit confused about my actions. “What’s wrong, Nao?”

“Well, I was just thinking about how a lot of people died here,” I replied. “It bothered me a bit, so...”

“Oh my, do you happen to be scared, Nao?” Yuki asked.

Yuki smiled playfully as she walked and looked at my face, but she had the wrong idea. “Nah, I don’t think something scary will happen, but it just feels a bit uncomfortable. Places that remind you of death, such as crematoria or cemeteries in the middle of the night, all feel this way to me.”

“Relax, Nao,” said Touya. “Ghosts are probably common encounters here.”

“Oh yeah, you’re right about that,” I said.

I wasn’t sure how ghosts were a reason to feel relaxed in any way, but being scared of ghosts wasn’t an excuse that any of us could use. Or rather, we had already slain a shadow ghost before ourselves, so...

“Well, I feel the same way as you do, Nao,” said Haruka. “However, we’ll use the Purification spell when needed, so you don’t need to worry about anything.”

“We’ve already slain a lot of undead monsters up until now, but you sure are sensitive in weird ways, Nao,” said Yuki.

Haruka and Yuki both sounded very nonchalant as they chimed in, and Natsuki smiled as well after she heard the conversation at hand.

“The girls in our party sure are reliable and brave,” I said. “I feel like there’s a lack of cuteness here, however.”

“Well, what would you do if I screamed cutely out of fear and hugged you when an undead monster appeared, Nao?” Yuki asked.

“I would peel you off and throw you away before holding up my weapon for battle,” I replied.

“Yeah, I figured that’s what you would say!” Yuki exclaimed.

Yuki sounded a bit sulky as she yelled in response to my words, but real ghosts in this different world were potentially dangerous, so...

“I’ll hug you back if it’s at a haunted house inside an amusement park, so look forward to it,” I said.

“Isn’t that something that’ll never happen?!” Yuki exclaimed.

Yeah, unless we make an amusement park ourselves.

Touya laughed as he looked and listened to our banter for a bit before he tapped the walls with his hands. “By the way, it’s true that these walls are hard, but timbering a mine is necessary, right? Isn’t it normal for most mines?”

“Oh, well, it seems like magic can take care of that,” said Natsuki. “Mages harden the surroundings with Earth Magic as miners dig through in order to prevent tunnels from collapsing on the workers, so it’s sort of similar to the shield tunneling method.”

“I see. I guess that means we don’t have to worry about this tunnel collapsing on us,” said Touya.

The shield tunneling method was a very safe construction method that was used in the construction of tunnels back in modern-day Earth, and Earth Magic in this different world could harden the surrounding area without requiring things such as seam joints, so it was possible that the use of Earth Magic was actually a much safer method.

“Wait, if I recall correctly, didn’t Diola-san tell us that the lord at the time couldn’t openly recruit miners for this mine due to the fact that it was a secret?” Yuki asked. “With that in mind, were there actually any mages here that specialized in Earth Magic for the development of a mine?”

“...We should probably be careful as we explore this place,” I said. *Shoddy work for construction is absolutely terrible, yep.*

“Mm. Use your Earth Magic to harden our surroundings if there are any spots that seem weak, Nao,” said Yuki. “I’m busy with mapping, so I’ll leave that to you.”

“Yeah, sure. Natsuki, tell me if you notice any spots that bother you,” I said. “I

can deal with them as a preventive measure.”

“Okay, I don’t mind,” Natsuki replied. “I don’t want to die from being buried alive either, after all.”

“We can probably escape using Earth Magic if there isn’t too much, but it’s better to stay safe,” I said.

There had been many cases of mine development that had been carried out with a disregard for safety back in modern-day Earth, and those cases had led to mining accidents where miners had been buried alive. It wouldn’t hurt to be too careful, so I poked the nearby walls with my spear to check if there were any weak spots as we continued exploring the tunnel, but it was a straight and slightly boring path. A few diverging paths would appear from time to time, but most of them had a depth of less than ten meters, and it was possible to see the end of those paths with the Light spell. As for the longer paths, even the depth of those was less than fifty meters at most.

“It’s nice that we don’t have to worry about getting lost, but this mine sure has a simple structure,” said Touya.

“Well, I don’t think there’s any reason to dig and create complex mining tunnels in normal circumstances,” said Haruka.

“I’m not so sure about that,” said Natsuki. “There’s the possibility that a mine could end up with a complex structure of tunnels if miners followed veins as they dug through, after all.”

“Oh, yeah, you’re right about that,” said Haruka.

Digging tunnels wasn’t the main objective of miners; their objective was to dig up ore, and the veins that contained ore weren’t always completely straight. With that in mind, Natsuki’s words made perfect sense to me, and some of the gentle curves we had encountered in the beginning were probably the result of miners following veins for ore.

“Whew,” said Yuki. “We’ve walked about two thousand steps from the initial diverging path.”

It seemed like Yuki had continued counting even while we were chatting with each other, and she sighed lightly as she stopped in her tracks.

“Good work,” said Haruka. “Do you want to rest for a bit?”

We had only encountered foes once so far inside of the cave, and Natsuki had dealt with them instantly via the Purification spell, so Yuki was the most exhausted person among us. Haruka sounded a bit concerned as she asked Yuki about how she felt, but Yuki seemed a bit hesitant as she held one of her hands to her lips. “Hmm. Well, I feel fine, so...”

“Let’s rest for a bit and replenish ourselves with nutrition,” I said. “I detected a large number of signals ahead with my Scout skill, so...”

“Foes, huh? Are they undead monsters?” Touya asked.

“Probably,” I replied. “I think they’re zombies and skeletons, but I can’t say for sure, so we technically should prepare ourselves.”

We were exploring a different place than usual, so resting was the right choice if someone was hesitant. All of us sat down and took out the food we enjoyed from our individual magic bags. I hadn’t felt hungry earlier due to how hot it had been, but it felt cooler here compared to the outside, and it actually felt slightly too cold when we weren’t moving around, so I consumed some slightly warm food to fill up my stomach.

“Whew. It feels really comfortable here, and I wish it was this comfortable outside,” said Touya. “By the way, mithril can be mined here, right? If I recall correctly, there’s an Earth Magic spell called Search Earth, right, Nao? Can you search for mithril using that spell?”

Touya was energetically chewing on a huge chunk of meat, and I felt a bit exasperated as I shook my head in response. “Nah, I can’t. That spell can only find minerals and metals that the user is aware of, after all,” I said.

The Search Earth spell was something that could be used to search for veins as well, but it was a useless spell if the user wasn’t aware of what signals would come back from specific veins. It would be similar to searching around for something with your hands while blindfolded, so you had to be aware of the shape and feel of what you were looking for in order to find it.

“Well, I think it’d be bad if we tried to mine mithril without permission,” said Haruka. “However, what about things like gold, silver, or copper?”

“I have a rough idea of what the signals are for those, but it feels like there’s only a small amount here,” I said.

I wasn’t sure if it was because I encountered those minerals on a daily basis, but I had detected some signals that were probably the three that Haruka had mentioned. However, it seemed like there was only a small amount of them within the earth, so it probably wouldn’t be worth the effort to dig for them to bring back with us.

“Yeah, I guess it makes sense that it wouldn’t be worth mining for those on an individual basis,” said Haruka.

“By the way, gold ore back in modern-day Earth seems to produce an average of three grams of gold per one ton,” said Natsuki.

“Wait, really?” Touya asked. “There’s that little content from gold ore?”

Touya seemed very surprised as he asked Natsuki for confirmation, and Natsuki casually nodded in response. “Yes. Smelting an amount of gold ore that’s enough to fill one dump truck will only get you enough pure gold for a few coins.”

“Yikes, that sounds like a real struggle,” said Touya.

There wasn’t much gold content in the gold coins that we normally used for everyday life, but it made sense to me after I heard Natsuki’s words. The large gold coins that we hadn’t encountered yet probably had a gold content of about half of the coins, but I wasn’t sure if they were worth the production costs required to make them. I felt like it wouldn’t be worth it due to the fact you had to dig up gold ore via manual labor in this different world instead of through industrial production, but it was possible that things such as magic and alchemy could cover and make up for the costs.

“Nao, can’t you just directly extract minerals and metals from the ground with magic?” Touya asked.

“You’re asking for the impossible, Touya,” I replied. “The Create Earth spell can technically work for that, but it’s very exhausting and dangerous to use!”

Yuki and I had already tested the Create Earth spell back when we were trying to make a bath, and we had found out for ourselves what would happen if we

tried to gather a chemical element that had low natural content in earth. *Hmm. Actually, it might be possible to extract minerals and metals if we gathered a bunch of ore with high content of what we're looking for before using the Create Earth spell. It would make the smelting process easier, so maybe this is a method that's used in this different world.*

“By the way, between gold and mithril, which is rarer?” Touya asked.

“It’s definitely mithril,” Natsuki replied. “The gold coins in circulation as currency aren’t pure gold, but they still have gold in them, after all.”

“I guess that means mithril is harder to mine than gold,” said Touya. “Does that also mean weapons made of mithril are an impossible dream? I really want one, so...”

“It seems like mithril is mixed with other metals for crafting products, so it depends on the mithril content,” said Natsuki.

Touya sighed after he heard the ambiguous answer from Natsuki, but he then looked up as if he had realized something. “Oh yeah, now that I think about it, Gantz-san showed us a weapon that had mithril in it before we grouped up with Natsuki and Yuki.”

“If I recall correctly, the cost of that weapon was 780,000,000 Rea, right? Gantz-san told us it was fairly cheap, and I guess he was actually right about that,” I said.

Touya seemed a bit disappointed when he heard my words, and Haruka chimed in as well. “That price was probably because it was an inconvenient weapon for practical use. Mithril weapons aren’t sold normally, so you can’t buy them even if you have enough money. If you really want a mithril weapon, then you’ll have to take your time to search for one. In any case, let’s get going.”



“Ugh, there really are a lot of them here,” said Yuki.

We had resumed walking for a few minutes when Yuki raised her voice in surprise and disgust at the sight ahead of us. The tunnel we were in had become a bit wider, and there were a large number of undead monsters

grouped up in an area that looked like an open space. The total number of undead monsters looked like it was about forty, and roughly a third of them were zombies. The other two-thirds were skeletons, and there were a few ghosts as well. The wind was blowing in the direction of the undead monsters, so it wasn't that bad for most of us, but Touya had been pinching his nose for a while due to how powerful and sensitive it was.

"Hey, there's a skeleton knight among those undead monsters," said Touya.

Touya's voice sounded a bit weird due to the fact that he was still pinching his nose, but I couldn't laugh at him after I heard his words. I hastily used my Third Eye skill on the skeletons and found what Touya had just mentioned.

Race: Skeleton knight
Condition: Healthy
Skills: Swordsmanship, Shieldsmanship

Is "Healthy" actually the right way to describe undead monsters? Well, I guess this is why I felt something weird with my Scout skill. A few of the skeletons had swords and shields along with helmets on their heads, and it seemed like these skeletons were skeleton knights. Some of the other skeletons only had swords, and their names were displayed as skeleton soldiers, so they were definitely stronger than the skeletons we had fought before. However, they didn't seem very strong based on how it felt when I used the Third Eye skill on them. With that in mind, they probably weren't very dangerous, but I wasn't sure if I could trust the Third Eye skill for this. However, Advastlis-sama had mentioned before that the ability of the Third Eye skill was to tell the user if it could win against what or who they used it on, so I could probably trust that function even if I couldn't trust the status information that the skill had displayed.

"Hey, is 'Healthy' actually the right way to describe undead monsters?" Haruka asked.

Oh, I guess that part tripped up Haruka as well.

"Their living condi—I mean, their 'dead' condition is probably healthy for them, so that could be it," said Natsuki.

“It doesn’t matter,” said Touya. “It just means they haven’t received any damage yet, right?”

“Touya, you sound really weird,” said Yuki. “Why don’t you just let go of your nose? You’re not going to fight with one hand, right?”

“None of you understand just how painful this smell is to me,” said Touya. “Ugh, yeah, it smells really bad. Man, I really want a gas mask.”

“Bear with it, Touya,” I said. “It’s not as bad for us as it is for you, but it’s still pretty bad. Hmm. Why aren’t they coming to us?”

“Yeah, that’s strange,” said Haruka. “I’m fairly sure they’ve noticed us, so...”

There was a decent amount of distance between our location and the location of the undead monsters, but it was within range of how far the Light spell could light up, and the spell had only been sent slightly ahead of us. It was also the reason why we had been able to use the Third Eye skill on the undead monsters, and monsters would usually attack people on sight, but the undead monsters merely wandered around in the open space that they were in and showed no signs of approaching us.

“We would be able to slay them one by one if they approached us, but I guess we have no choice but to attack them first,” I said.

“It’ll be hard to purify all of these undead monsters in one go due to their sheer numbers,” said Haruka. “Let’s deal with them while focusing on the zombies first.”

“They’ll probably attack us once we get closer,” said Natsuki. “Please take care of the skeletons and ghosts while we use the Purification spell.”

“Okay,” the rest of us replied.

Yuki, Touya, and I all held up weapons as soon as Haruka and Natsuki cast their Purification spells together, and their combined spells succeeded at purifying most of the zombies and some of the skeletons along with one shadow ghost in an instant. The remaining undead monsters reacted and were ready for battle after that as they started moving, and they were faster than I had expected them to be. The skeleton soldiers moved together with three normal skeletons as a group, and they slid past the slow zombies as they rattled

their bones while they ran toward us.

“Are these skeletons actually coordinating with each other?!” I exclaimed.

“It’s pointless, however,” said Haruka.

“Yeah, exactly!” I exclaimed.

The skeletons were basically moving as a squad of four, but the skeleton soldiers were the only ones that had proper weapons. The other skeletons were either unarmed or armed with clubs, so their squad formations were almost pointless. All we had to do was to pay attention to the skeleton soldiers as we smashed the heads of the other skeletons in order to ruin their formations, and the remaining zombies were purified by the second round of the Purification spell from Haruka and Natsuki while we were dealing with the skeletons.

“Gotcha!” I exclaimed.

A shadow ghost had tried to sneak up on me, but shadow ghosts were easy to deal with as long as you had an elemental metal weapon.



In fact, shadow ghosts were weak monsters that vanished after receiving a few attacks from me that were imbued with mana. I looked at Yuki and Touya, but it seemed like the remaining shadow ghost hadn't tried to attack them. There had been a total of three shadow ghosts in the beginning, but I couldn't find the remaining one, and it was possible that it had been purified by the second volley of the Purification spell from Haruka and Natsuki.

"There are just the skeleton soldiers and skeleton knights left, huh?" I said.

There were four skeleton knights left that were protected by seven skeleton soldiers, and they seemed like a decent challenge compared to the other undead monsters. Touya raised his voice as he yelled and was about to charge in, but...

"Purification!"

The third volley of the Purification spell from Haruka and Natsuki went off and filled the cave, starting from the center of the skeleton knights. All of the remaining skeletons shattered to pieces after that, and Touya stopped in his tracks as soon as he saw that sight as silence dawned upon us for a while.

Touya turned around with his sword still raised up in the air and had a disappointed expression on his face. "Really? I was just about to show off my prowess with a sword against skeletons, you know? Wasn't it my time to shine?"

"Nah, that dream wasn't going to come true," said Haruka.

Poor guy. It was true that there was no point in risking injuries if there was an easier way to slay the skeletons, but I still felt a bit bad for Touya.

"I'm sorry, Touya-kun," said Natsuki. "I had already cast the spell before you could charge in, so..."

"Well, I mean, you don't have to apologize for it," said Touya. "It's just a shame, that's all."

Natsuki bowed toward Touya to apologize to him, and Touya sheathed his sword when he saw that as he muttered some tiny complaints under his breath. However, Haruka's and Natsuki's actions were tactically correct, so Touya

couldn't actually complain about it for real. It would be a different story if it had happened during one of our training sessions, but reducing the risk of injuries in actual combat as much as possible was the natural and proper thing to do.

"Keep in mind that it was thanks to Haruka and Natsuki that we didn't have to get close to zombies, Touya," I said. "Just thank them and then join me for retrieving the loot on the ground. There are things lying on the ground aside from magicites such as swords here, after all."

"Hmm. Yeah, I guess you're right about that. An opportunity to fight against strong skeletons isn't worth having to fight against zombies in close combat," said Touya. "Sorry for complaining, Haruka."

"Don't worry about it," Haruka replied. "I simply prioritized our safety and efficiency."

Haruka shrugged in response to Touya's apology before she started to retrieve the magicites, and the rest of us joined her right after that. In the end, we had retrieved a total of forty-six magicites. The magicites were probably worth a decent sum of money in total considering the fact that some of them were from skeleton knights, but it didn't feel very good due to the fact that there weren't any other materials that we could retrieve from skeletons. However, it wouldn't have felt good either even if there had been usable materials from skeletons, as it would be their bones in that case.

"Hmm. The pickaxes are scrap metal and the clubs are trash," I said. "What about the swords, Touya?"

Touya had both the Appraisal and Blacksmithing skills, so I asked him about the quality of the swords that the skeleton knights and soldiers had, and he frowned in concentration as he tapped the swords. "They're rusty, but they seem to be of good quality. In fact, this one here that isn't rusty is made out of white iron."

"Mm. On top of that, there's a crest engraved on the hilt of that sword, and it looks like the family crest of Viscount Nernas," said Natsuki.

"That's the lord who rules over Laffan, right? I'm surprised that you recognize this crest," said Touya. "It's my first time seeing this, after all."

“I did some research just in case, for the sake of defending ourselves. It’s dangerous not to know when we’re in this viscounty, after all,” said Natsuki. “In any case, this is more or less clear proof that the cave we entered is the abandoned mine that Diola-san had told us about, and that’s a slightly troublesome truth for us.”

The abandoned mithril mine we were in was one that had been developed using criminals as labor in order to keep the mine a secret from others. As for the person that had the title of Viscount Nernas two generations ago, he was someone convicted of treason that had suddenly disappeared one day. With all of that in mind, everything about this smelled like trouble.

“Is it really okay for us to continue exploring this place?” Yuki asked. “What if we accidentally see something that we’re not supposed to?”

“Are you talking about the possibility of us dying due to knowing too much? That sounds kinda scary to me,” said Touya.

We had been looking for traces of what had happened in the abandoned mine, but it would be troublesome for us if we actually found further concrete evidence. Prioritizing self-care and safety was our main policy, and combat against monsters wasn’t the only thing that our policy applied to.

“It would probably be a very bad idea to try to sell this white iron sword, right?” Touya asked.

“Yeah, we might get locked up as criminals if we try to. There’s the option of melting down the white iron itself instead, but we should probably show this sword to Diola-san first and ask her about what to do with it,” said Haruka. “This is a very sensitive matter, after all.”

“I don’t want to be forced to run away and abandon our house after we’ve worked so hard to afford it,” I said. “We should definitely avoid investigating further about this. I feel a bit bad about causing more work for Diola-san, however.”

“Well, it’s technically part of her job at the Adventurers’ Guild.” Natsuki lowered her eyebrows in a troubled way as she paused in thought for a bit. “However...”

“I-It should be fine!” Yuki exclaimed as she shifted her eyes around awkwardly. “We gave Diola-san a souvenir the other day, after all!”

“Things such as dealing with the lord sound like a lot of hard work, and stress isn’t good on the skin either,” said Haruka. “Bringing another souvenir to give to her might be a good idea depending on the circumstances. We have some leftover medicine from the batch that we made together with Riva, after all.”

“Well, it’s better than fumbling around and trying to directly deal with this matter ourselves,” I said. “There’s a good chance that we would cause more issues in that scenario, after all. Okay, let’s head back.”

“Yeah, the lava boar should be gone by now!” Touya exclaimed.

All of us silently looked at Touya after he opened his big fat mouth, and Yuki sighed in response. “We purposefully avoided mentioning that, Touya, and yet...”

“Huh? I mean, there’s no way it’s still there outside, right? A lot of time has passed since we entered this abandoned mine, so there’s no reason for the lava boar to still be around,” said Touya.

“Look, Touya, you don’t have to actively jinx us every time just because you’re a second-class jinxer,” I said.

“You’re still going on about that?!” Touya exclaimed. “Or rather, I’m not trying to jinx us! Believe me!”

“In that case, wanna bet on it?” I asked. “You’ll have to suffer a penalty if you lose, however.”

“Yeah, sure!” Touya exclaimed. “Wait, hold on, why do I have to suffer a penalty if I lose?”

“Oh, do you lack confidence for this, Touya? Do you not trust your own abilities at jinxing us?” I asked.

“Of course not!” Touya exclaimed. “Also, that’s not what I have confidence in! I’m confident in my ability to break jinxes!”

“Sure, let’s go with that,” I said. “You better keep your word, Touya.”

“Yeah, I will,” said Touya. “Hm?”

Touya seemed a bit confused about how our conversation had turned out after he nodded to me at the end, but I urged him to forget about it as we started walking toward the exit.

“Hey, Haruka, didn’t Nao help with jinxing us even further?” Yuki asked.

“If Touya’s a jinxer, then Nao’s a buffer at enhancing the strength of a jinx,” said Haruka.

“I feel like he’s more of a debuffer due to the fact that he’s pushing all of the negative effects on Touya,” said Natsuki.

Please, I simply have full faith in Touya! Is that so hard to believe?

“Yep, the lava boar’s still here,” I said. “I was right to believe in your abilities to jinx us, Touya.”

Touya seemed very confused when he saw the lava boar that had planted itself outside near the exit of the cave. “Huh? Why? It shouldn’t have any reason to be obsessed with us, so...”

“The lava boar might have a habit of never giving up on prey that it sets its eyes on,” said Natsuki. “What does your Appraisal skill say about this, Touya-kun?”

“Uh, I don’t see any information in regard to that. It seems like lava boars were named as such due to the fact that the color of their huge tusks is similar to lava, however,” said Touya. “There are also other pieces of information, such as how the meat of lava boars is very hard, but their livers are a delicacy, and their fur seems to be quite tough and prized as a material that can be used to make powerful armor. Oh, nice. I guess this means that you guys can get some new armor made as well.”

“Yeah, but that’s only if we can actually slay the lava boar!” I exclaimed. “That’s the hard part!”

“Mm, our magic wasn’t effective at all,” said Haruka. “Are lava boars resistant to Fire Magic?”

“Uh, I don’t see anything about that either from my Appraisal skill, but it seems like lava boars tend to be found in hot areas such as volcanic zones,” said

Touya. “The forests here aren’t that hot, but maybe the lava boar wandered here as a result of global warming.”

“Please, there’s no way that’s the case!” I exclaimed. “Don’t blame everything on global warming, Touya! Besides, this isn’t Earth, so that shouldn’t apply here in this different world.”

“Relax, I’m just joking. However, we’ve definitely encountered a lot of strange things recently,” said Touya. “There was no information or sightings for undead monsters and lava boars in the forests, but look what happened. In any case, how about trying out other types of magic that aren’t Fire Magic? It could work, after all.”

“Hmm. It’d be great if the other types of magic worked, but they’re not as good as Fire Magic,” said Yuki.

“Yeah, we haven’t trained enough for the other types of magic,” I said. “Ugh, I should have at least trained and practiced the Stone Missile spell.”

We had been mainly using Fire Magic for dealing damage to our foes due to how powerful the spells were. It had worked just fine up until now, but a foe that was resistant to Fire Magic was an issue for us.

“We can practice other types of magic at another time,” said Haruka. “The only non-Fire Magic spell I can use for dealing damage at the moment is the Air Cutter spell, but I’ve only used it for cutting trees, so I don’t know how effective it is in combat.”

“The idea of unfamiliar spells flying from behind makes me feel a bit uneasy as someone on the front line,” said Natsuki. “Let’s hold back on magic and mainly focus on close-range combat for fighting the lava boar. You wanted to fight a challenging foe like this, right, Touya-kun?”

“Like I said before, it’s not like I actually want to encounter or fight challenging foes,” Touya replied. “More importantly, Nao, use your Third Eye skill on the lava boar. Can we win against it? The Third Eye skill provides you with a rough feeling of how tough a foe is, right?”

“Well, it feels like we should be able to win against the lava boar,” I said. “As for its skills, I see three of them, and they’re Charge, Skewer, and Trample.

What about you, Haruka?”

“I see the exact same things as you do,” Haruka replied. “Oh, actually, I also see a skill called Fire Resistance, but the lava boar doesn’t seem to have the Magic Barrier.”

Based on the information that our Third Eye skill had provided us, Haruka and I both agreed that the lava boar wasn’t an easy foe that we could casually slay, but it also wasn’t an impossible fight for us.

“In that case, let’s give it a shot!” Touya exclaimed. “Luckily for us, we’re in a decent spot right now for fighting the lava boar!”

“Mm. The fact that there aren’t any large trees nearby is also a significant factor,” said Natsuki. “There’s plenty of space for me to swing around my naginata, after all. In addition, we don’t have to worry about trees suddenly falling on us, and we also don’t need to constantly pay attention to the ground here.”

The main reason we had fled earlier was because we had been caught by surprise. The lava boar had knocked down a lot of trees just by charging through them, and fighting in an area with fallen trees all over the place would be extremely disadvantageous for us. After all, the lava boar wouldn’t have any trouble hopping over the thick trunk of trees, but that wouldn’t be the same for us.

“We also have this cave if needed,” said Yuki. “We can just run inside if things become dangerous for us, after all!”

Our situation would normally become worse over time if we holed up in a cave, but it was different for us due to the fact that we had magic bags with plenty of food inside of them. We could also use the Purification spell to clean ourselves, and water was obtainable via the Create Water spell, so it was possible for us to hole up in the cave for a long period of time if needed.

“Our goal is to slay the lava boar, however,” said Haruka. “Let’s do this.”

We headed out of the cave to fight the lava boar, and when the lava boar saw us, it slowly raised its body to get ready for combat. However, it didn’t charge at us all of a sudden this time, and that was probably because we had rock walls

behind us.

“Our usual pattern would be to take the initiative via using spells like Fire Arrow, but we’re going mostly physical this time,” I said. “Let me have the first attack against the lava boar.”

I stepped forward and took out the spear that had become my spare one after I had obtained a spear made of elemental metal.

“You sure that spear will cut it?” Touya asked.

“No problem. Everything’s fine,” I replied. “Or rather, don’t joke around in times like this, Touya! I don’t want to get jinxed!”

My spare spear was actually a high-quality weapon that was worth 140 gold coins. *I’m gonna think of a “fun” penalty for you later, Touya. You lost the bet, after all.*

“Besides, I’m not going to get close to the lava boar, so I don’t have to worry about getting injured!” I exclaimed.

Javelins were different from normal spears, and it was because they were made for the purpose of being able to be thrown a long distance. However, a normal spear would do just fine for throwing if it was a short distance. I held my spear above my shoulder and coiled back my body before I took a big step forward and let go of my spear as I cast some magic at the same time. The spells I cast were Heavy Weight and Accelerate Time. I hadn’t perfected them yet for actual combat, but I decided to test them because they would probably be useful.

“AAARRRGGGHHH!”

A rumbling roar echoed through the air from the lava boar. My spear had directly landed on the lava boar’s left eye, and it looked like it was halfway stuck inside.

“Whoa! Amazing, Nao!” Yuki exclaimed.

“Just to be clear, this was a lucky shot!” I had aimed for the lava boar’s head, so it was a complete coincidence that my spear had pierced the lava boar’s left eye, and there was no way I could replicate the same feat. “In addition, it’s also

thanks to the use of Time Magic spells!”

The lava boar had been able to deflect our Fire Arrows by using its tusks, and my spear would have also been deflected by those same tusks if I had thrown it normally. I had used Time Magic in order to deal with that scenario and to increase the potency of my throwing attack, and the result was way better than I had expected. In fact, I had been surprised by the speed of my spear after it had left my hands and flown toward the lava boar.

“I-I guess that means I’ll have to practice this as well,” said Yuki.

“You can attempt that training at another time,” said Touya. “More importantly, the boar ‘god’ seems to be angry.”

“Mm. Let’s see if this works!” Haruka exclaimed.

Touya stepped in front of me as an arrow flew out from Haruka’s bow. Haruka had accurately aimed at the eyes of the boar, unlike my throwing attack, but she missed her target because the lava boar stepped back, and her arrow landed on the neck of the lava boar before it bounced off and fell to the ground.

“Really? My arrows can’t pierce through at this distance? I can’t believe the lava boar is this tough,” said Haruka. “The arrow I used was made of elemental metal, and yet...”

Haruka seemed slightly exasperated as she drew her bow again, and I was surprised at the result as well. I had thought before about the possibility that arrows wouldn’t be useful against the lava boar due to its huge and fat body, but I didn’t think that Haruka’s arrows wouldn’t be able to even pierce through the lava boar’s fur.

“We can probably make some very good leather armor from this lava boar after we slay it,” said Natsuki.

“You sure seem relaxed, Natsuki,” said Touya. “Honestly speaking, I feel a bit uneasy about whether or not my sword can actually slice through the lava boar.”

“If it can’t, then do your best to smash the boar with your sword,” said Natsuki. “That’s what your sword is for, after all.”

If Touya's sword wasn't able to slice through the lava boar's fur, then the fur would be an excellent material for making leather armor. It would be a huge upgrade for us in terms of the defensive capabilities of our armor, but it would also mean that there was a higher risk of us dying to the lava boar before we could slay it and turn its dead body into useful materials.

"GRAARRRR!"

The lava boar roared once again before it stomped on the ground with its legs and lowered its head.

"Spread!" Natsuki exclaimed.

Natsuki ran to the left, and Touya reacted after a few seconds as he ran to the right. The lava boar showed some signs of hesitation after it saw that, and then a Stone Missile from Yuki landed on it, so its attention shifted to the remaining three of us. The lava boar wasn't exactly capable of suddenly stopping in the middle of a charge, and I somewhat hoped that it would charge as is and injure itself on the rock walls behind us. However, the lava boar was actually much more intelligent than I had thought it was. It seemed to have deemed that Yuki's magic and Haruka's arrows weren't a threat to it, as it ignored us and turned toward Touya. I wasn't sure if the lava boar had decided on Touya as its next target instead of Natsuki due to the fact that it thought Touya was more of a threat or if it was because it couldn't see where Natsuki was at, but Natsuki took advantage of that opening and swung her naginata down at the lava boar. She aimed at the lava boar's legs, and that was the correct choice considering how large its body was, but the lava boar's legs were as thick as three Yuki in total, so even a high-quality naginata wasn't capable of slicing through them easily.

"Ugh, it's really tough!" Natsuki exclaimed.

It seemed like Natsuki was aware of that as well, so she had sliced at the Achilles tendon of the lava boar. However, she hadn't been able to rupture the tendon despite the fact that her naginata had sliced through the lava boar's fur, so she seemed a bit frustrated as she moved back. Natsuki's attack seemed to be enough for the lava boar to glance behind it, but Touya diverted the lava boar's attention back to him by attacking it as well.

“What do you think, Natsuki?” I asked.

“The lava boar is really tough. I attacked it under almost ideal conditions when it wasn’t paying attention to me at all, but it still wasn’t enough to deal significant damage,” Natsuki replied. “However, I don’t think the lava boar itself is that much of a threat to us.”

“Do you mean that we should have no trouble with slaying the lava boar?” Yuki asked.

“Its toughness, stamina, and its ability to charge at targets with a lot of force all make it a foe to be reckoned with, but it’s still merely a beast with four legs,” Natsuki replied. “There’s nothing surprising about it, unlike ogres, so we should be fine if we’re careful and stay alert. It might take a while for us to slay it, however.”

Natsuki’s observation about the lava boar was completely accurate. The lava boar’s actions were quite easy to read due to its huge body, and it probably wasn’t capable of anything unexpected like hopping between trees for movement or standing up on its hind legs to attack us, especially if the information from the Third Eye skill was correct.

“Well, we have to take into account the fact that you were able to pierce through its fur with your attack for all of what you mentioned, Natsuki,” said Haruka. “Adventurers that can’t actually deal damage to the lava boar would have no choice but to continue running away from it, and most of those adventurers would probably end up dying after being trampled by the lava boar eventually.”

“Mm. However, we’re capable of dealing damage to the lava boar,” said Natsuki. “Let’s focus on damaging the lava boar from its left flank.”

“Are you saying we should leave the front to Touya?” I asked.

“We can only attack from the flanks thanks to the fact that Touya is taking on the lava boar from the front. He has to work hard to keep the lava boar’s attention on him, or else we’ll end up in the front,” Natsuki replied. “Besides, take a look. Touya-kun wanted to fight against a challenging foe, and it seems like he’s really enjoying this opportunity right now.”

I wasn't exactly sure if Touya was actually enjoying combat against the lava boar, but he was holding his ground as the sound of his sword clashing against the lava boar's tusks echoed through the air. It seemed like Touya was avoiding any reckless moves and focusing on maintaining the status quo due to the fact that the rest of us were around. The lava boar would turn around toward us if Touya retreated, and there was also the possibility of it charging at us from a distance, so he was doing the right thing.

"I feel a bit bad about leaving him to fend against the lava boar by himself, however," I said. "I'll go provide him with backup, so be careful here while chipping away at the lava boar."

I left the girls where they were and joined Touya at the front of the lava boar. The lava boar looked at me as soon as it saw a new opponent, but Touya's sword landed on its head at the same time, so it hastily focused on dealing with Touya's attack instead.

"How's it going, Touya?" I asked.

"Its tusks are really hard!" Touya exclaimed. "I feel like they're as hard as elemental metal!"

Touya grumbled a bit about how hard the lava boar's tusks were, but he didn't slow down at all while doing so. The lava boar seemed quite irritated by Touya's attacks and tried to step back to prepare for a charge, but Touya would step forward each time to attack it. As a result, the lava boar had no choice but to respond to Touya's attack, so it couldn't do anything else. Touya wasn't actually dealing a lot of damage to the lava boar, but the fact that he had more or less incapacitated the boar's movements was very impressive.

"Stone Missile!"

I aimed at the right eye of the lava boar, which was still intact. I probably couldn't destroy its right eye with my Stone Missile spell, but it was sufficient for the purpose of providing Touya with backup.

"Hell yeah!" Touya exclaimed. "Nao, keep it up, and—"

Touya's words were interrupted by a huge explosion around the lava boar's left hind leg, and the lava boar screeched with pain as its huge body tilted a bit.

“It seems like Fire Magic works as well after you’ve sliced and cut through its fur!” Haruka exclaimed. “A lot of mana is required, however!”

“You heard her, right, Touya?” I asked.

“Yeah, I did, but I’ve only managed to land a few clean blows so far!” Touya exclaimed.

The girls were able to attack the lava boar thanks to the fact that Touya was distracting it, but he wasn’t able to deal any real damage to the lava boar as a result. However, that wasn’t an issue due to the fact that we were fighting as a party of five.

“Keep distracting the lava boar,” I said. “Let the girls handle dealing damage to it!”

“Gotcha!” Touya exclaimed. “Ugh, these tusks are really annoying!”

Touya stepped forward once again while he was grumbling about the lava boar’s tusks, and he pulled out my spear that was still stuck in the lava boar’s left eye. The lava boar screeched with pain once again as it swung down its tusks, but Touya dodged them as he tossed my spear to me.

“Try to destroy its right eye as well!” Touya exclaimed.

“Okay!” I exclaimed. “Ugh...”

I grimaced after I saw how dirty my spear was because it had been stuck halfway through the lava boar’s left eye before I aimed for the lava boar’s right eye once again, but the lava boar was actually wary of me, unlike before in the beginning, so it wasn’t easy even though Touya was distracting the lava boar for the most part. However, Touya eventually managed to slide through the gaps of the lava boar’s tusks as his sword landed on the lava boar’s snout, and the lava boar completely stopped moving for a moment as a result. Yuki and I made our moves at the same time right after that, and I threw my spear at an even closer distance than before. It landed where I had aimed this time on the lava boar’s right eye, but the results weren’t as good. My spear only slightly pierced the lava boar’s right eye before it fell off right away and rolled around on the ground.

As for Yuki, she had tried to rupture the Achilles tendon of the boar’s left

foreleg just like Natsuki, but her weapon was a kodachi that couldn't reach as far as Natsuki's naginata. She had succeeded at slicing through the lava boar's foreleg by stepping closer to it, but it was a very risky move. The lava boar had received multiple attacks from the three of us at almost the same time, and it roared as it wildly thrashed its tusks around and stomped on the ground. It wasn't trying to specifically aim for one of us, but the lava boar's body chased Yuki while she was retreating, and its legs that were raised up in the air drew close to Yuki as a result. Yuki hastily curled up in response, but Touya managed to intercept the lava boar's legs as he pushed her away by a few meters on the ground. On the other hand, Touya was kicked by the lava boar and flew in a straight line as if a truck had rammed into him, and he collided with the trunk of a tree that was about ten meters away before he bounced off and fell to the ground.

"Touya!" I exclaimed.

The huge dent in Touya's breastplate was visible even from where I was at, and I felt some really uncomfortable sweat burst out all over my body when I saw that, but I sighed out of relief when I saw his body move a bit. *Man, I'm really glad we upgraded our armor instead of deciding to cheap out!* Touya's breastplate was dented even though it was one that was made of elemental metal, so I really didn't want to think about what would have happened if he had still been wearing the previous breastplate that was made of normal metal.

"Good job, Touya!" I exclaimed. "I'll let you off the hook for the bet!"

Touya's right arm was shaking as he raised it and gave me a thumbs up in response. "I'll...be...back..."

Hmm. I guess he's actually okay if he's able to joke around like that, but he probably won't be able to stand up anytime soon. I saw that Haruka had dashed to Touya in order to heal him, so I left Touya to her as I turned around to the lava boar in order to take over what Touya had been doing, but it seemed like Natsuki already had that covered, so I helped Yuki get back up and retreated as I focused on preparing a spell to aim at the lava boar's left foreleg that Yuki had injured earlier. The lava boar had the Fire Resistance skill, but Yuki had already proved that it was possible to damage the lava boar through Fire Magic if you used enough mana to overwhelm the resistance. I kneaded my mana as I

compressed my Fire Arrow beyond what was enough to pierce through multiple orcs, and I had no intention of holding back at all.

“Fire Arrow!”

My Fire Arrow was whiter and brighter than usual as it flew toward the wound on the left foreleg of the lava boar, and it pierced through it with ease. My spell then made contact with the right foreleg ahead of it before it exploded and gouged out most of the right foreleg as well. I hadn't expected my Fire Arrow to be so powerful, but I had accomplished my objective due to the fact that there was no way the lava boar could support its huge body with just two legs. The lava boar screeched with pain as its body tilted strongly, and it tried to endure it by grinding its head with the ground, but that didn't last for long. Its tusks that had endured all of Touya's attacks snapped from their roots, and the lava boar lost its balance as it fell with a heavy thud. Its huge body was flipped on its back, and its defenseless belly was wide open. There was no reason for us to force ourselves to attack it close up anymore, so we kept our distance as we slowly chipped away at the lava boar, and it eventually died. However...

“It saddens me when I think about us, but Touya never returned to us,” I said.

“We'll never forget about you, Touya!” Yuki exclaimed. “We managed to get revenge on the foe that slew you!”

“What's with that ominous monologue all of a sudden?!” Touya exclaimed. “I'm alive and perfectly fine!”

Yuki and I wiped the liquid that was flowing out from us as we looked at the clear and bright sky above us. “Today's victory tastes somewhat salty, doesn't it, Yuki?”

“Mm, it really does,” Yuki replied. “However, I'm sure that Touya is watching over us from afar in the skies as a star.”

“That salty taste is just from sweat! You two sweated a lot from combat!” Touya exclaimed. “I mean, yeah, I'm watching over you two right here and very close! I'm not up in the skies!”

It was almost as if we could hear Touya's voice as the wind blew through us, and we closed our eyes to grieve for him.



Side Story—Jade Wings: Episode Three

“Hey, that girl over there looks quite cute, doesn’t she?”

“Who? Whoa, you’re right! Let’s try to hit on her!”

“I’d think again if I were you guys. Just so you know, that girl is part of the Jade Wings party.”

“Huh? Is that a famous party?”

“Tsk, you don’t know? Well, in that case, you’ve probably heard of the Angelic Sadist before, right? The Angelic Sadist is one of the members of the Jade Wings party, so connect the dots.”

“Yikes, seriously? She doesn’t look like her alias at all—actually, never mind, everything makes sense to me now.”

Again? More young adventurers that are scared after hearing my alias? The infamous alias of Orc Eaters for my party had more or less faded away from people’s memories due to the fact that other adventurers knew my party by the name of Jade Wings by now, but it seemed like my alias was more famous than the name of my party. Also, why did that guy bring up my alias instead of Kaho or Sae’s aliases?! What did that other guy mean by “everything makes sense”? I’m sure that Kaho and Sae stand out way more than I do! I tried my best to act caring while healing people and worked hard on regular quests as well instead of just hunting orcs, so why am I still being treated like this?!

I wanted to hear a different opinion, so I decided to ask the guild receptionist that I was very familiar with by now. “Any idea why my alias is more well-known than my other party members, Sara-san?”

Sara-san placed one of her fingers on her lips and looked up as she paused in thought for a bit after she heard my question. “Hmm. It’s probably because you’re the one that interacts with others the most. Your other party members don’t really talk with other adventurers very often, but you accept requests for healing if asked, right, Yoshino-san? On top of that, you’re also the leader of

your party, so that's another factor."

"Oh, so those are the reasons? Hmm. In that case, it might be a good idea to stop accepting healing requests," I said.

My party hadn't had much money in the beginning, and there were also some adventurers that knew about my clinic back at Sarstedt, so I had actively healed people when I had received any requests for healing. However, it wasn't necessary for my party to earn money through healing people anymore, and it had become somewhat detrimental by now, so...

"Oh, are you really going to stop accepting healing requests? That's a shame," said Sara. "You have a lot of fans, so..."

"That's what I don't like about it!" I exclaimed. "I don't want to interact with adventurers that have a grin on their faces even though they're injured!"

"Try to turn a blind eye to that," said Sara. "Opportunities to interact with the opposite sex are quite rare for adventurers, after all."

"Hell no, I'll pass on those kinds of people," I said. "I'll leave them to you, Sara-san."

"Oh, I'll pass as well," said Sara. "Adventurers are a huge no for me."

A few adventurers inside of the guild building collapsed onto the tables they were at after they heard the casual rejection from Sara-san. Sara-san was the youngest and most beautiful guild receptionist here, so the reaction of those adventurers made sense to me. In any case, trying to push those adventurers onto someone else when I couldn't really stand them myself wasn't a good thing, so...

"Mm, yeah, I guess I'll stop accepting healing requests for the near future," I said. "More importantly, what did you want to talk about with me today?"

"Oh, right. Well, the guild has received a personal quest for your party, so I wanted to ask you whether you're interested or not," said Sara.

"Really? My party consists of only Rank 2 adventurers, so that seems kind of strange to me," I said.

Aren't personal quests things that only high-rank adventurers receive?

Personal quests were quests that were issued by people who wanted specific adventurers to take on the quest. However, you had to become decently famous before you would start receiving such quests. I was aware of the fact that a decent number of other adventurers knew about my party, but that probably wasn't the case for people that weren't adventurers.

It seemed like my doubt had appeared on my face, as Sara-san chuckled and shook her head in response. "It's true that your adventurer ranks are still low, but your circumstances are a bit special. These kinds of quests are easier to receive if you have specific abilities that you're specialized in, after all. In any case, take a look here first."

I quickly glanced through the quest poster that Sara-san handed over to me, and I grimaced after I was done reading. "Yikes, this sounds like a hassle..."

Sara-san lowered her eyebrows when she heard my reaction. "Oh, please don't say that. The issuer is technically the lord of this town, you know?"

"That's exactly why it sounds like a hassle." It seemed like Duke Ohnick was the issuer of the personal quest that Sara-san had shown to me. "On top of that, this quest is asking my party to make a reservoir. Is this really a normal personal quest?"

The type of jobs that the Adventurers' Guild would introduce to adventurers through quests included things such as day labor and light duty work. As such, issuing quests at the guild in order to recruit adventurers for construction work was something perfectly normal, but it would be weird as a personal quest. On top of that, my party didn't have anyone that was suited for manual labor aside from Kaho, so...

"It seems like the lord issued this quest because he heard about the power of Sae-san's magic," said Sara. "It's possible that he wants her to just create a reservoir with the explosive power of her magic or something along those lines."

"Huh? I'm pretty sure you can't just create a reservoir that way, so I'm a bit confused about exactly what we need to do," I said.

I wasn't very knowledgeable about this, but I was fairly sure that reservoirs weren't that easy to make. Digging a hole by itself wouldn't fill it with water,

and setting up an intake structure was necessary as well. On top of that, Sae's magic was quite powerful, but it wasn't powerful enough to create a hole large enough for a lake in one shot.

"Well, I don't think your party will be fully responsible for all of the work required to make a reservoir," said Sara. "It seems like the person in charge of this project will come to provide a more detailed explanation if your party takes on this quest, so you can ask at that time."

"Ugh, it's pointless if we can't know ahead of time," I said. "However, it would be ideal for the guild if my party takes on this quest, right?"

"Mm. It is a quest from the lord, after all. Taking on this quest will be considered as contributing to the guild as well, so one benefit is that it'll make it easier for your party to climb up adventurer ranks," said Sara. "However, the guild will respect whatever decision your party settles on, and I'll try to deal with it as smoothly as I can if your party decides not to take on this quest, so..."

Hmm. Maintaining a good standing and relationship with the guild is ideal, so it'd be good to take on this quest. I should probably discuss things with Kaho and Sae first.



"So yeah, I brought the quest poster back with me," I said.

I had returned to the house that Kaho, Sae, and I were renting together. It was a small house that didn't have a yard, but we had somewhat improved our living conditions recently by setting up a small bathtub in the laundry area of our house. However, we weren't able to take baths frequently due to the fact that preparing hot water for a bath was a lot of work. Boiling water in itself was easy with Sae's Heat spell, but we would have to fill the bathtub with water first. In order to do that, we would have to bring buckets with us to the public well for a lot of round trips. Our bathtub wasn't that large, but filling it up completely was very exhausting work. We would work hard for this if we had no other choice of cleaning ourselves, but we had access to the Purification spell, so baths were sort of a luxury for us that we would enjoy from time to time. However, Sae had been practicing Water Magic recently, so I had some hopes that we would be able to casually take baths easily in the future.

“A personal quest, huh? Is it counting on my magic?” Sae asked.

“Yeah, probably, so it’s up to you whether or not we take on this quest,” I replied. “You can say no if you don’t want to.”

“Hmm...”

Sae looked at the quest poster and paused in thought as Kaho looked at it as well next to her, and I placed one of my hands on Kaho’s shoulders. “Congrats, Kaho. This is the next arc of the campaign that you were excited about.”

“I’m afraid that I don’t see a connection here,” said Kaho. “Besides, that was something that I mentioned ages ago, so...”

“Take a look at the location of this quest,” I said. “It’s the place that we went to before to slay goblins, see?”

It seemed like the planned location of the reservoir that the personal quest wanted us to create would be near Regina, which was the name of the village we had visited before, and the village was going to be used as both a hub for construction work and a source of construction workers. I would have turned down the quest right away if the village elder we had encountered before was still there, but it seemed like a new person had been appointed to that post after the previous one had been exiled, and that was another reason why I wasn’t sure what to do about the quest.

“That in itself isn’t enough evidence to make a connection, Yoshino. Consistency is essential, after all,” said Kaho. “Hmm. Oh, what if there were a mastermind behind the scenes who gathered the goblins that we slew, and that mastermind happens to be the person that issued this personal quest? The possibility is there, is it not?”

Kaho grinned after she revealed her theory to us, but Sae didn’t play along with her and brought up the main topic we had to discuss instead. “Sure, whatever. More importantly, let’s talk about whether to take on this quest or not.”

“Ugh. I suppose my reasoning was a bit too far-fetched...”

“It’s more like the lord would be the villain if we went along with the story that you came up with, Kaho,” I said. “That’s fine as fiction, but it would be

awful if it was true due to the fact that we actually live in the lands that the lord rules over, so...”

“Mm, indeed. It appears that Duke Ohnick is a noble of sterling reputation, after all,” said Kaho.

The reservoir was probably an investment for the future in order to prepare for cropland expansion and as a backup measure against droughts. The lord had also punished the previous village elder, so he was probably someone that truly cared and thought about the well-being of the citizens who lived in the lands that he ruled over. All of these were factors that had to be considered before making a decision.

Sae paused in thought for a while, but she eventually arrived at a final answer. “Well, I personally wouldn’t mind taking on this quest.”

“Indeed. The creation of a reservoir would be a great help to many people as well,” said Kaho.

“In that case, I’ll tell Sara-san that we’ll take on this quest,” I said.

A personal quest from the lord will surely be a decent one, I think.

★★★★★★★★

Uh, actually, I don’t have a good feeling about this...

“I’m Esquire Damlos, and I’m the one that the lord placed in charge of this project.”

The person that arrived to provide us with an explanation of what we had to do for the quest introduced himself with a very arrogant tone to his voice. He looked like someone who was in his late thirties, and he had short gray hair behind his head that looked like it was hardened with some sort of hair gel, so his forehead was very clear and shiny. His body looked skinny and didn’t seem muscular at all, so he had no particular external features that stood out, but that didn’t matter at all due to the fact that a very strong smell was oozing out from him. The smell was probably some kind of perfume, but it smelled really bad and felt really overwhelming. I almost unconsciously tried to pinch my nose, but I somehow managed to hold myself back. In fact, Kaho was pinching her own nose while hiding behind me, but I couldn’t really blame her due to the

fact that she was a beastwoman. My party was in a room that the guild had prepared for this meeting, and Sara-san was here as well, but the smile on her face twitched from time to time. However, I was impressed by the fact that she was still somewhat able to maintain that smile.

“Nice to meet you,” I said. “I’m Yoshino, the leader of the Jade Wings party.”

I bowed after I finished greeting Damlos-san, but he lightly snorted in response without saying anything. *Sure, we’re here to work for the lord, but isn’t it common sense as an adult to respond in kind to greetings, Damlos?*

Kaho and Sae remained silent after they saw the reaction from Damlos, so I had no choice but to try and resume the conversation. “If you don’t mind, I’d like to ask about further details in regard to the quest. What are we supposed to do?”

“Hmph, I knew I shouldn’t have expected anything from lowly commoners,” said Damlos. “You can’t even read, huh? It was written in the quest poster that you’ll be working to create a reservoir.”

My patience was tested when I heard Damlos sigh in a condescending way, but I forced a smile as I asked some questions. “I did read the quest poster, but reservoirs can’t be created by just digging a hole. We’re amateurs at this kind of work, and I don’t think it’ll be easy to make a reservoir, so...”

My questions were all very logical, but Damlos snorted in response. “I’m not expecting mere adventurers like you to know what to do. A specialist for this kind of work has been invited to this project, of course, so all you adventurers need to do is to perform physical work. I assume you can at least do that, correct?”

I wanted to yell at Damlos about how he should have mentioned that in the quest poster, but I held myself back as I nodded in response. “I see. In that ca —”

“I’m a busy man, so I wrote down the details on some paper,” said Damlos. “Read them.”

Damlos interrupted me right as I was about to ask for more details and threw a few pieces of paper on the table in front of him before he stood up and left

the room after telling us not to be late.

The room fell completely silent after Damlos had left, and Kaho was the one that exploded first after a while. “Just what was that walking putrid source of destruction?! My nose felt like it was about to become crooked!”

“His attitude was horrible, but the awful smelly odor that he had was even worse than that,” said Sae.

“Mm, it really was very bad,” said Sara.

Sae didn’t seem as unhappy as Kaho, who was stamping her feet out of anger, but she grimaced as well as she commented about Damlos, and Sara-san opened the window of the room all the way before she took a deep breath.

“Oh, right, elves also have somewhat sensitive noses, but not as much as beastmen and beastwomen,” I said. “To be honest, the odor from that guy was quite painful for me as well. Did he use some low-quality perfume or something? I don’t know if he has a numb nose or if he just has poor taste.”

“Taste?! You dare describe *that* as part of ‘taste,’ Yoshino?!” Kaho exclaimed. “That would be catastrophic in all sorts of ways!”

“Well, like I said, I don’t know, but it’s probably both a numb nose and poor taste,” I said.

Even perfumes that had a good fragrance could smell bad if the smell of the ingredients were too strong, so it was possible that people with numb noses would think that perfume smelled good. *Hmm. Actually, I’m not really sure about this...*

“Was that perfume the latest trend among the nobility, Sara-san?” Sae asked. “He introduced himself as an esquire, so he’s a noble, right?”

Sara-san grimaced for a moment before she forced a smile and shook her head in response. “No, I don’t think that perfume is the latest trend among the nobility, but it would be quite unpleasant if that were the case. Esquires technically count as part of the nobility, but they’re below the rank of knight, and it’s the first time I’ve ever heard someone introduce themselves by that rank. It’s basically almost the same as declaring that you’re on the verge of losing your nobility status, after all.”

It seemed like nobility status in the kingdom that we were in wasn't completely stable by any means. Nobles that were lords of territories merely needed to rule over those lands in order to maintain their nobility status, but life was a struggle for other nobles. Such nobles would drop down one rank when they succeeded the peerage of their parents if their parents hadn't accomplished anything. Further demotion was also possible if the person that had succeeded a peerage wasn't competent, and those kinds of incompetent nobles could rank down two ranks upon each succession. Esquire was the lowest rank of nobility in the kingdom we were in, so people with those ranks were basically barely holding on to nobility status.

"I must say, I have a hard time believing that man had the gall to look down on us by calling us lowly commoners," said Kaho. "What an absolute clown."

Kaho seemed very exasperated as she shrugged in disbelief at how Damlos had acted, and the rest of us including Sara-san nodded deeply in response.

"In any case, it seems like there will be a lot of trouble ahead of us for this quest," said Sae. "What's written on those papers?"

"Mm, you're definitely right about that," I said. "However, there's something else to do first. *Purification. Disinfect.*"

I used more mana than usual for my two spells, and then the entire room was engulfed by a gentle light that cleaned the air.

"Mm, your magic is as amazing as always, Yoshino. I feel much better now." Kaho breathed a sigh of relief before she picked up all of the papers on the table and started to read through them. "Hmm. It appears that the work we have to do for this quest is actually quite simple, and it can be divided into four primary categories."

Group up with the specialist at Regina by the designated date

Accompany the specialist to protect him as he inspects the planned site for the reservoir

Make use of magic to assist with excavation through hard soil

Slay any monsters that appear near the reservoir site and strive to ensure the safety of the construction workers

I read the papers myself as well afterward, and Kaho was right about the fact that the contents could be summarized into four main categories, so the papers themselves were actually quite decent as documents.

“These papers are fairly well organized and concise,” said Sae. “Did that person write these papers? Nah, there’s no way...”

“Mm, the work itself does seem simple,” I said. “However, interacting with others for a work relationship sounds like it’ll be a huge hassle. Did you know about this ahead of time, Sara-san?”

“Just to be clear, the Adventurers’ Guild isn’t that type of heinous organization,” Sara replied. “It was a different person that had brought this quest to the guild initially. Believe me, Yoshino-san, I would have told you if *that* person had visited the guild in the beginning.”

The fact that Sara-san had described the act of introducing Damlos to someone as a heinous act was quite harsh, but it was an assessment that Damlos fully deserved. He was a person that I absolutely wanted to avoid and stay far away from in all sorts of ways.

“By the way, can we still turn down this quest as of now?” I asked.

“Um, well, I’m afraid not,” said Sara. “I’m very sorry about this...”

“It’s fine. I figured as much,” I said.

Sara-san lowered her head toward us in an apologetic manner, and the rest of us all sighed in unison when we saw that. I was fully aware of the fact that it wasn’t possible for us to turn down a quest from the lord when we had initially agreed to accept it, after all. *Ugh. I hope the specialist and the other people assigned to this project are actually normal and decent people...*



A few months had passed since our last visit to Regina, and there were new leaves that had sprouted in the fields. The wind from the mountains provided a refreshing sound as it passed through us while we walked through the fields and headed toward the village elder’s house.

“I really hope the new village elder is actually a decent person,” I said.

“If the new village elder is scum once again, then perhaps we can use that as a pretext to decline this quest,” said Kaho.

“I don’t want to get assaulted again for the sake of that,” said Sae. “I might end up vanquishing the village elder’s house before vanquishing the ground for the sake of creating a reservoir, after all.”

“Please don’t do that, Sae!” I exclaimed. “The rest of us will be vanquished as well by your magic!”

Sae frowned and sounded very gloomy for real, so I tried to cheer her up before we eventually arrived at the village elder’s house. I felt a bit gloomy myself as I knocked on the door, but we were greeted by an unexpected person.

“Huh? Um, you’re Dale-san, the hunter, right?” I asked.

It seemed like Dale-san also remembered us, due to the fact that he seemed quite happy as he looked at our faces. “Oh, you girls are the ones who accepted the quest? Ha ha, that’s great to know!”

“Will you once again act as our guide, Dale?” Kaho asked. “We were told to group up with the specialist here. Hold on...”

“Nah, that’s not it. As for the specialist, it’s someone else,” said Dale. “You see, I’m actually the new village elder.”

“Huh? Really, Dale-san?” I asked.

“Yeah, I somehow ended up with this position,” Dale said. “Well, this is sort of thanks to what you girls did before, so...”

According to Dale-san, he had gathered the other villagers and organized them for things such as cleaning up the dead goblins that we had left behind during our previous visit here and the retrieval of magicites from those dead goblins. Nobody had complained about it due to the fact that he had made sure the profits were split evenly, but the previous village elder and his son were exiled at around the same time. As a result, the villagers had to discuss who to appoint as the new village elder, and it seemed like they had ended up voting for Dale-san due to the fact that they thought he was a fair and impartial person that was strong as well.

“I don’t think I’m suited for this position, but everyone else told me that I can’t be worse than the previous village elder no matter what I do and to take it easy, so I went along with them and accepted the post,” said Dale.

“That sounds like no more than the result of random chance, but I suppose that’s the norm for a village,” said Kaho. “By the way, are there any strong smells in this village?”

Kaho wrinkled her nose as she asked her question, and Dale seemed a bit confused as he paused in thought for a bit before he responded to her. “Strong smells? The reservoir specialist is a very masculine guy, but I don’t think he smells bad or anything.”

“Well, it’s fine as long as it’s something that you can tolerate,” said Kaho. “There’s nothing for you to worry about, Dale.”

Kaho was probably just trying to check if Damlos was here at this village or not, but Dale-san looked very uneasy as he sniffed his own body. “Huh? Wait, do I smell like an old person? Is that why my daughter doesn’t want to go near me recently...?”

“It’s not bad enough that you need to be concerned,” said Kaho. “More importantly, can we come in?”

“O-Oh, yeah, sure,” said Dale. “The specialist is already waiting inside.”

We walked past Dale-san after he opened the door for us and headed inside. I heard Dale-san mutter, “Hm? Not bad enough means I do smell, right?” behind me, but that kind of smell was something unavoidable. Teenage girls not wanting to go near their dads was a natural part of life, after all. I had no idea how to cheer up a father that was being avoided by his daughter, so I remained silent as we headed toward the room that we had been guided to before, and it was a room that served as both a parlor and a dining room. We met someone that was probably the specialist after we entered the room, and he looked like a guy in his late thirties. He had well-tanned skin and powerful muscles, so he looked like the typical kind of healthy guy that performed physical labor in the sun. With all of that in mind, Dale-san’s description of the specialist as a very masculine guy was completely accurate.

“Hm? Oh, are you girls the adventurers that’ll be the bodyguards for this

project? I heard that some young female adventurers had accepted the quest, but I didn't expect you all to be so young and beautiful. My name's Nicolas! Nice to meet you all!"

Nicolas-san's words could sound quite offensive depending on the context, but his words didn't feel unpleasant at all to me due to the fact that he seemed like a cheery person, and I smiled as I greeted him back. "Um, yeah, we're the party that accepted the quest, and our party name is Jade Wings. My name's Yoshino, and I'm the leader of this party."

"Call me Kaho," said Kaho.

"My name's Sae," said Sae. "Um, where's the person that's in charge of this project?"

"Oh, he isn't here in this village," said Nicolas. "He'd get in the way just by being around, so I told him not to come here!"

Whoa, good job, Nicolas-san! My positive impression of Nicolas-san was greatly enhanced after I heard about his excellent decision, and I also felt like things would work out well as a result. We had ended up with an awful person in charge at the top, but the specialist that had been assigned to this project actually seemed like someone who was a decent person.

"I'm very glad to hear that," said Sae. "Thank you very much, Nicolas-san."

"O-Oh, yeah, don't worry about it," said Nicolas. "In any case, the inspection will start tomorrow, so I'm counting on you girls."

Sae had a beaming smile on her face as she expressed her gratitude to Nicolas-san, and Nicolas-san stuttered a bit at first due to the fact that Sae was an extremely beautiful girl, but he recovered right away and grinned back in response.

The next day, my party accompanied Nicolas-san to inspect the areas around the village. He'd apparently decided on some potential construction sites beforehand, so all we had to do was to protect him as he inspected each site. However, the only monsters that we encountered were goblins, so dealing with them wasn't much work at all, and the time passed pretty quickly.

As he inspected the various sites, Nicolas-san made a bunch of different

observations. “This area won’t do—the soil’s no good. You could make a reservoir here, but it would be too much work... Hmm. The soil here is decent, but the location isn’t acceptable. You can’t irrigate the fields from here... This location is quite good, but there’s a natural spring nearby, so it’d be better to choose someplace else.”

Clearly the site for a reservoir had to fulfill a lot of different conditions. It was natural, then, that a project like this would require a specialist; it wasn’t something we could do ourselves.

There was something I was curious about, though. “Is it an issue if there’s a natural spring near a construction site for a reservoir?”

“Well, it’s not a problem in constructing the reservoir, but the construction could pollute the spring,” Nicolas replied, “so ideally, you don’t want to build a reservoir near a natural spring. It’s best to avoid disrupting nature if you can.”

“Oh, so it’s about protecting nature?” Sae asked.

Sae sounded a bit surprised, but Nicolas-san was even more so. “Protecting nature? What? Nah, it’s just a matter of safety. Disturb the world too much and ill will come of it. My job as a professional is to prevent or reduce that as much as I can.”

Oh, right, that makes sense. In this world, nature was something that people had to fight, not something they had to protect; Nicolas-san’s concerns had nothing to do with conserving the environment or particular species of animal. The reason was much simpler: any change that impacted the habitat of local monsters might cause them to attack human dwellings.

Nicolas-san continued searching for a site that met all the conditions he had in mind and finally nodded with satisfaction at the fifth site we’d investigated. “All right, this ought to be suitable for a reservoir!”

This site had a gentle slope covered in greenery. Ordinarily, it would take a lot of time and effort to clear the greenery, but...

“Please get rid of all the greenery here,” said Nicolas. “You can do that in one go, can’t you?”

“If all I need to do is to blast it away, then yes.” Sae confirmed that Nicolas-

san had walked behind us for cover before she readied her magic. “*Explosion.*”

There was an explosion of about ten meters in diameter, and all of the greenery was instantly shredded. The fragments flew into the air amid a cloud of dust, and when it approached us, Kaho stepped forward and deflected it; none of the pieces got past her.

The final result of Sae’s spell was a huge hole filled with dirt and leaves. However, it was only about fifty centimeters deep, so Sae must have prioritized a wide area of effect over potency.

All of us were now capable of exercising the level of control over magic that Sae had just demonstrated, but Nicolas-san’s mouth was hanging open. He took a deep breath. “Huh? Seriously? I heard that your party could use some amazing magic, but that was far more powerful than I expected. I can’t believe you girls are here in the countryside. You’d probably do just fine at the capital or in a dungeon city.” Nicolas-san blinked a few times as he glanced back and forth between Sae and the remains of the explosion with a look of disbelief on his face. At last, he shook his head and said, “More importantly, how many times can you use that spell?”

“Well, if I can take breaks, then probably about eight times in one day,” Sae replied.

When we’d first arrived in this world, Sae had collapsed after using the spell just once, but it wasn’t that taxing on her nowadays. We had all gotten stronger and had learned to adjust the potency of our spells depending on what the situation called for. However, Sae’s estimate of eight uses seemed like it was on the low end, so she probably wanted to have mana leftover as a precaution.

“Damn, that’s amazing. It’ll be more than enough to finish clearing the greenery in one day,” said Nicolas. “This kind of work would usually take a lot of time...”

“Dirt falls back into the crater, though, so I don’t know if it’s the most efficient method,” said Sae.

“Oh, you don’t have to worry about that. The construction workers will carry out the dirt,” said Nicolas. “You see, a new tool recently appeared on the market. It’s called a shovel. I don’t know why it’s called that, but it’s quite a

well-made tool. The structure is quite simple, but it's been a great help in construction."

Nicolas-san sounded proud as he shared that knowledge, but...

"Shovels?" I whispered. "Like you could buy in a hardware store back on Earth?"

"What else could it be?" Kaho whispered. "The man himself said that he doesn't know the meaning of the tool's name. However, that in itself is confusing to me..."

"It seems like some of our classmates are also working hard to survive in this world," Sae whispered.

Nicolas-san seemed to be ignoring us; while we whispered to each other, he took some rope, stakes, and a large wooden mallet from the bag over his shoulder and walked off. "All right, feel free to rest here while I rope off the site."

"H-Hold!" Kaho exclaimed, chasing after him. "I'm certain you'll be fine, but it is our sworn duty to protect you, so..."

Kaho stood on guard next to Nicolas-san, watching him hammer the stakes into the ground, but eventually, she couldn't stand how slowly he was working, so she grabbed the wooden mallet from him and used her incredible strength to finish the job.

"Whoa, you're quite strong, Kaho!" said Nicolas.

"Of course! Hefting my sword requires great strength!" Kaho exclaimed. "Weakness is not an option!"

I listened to their conversation from a ways off; I was standing near Sae to protect her. Her remaining magic would be enough to defeat an attacker if it was a goblin, but it was better to be safe than sorry.

"Wouldn't it be more efficient to use Earth Magic for digging holes?" Sae asked.

"You can do that if you want, Sae," I replied. "The level of your Earth Magic isn't as high as that of your Fire Magic, but it's still decent, right?"

Sae had made our first “house” with her Earth Magic, after all. It was thanks to her that we’d had some sort of roof over our heads; we would have had to live outside otherwise. That “house” had also served as my clinic, and in time, we’d made it into a proper house, so it was proof of Sae’s abilities with Earth Magic.

“Nah, I think it’s best not to. Using Fire Magic to excavate is what I got hired to do,” said Sae. “I wouldn’t mind if it were just Nicolas-san, but that Damlos guy is involved too, so I don’t want to reveal too much information about our abilities.”

“Yeah, you’re right about that,” I said. “It’d be great if he continued to stay away from here, but he’s technically in charge of this project, so...”

“It’s unacceptable to offend people who are working on the same project,” said Sae. “The fact that Duke Ohnick would allow that kind of person to work under him is disappointing. The name Duke Orc really suits him.”

“I mean, yeah, some people call him by that name, but please don’t say it in public, Sae,” I said.

While I was resting and chatting with Sae, Nicolas-san and Kaho finished roping off the construction site. The roped-off area was a slightly distorted circle with a diameter of about forty meters, which I thought was quite large for a construction site for a reservoir.

“Okay, please use the area inside the ropes as a target!” Nicolas exclaimed. “Don’t worry too much about accuracy—we’ll be constructing embankments inside that area.”

“Very well,” said Sae. “Here goes!”

Sae continued using her Fire Magic, with routine breaks, until the evening. By that point, she’d finished clearing the land.



“Gress, go help out over there!” Nicolas exclaimed. “Kirn, take a break for a bit! You’ve worked too hard!”

The laborers had arrived the day after Sae worked hard to clear the land with

her magic. All of them were villagers who lived in Regina. Dale-san was among them even though he was the village elder, and he threw himself into the manual labor.

The workers used shovels to scoop up dirt and pieces of wood before moving them to straw mats to build embankments. Nicolas-san was in charge of issuing specific instructions, and even while working himself, he was paying attention to everyone else.

“Make sure you pack the embankment properly! It’ll collapse if you slack off!” Nicolas exclaimed. “If that happens, it’ll be your village that’s destroyed! Mix thin branches into the earth. Do not use thick ones! Yeah, that’s right, gather them like that!”

There wasn’t much for my party to do while everyone was hard at work. We had already slain most of the monsters nearby, so all we had to do was patrol the area, and the remaining monsters seldom appeared. From time to time, Sae blasted huge holes in the ground, and then the workers would carry earth to the holes. Once the ground had hardened, Sae would use her Explosion spell again. Nicolas-san seemed very impressed at the efficiency of Sae’s magic combined with the shovels. According to him, other construction projects did hire Earth mages, but most of those projects couldn’t afford to hire talented mages, so the Earth Magic that was available to them was quite limited in terms of effectiveness. In contrast, it seemed like this project was advancing at a rapid clip.

Kaho periodically helped with tasks that required a lot of physical strength. We had a lot of free time, but she had only helped on a few occasions due to the fact that we were meant to be bodyguards for the construction workers. She was quite popular with the men due to her combination of strength and cuteness. As for me, I healed the few people who suffered injuries and spent my free time under the shade of the trees. Healing wasn’t part of what I’d been hired to do, but it was easy enough for me, so I didn’t really mind, and the workers seemed to really appreciate it; healing magic wasn’t readily available in this world.

Work on the reservoir continued each day apart from the days with rain, and by the middle of summer, the project had reached seventy to eighty percent

completion. In early summer, when the construction work had started, Dale-san had been the only person we knew, but over the course of the project, we got to know the other villagers. The construction site had a very friendly atmosphere despite the fact that the men were hard at work. However, one day, an event occurred that dampened everyone's moods.



The first person who noticed a difference was Kaho. "Ugh. Something malodorous this way comes..." She grimaced and swished her tail in discomfort.

Soon, Sae's ears started to twitch as well, and she also grimaced. Then the bad smell reached my nose. It was a smell that was hard to mistake, and I wanted to believe that there was only one person in this entire world who smelled that way. *Surely that guy stands out in a bad way among the nobility, right?!* Luckily and unluckily for us, the person who appeared was exactly the one we'd all had in mind.

"Ugh, why must I travel so far to a place like this, damn it!"

The person who appeared, already complaining, was Damlos; he was, after all, formally in charge of this construction project. He was drenched in sweat, but his odor wasn't actually as bad as before. I wasn't sure if that was because we were outside this time or if he'd walked so far in this heat that his sweat had washed away most of whatever scent he applied. I wasn't exactly the type of person who would ordinarily complain about someone else's tastes, but I felt like it would be best to stop using something that made other people feel uncomfortable. *Did nobody else who works with him complain?*

"Whew, I've finally arrived. Nicolas!" He raised his voice, looking around. "Why is the work not finished yet?!"

Nicolas-san winced and sighed. "Actually, boss, work's advancing faster than initially planned. Trying to hurry things along won't end up well."

"I'm telling you to make your people work harder! You can order those adventurers over there to work, can you not?!" Damlos pointed to us.

Of course, we didn't look like we were working, and it was technically true that we hadn't worked much over the course of the entire project, but we

hadn't slacked off when it came to the tasks we'd actually been hired to do.

"They've worked hard on the tasks that they were assigned," said Nicolas. "If we can help it, we shouldn't use amateurs for this kind of work, boss."

"I'm in charge of this project! I am the one who hired all of you!" Damlos exclaimed. "Listen to me and obey my command!"

Uh, I'm pretty sure the one who hired us was your lord. There were plenty of people out there in the world who had inflated ideas of their own importance, but what was especially troublesome in this case was the fact that we couldn't ignore Damlos.

Nicolas-san scratched his head and sighed. "Sure, I guess. So, what are you here for, boss?"

"I'm here to check your progress," said Damlos. "I won't allow any slacking off now that I'm here!" He glared at the construction workers as he declared his policy.

The atmosphere of the construction site turned negative from that day onward.

"All of you, work harder! You over there, no resting!" Damlos exclaimed. "Hmph. I knew lowly commoners think of nothing but slacking off."

Nicolas-san and Dale-san had organized break times and shifts in a way that had kept the project running smoothly, but work efficiency drastically decreased due to the fact that Damlos had meddled wherever possible. That, in turn, resulted in him yelling more, but it was his own fault.

"Explosion."

Sae's magic went off at the spot that Nicolas-san had designated, and the bottom of the reservoir site got a little deeper. The construction workers started to carry earth down to the hole, but Damlos clicked his tongue as he watched from above.

"Tsk, that's it? You're nowhere as powerful as the rumors suggested!" Damlos exclaimed.

I mean, yeah, Sae adjusted the potency of her spell to the requirements of the

situation. Too much potency would be a waste of mana, and it would also be pointless if it damaged the embankments. Damlos himself wasn't working at all, just running his mouth, and all the workers were glaring at him. As for Sae, who he'd scolded directly, her face was completely expressionless, which made me pretty nervous.

"One missed shot could be an 'accident,' right?"

That was pretty chilling to hear, and I hastily tried to deter her. "Don't do it, Sae! That's the kind of accident we can't undo! I know how you feel, but please hold back!"

"Your patience knows no bounds, Yoshino," said Kaho. "One shot would be enough to close that frothing mouth, would it not? It's a method we have already tested against orcs."

"There are a few monsters around that we have yet to clean up," said Sae. "With that in mind, we could say they cleaned *him* up if we caught him walking alone. Hee hee..."

Hmm. I don't think there are any monsters in this area that you could plausibly claim had eaten Damlos without leaving a trace, so—actually, no, as the conscience of this party, I have to be the last bastion against this idea. Sae seemed like a sensible person on the outside, but she made absurd choices sometimes. In some respects, Kaho and I were better equipped than Sae to take this situation seriously, since our experiences with tabletop RPGs had "honed" our instincts.

"Sorry about this, girls," said Nicolas. "I'd be able to deal with him if he tried to directly interfere with construction work, but I can't really do anything when he's just yelling..."

"Don't worry about it too much, Nicolas-san," I said. "It's not your fault."

Damlos had done a lot of pointless yelling, but that was basically it. He had yelled all kinds of things with contempt in his voice—"Work harder!" and "No slacking!"—but he hadn't actually yelled any specific instructions, so it amounted to annoying background noise. However, that background noise would cause frustration and stress to build up over time.

“Thanks for being understanding. Also, sorry about this, but can you use your magic one more time, Sae? I’d like to reduce the workload on the construction workers if possible,” said Nicolas. He seemed genuinely sorry to be pleading for help. “At this rate, someone might get injured from an accident caused by frustration.”

Sae nodded. “In that case, sure, I don’t mind. I can’t use my spells multiple times in a row, however.”

The construction workers took shelter from the planned explosion site before Sae’s magic went off again, but...

“Whew. Hm? The hole doesn’t look as deep as I thought it would be,” said Sae.

Sae tilted her head in confusion as she looked inside of the hole, and Kaho nodded in agreement. I also looked inside to confirm, and Sae was right that it looked a little shallow.

“Well, the force of the explosion felt about the same as before, so maybe your magic hit bedrock or something like that, Sae,” I said.

“Perhaps. Do you want me to give it another go, Nicolas-san?” Sae asked.

“If one use of your magic wasn’t enough, it must be too hard to dig through, so it’d be great if you could give it one more try,” Nicolas replied.

“Very well,” said Sae. “*Explosion.*”

This time, Sae took slightly longer to charge up the spell. The force of the explosion was so great that it reached where we were standing, but...

“There appears to be nothing at the center of the blast apart from a little debris,” said Kaho. “I’ll go inspect the area.”

A mass of earth had somehow endured Sae’s magic and formed a weird shape, possibly because there were hard rocks inside. Kaho borrowed a shovel from one of the construction workers nearby and jumped down into the crater, then started to dig around the area where Sae’s spell had landed. Sae and I chased after Kaho and helped her out, and soon, we uncovered a lustrous black rock.

“Is this rock the reason Sae’s magic couldn’t dig through as easily as before? I’m not sure if I’m just imagining things, but it looks a bit shiny to me,” I said.

“Does it? I don’t seem to see what you’re talking about, Yoshino,” said Kaho.

“It’s probably mana making it lustrous,” said Sae. “If that’s the case, you probably can’t see it because you can’t use magic, Kaho.”

Kaho’s eyes gleamed with excitement after she heard Sae’s analysis. “Magic, you say? How peculiar. Perhaps now that this rock is broken, a legendary fox of great power will be released?”

“Are you implying that one of your ‘friends’ is sealed within this rock, Kaho?” Sae asked.

“Like the Killing Stone in Nasu? Nah, there’s no way! We’re in a completely different genre of fantasy world!” I exclaimed. “This is more like a Western fantasy world.”

“I wouldn’t be so sure about that if I were you, Yoshino,” said Kaho. “There is a chance that this world is a melting pot of East and West. After all, it was an evil god who transported us here.”

“Well, okay, yeah, that actually sounds a bit convincing now!” I exclaimed. “But in situations like that, either the hero accidentally resurrects the fox inside the stone or the villain does it on purpose, right? We don’t fall under either of those categories, so...”

“Impossible!” Kaho exclaimed. “I have worked so hard to act like a protagonist, and yet you believe that my efforts have been in vain?!”

“I think you’re more of a mascot character than a protagonist, Kaho,” I said. “You could also be the type of character who appears to help the protagonist from time to time. In any case, you’re definitely the type of character who never becomes part of the main cast, no matter how popular she gets with the fans.”

“Ugh. I suppose you make a compelling point, Yoshino,” said Kaho. “Perhaps I should have instead acted like the standard overpowered protagonist who enrolls in some type of school in a different world, completely unaware of how amazing she is.”

I gave Kaho an exasperated expression, and Sae sighed in response before chiming in. “To be honest, that kind of role suits Yoshino better due to the fact that she can use Light Magic.”

“Nah, I don’t want that kind of role at all. Well, in any case, there aren’t any schools or academies like that in this world, and we don’t know any hot guys either,” I said. “If there are any roles we fit in a story where a killing stone is a major plot device, then we’d probably be the NPCs who accidentally break a magic seal and become the first victims of whatever ancient evil is resurrected as a result.”

“In that situation, only one of us would be able to escape alive, which doesn’t sound very pleasant,” said Kaho. “The surviving character would rush to the guild to report about the casualties, all the while bearing in her heart the guilt of having caused the deaths of her friends.”

“In any case, either Yoshino or I will be the survivor,” said Sae. “You’ll be the one who splits the killing stone, Kaho.”

“Mm, that sounds fitting,” I said. “The survivor will also want revenge for the deaths of her friends, and as for who’s the best fit for that kind of character, it—wait, hold on, that’d be Kaho too. Hmm...”

A healer wasn’t exactly the type of character who could perform in combat, and Sae was a mage who cast explosive magic at range. It would be more dramatic for an avenger to deal the finishing blow to the foe with a sword, so Kaho would be the best fit of any of us.

“What are you adventurers mumbling about down here?! Are you unable to destroy a mere rock? I see that you’re typical adventurers—all talk and no action,” yelled Damlos as he descended into the crater after us. “Don’t get full of yourselves just because you’ve ranked up a bit!”

Damlos seemed to have lost his patience while we were chatting. As for Nicolas-san and the other construction workers, they were quietly watching from up on the embankments, probably because one of Nicolas-san’s objectives was to allow the construction workers some time to rest.

“Ugh. All talk and no action is a more apt description for that source of noise pollution,” said Kaho. “Very well. I’ll prove that mere rocks are no match for

me!”

We were only joking about the black, lustrous rock being a killing stone, of course. Kaho gave Damlos a frustrated glance, then raised her greatsword high in the air and swung it down with full force to relieve her anger. A loud clank echoed through the air as Kaho’s greatsword bit into the rock and split it in half. Apparently it wasn’t very hard even though it had endured Sae’s magic, but...

“Hm? I feel the earth shaking,” said Kaho.

Right after those words were out of her mouth, I heard some rumbling and felt the shaking too, and then water burst out of the ground and jetted into the air.

“Eep!” we all exclaimed.

“Huh?!”

Kaho succeeded at dodging the initial burst of water, but the water in the air was raining back down, and we were, after all, standing in the middle of a brand-new reservoir, so the water began to fill the area at our feet.

“Hm, I suppose I need to get to high ground,” said Kaho. “Alley-oop.”

Kaho stuck her greatsword into the ground, hopped onto the pommel, and perched there, balanced on one leg. It was an amazing acrobatic feat, but...

“That’s not fair, Kaho!” I exclaimed.

“I am merely protecting myself due to my short stature,” said Kaho. “Relax, Yoshino. I don’t imagine the water level will get so high as to drown you.”

Eventually, the workers would bury water pipes connected to sluice gates, but at this point, only some of the embankments had been finished. That was probably why water had burst out of the ground.



The water was filling some of the embankments as well. Nicolas-san hastily gave out instructions to the workers, and they started digging away, making ditches to drain the water. However, it wasn't the kind of work you could finish quickly, so it seemed likely that the crater would probably fill up to about ten meters or so. Unlike Kaho, I wasn't really at risk of drowning, but I didn't want to get drenched in muddy water.

I heard a panicky voice behind me from someone who was flapping around in the water. He sounded like he was afraid of drowning, but we had no obligation to help that guy out.

"Sae, let's return to the top," I said.

"Mm, there's no point in staying here," said Sae.

So far, the water level had barely reached my ankles, but it was rising faster than I had expected. Sae and I started to walk back up the embankment, but we heard something from Kaho that stopped us in our tracks.

"Sae, Yoshino, look! Fish!" Kaho exclaimed. "And not just any fish! There are salmon here!"

"Salmon? There's no way—oh, you're right," I said. "It really does look like a salmon. But why would there be salmon here?"

"It looks pretty big," said Sae. "It's about a meter and a half long."

While we were conversing, another salmon flew out of the jet of water and landed near me.

"Secure that salmon, Yoshino!" Kaho exclaimed. "Grilled salmon with salt! A bento box with salmon!"

"We'd need rice for that," I said. "Although I guess aquatic wheat could work."

"We can discuss what to eat with the salmon later," said Sae. "Let's catch them first. We haven't eaten any fish in quite a long time."

"Mm, yeah, you're right about that," I said.

The salmon were quite large, but they were still fish, so they couldn't swim if

the water around them was too shallow. I struck the one closest to me with my mace, and it instantly stopped moving.

“There’s one yonder as well, Yoshino!” Kaho exclaimed.

“They’re all pretty big, so even if we catch a lot, I don’t think we can finish them,” I said. “We don’t have anything like a fridge to store them in, after all.”

Sae could use the Cool spell, which was actually under the category of Fire Magic, but as its name implied, it just cooled the target; you could actually freeze food with Water Magic, but so far, Sae had only been able to produce a little water, so that method of preserving food wasn’t available to us yet.

“We can just salt them and turn them into aramaki salmon!” Kaho exclaimed.

“Just so you know, Kaho, that’ll be very expensive given how large these salmon are,” I said.

Salt was far from cheap in this world. It wasn’t so expensive that we would hesitate to use it in our daily meals, but I was fairly sure that we would need a volume of salt equal to about ten to twenty percent of a salmon’s weight in order to make aramaki salmon. On top of that, most of the salt used in the process would end up being thrown away rather than consumed, so aramaki salmon was effectively an expensive luxury food in this world.

“It’s fine, Yoshino,” said Sae. “I’m down for making aramaki salmon.”

“Oh, right, I forgot that you enjoy salmon, Sae,” I said. “I mean, I do too, so yeah... More importantly, get back here, Kaho.”

“Mm. Given this rare opportunity to catch salmon, I suppose I can’t leave all the work to you, Yoshino,” said Kaho.

I had gotten a little sick of eating nothing but meat, so there was no reason for me to object, and we started hunting salmon. However, by now, there was a decent amount of water in the crater, so it wasn’t as easy to hit the salmon, which were swimming around. Even with our entire party working together, it took some time. Kaho herself was quite a happy hunter, however. She pulled multiple salmon through the water that were much bigger than her by tying some rope to their fins, which made for a pretty surreal sight.

“It appears that the total number of salmon we caught is six. That will be more than enough for us, even if we share one or two with the villagers!” Kaho exclaimed. “These are edible salmon, are they not?”

“They’re called king trout,” said Nicolas. “Usually you find them in rivers. They’re quite tasty.”

Nicolas-san had picked his way down the embankment toward us; it seemed that he had finished giving out instructions to the workers. He chuckled awkwardly when he saw Kaho towing a large fish behind her, which was a perfectly normal reaction.

“Oh, these are actually trout? Interesting,” said Sae.

Kaho paused in thought for a moment but then smiled as if she didn’t really care. “Salmon and trout are fairly similar! The aramaki method ought to work regardless!”

Yeah, I wouldn’t know the difference myself if I were served both salmon and trout.

“How’s it going on your end, Nicolas-san?” I asked.

“Everyone’s slowly chipping away at the embankments to drain the water, so you can rest assured that the water level won’t rise any further,” Nicolas replied. “I’m here to check out the opening that the water spurted out of. It looks like it’s slowed down by now.”

“Yeah, the water doesn’t have as much force as it did in the beginning,” I said.

“In that case, it should be all right to resume construction work,” said Nicolas. “We’ll have to set up drainage channels, but—”

“Stop fooling around and help me! It’s your job as adventurers to serve as my bodyguards, so stop slacking off!”

A voice I had been ignoring until now interrupted my conversation with Nicolas-san, and the two of us glanced at each other, then sighed and turned around. Damlos was the source of the voice, of course, and his body had been completely enveloped by some sort of black, thin, and long creature. He was writhing around in an attempt to pull it off himself, but the creature looked

pretty slimy, so he wasn't having much luck. On top of that, whenever he succeeded in peeling it off and throwing it away, the creature would swim back and bite him. There was no end to his struggle. *You seem to be that creature's favorite, Damlos. It's completely ignoring us, so it must really like you.*

"What is that creature, Nicolas-san?" I asked.

"That's a lamprey. It's a type of fish that sometimes latches onto large fish like king trout to survive," Nicolas replied. "It might look like it, but it actually isn't a monster; it's an edible fish."

It sounded like lampreys were similar to leeches, loaches, and eels. However, the lamprey in front of us didn't look appetizing at all—mostly because of the fact that it had touched Damlos.

"Hurry up and help me as I commanded!" Damlos exclaimed. "You stupid adventurers are capable of that at the very least, aren't you?!"

In a weird way, I had some respect for Damlos, since he was maintaining his arrogant demeanor despite the situation he was in, but there was no way we would readily help him with that kind of attitude.

"The quest we accepted was to protect the construction workers," I said. "You're not a construction worker, are you?"

"You're old enough to protect yourself," said Kaho. "As such, dealing with a mere fish shouldn't be an impossible task."

"I don't want to touch that fish at all," said Sae. "I don't mind helping out if you're okay with being burnt to a crisp, however."

Nicolas-san chuckled awkwardly when he heard the cold tone in our voices, but he didn't seem to have any intention of helping Damlos out either.

Nicolas pointed at the embankment above us. "Boss, why don't you just get out of the water already? I'm pretty sure that the lamprey won't stay latched onto you."

"You should have mentioned that sooner!" Damlos exclaimed. "Damn it!"

I have no idea how you didn't think of that solution yourself, Damlos. Damlos cursed under his breath as he crawled up to the embankment, and he rolled

around on the ground as he tried to peel the lamprey off himself. *Ugh, yeah, I really don't like how lampreys look.*

“Are there lampreys in the nearby rivers?” I asked. “If so, I really don’t want to go in the water...”

“Well, lampreys are usually smaller than the one over there, and they usually don’t attack people,” Nicolas replied. “This one seems to really like Damlos for some reason, though.”

As Nicolas-san answered my question, he looked below at the water level, which wasn’t as high as it had been. When we followed his gaze, we saw another lamprey in the water, but it ignored us and swam away.

“Hmm. I suppose that means the lamprey thought Damlos was a fish himself.” Kaho paused for a moment and grinned. “That was perfectly reasonable, since he stinks worse than a fish!”

Sae giggled and nodded. “Mm. You might be right about that.”

“Well, yeah, I can’t think of any other reason that Damlos was the only one who got attacked by a lamprey,” I said. “I’m not sure if this is true, but I’ve also heard that aquatic animals have a good sense of smell.”

The water had been drained to below our ankles thanks to the efforts of the construction workers. There was no reason for us to remain here now that we had finished our fishing for king trout, so we headed back up the embankment, where we were greeted by an angry Damlos.

He pointed and yelled, “Hey, you! You can use healing magic, can you not? Hurry up and heal me!”

Apparently Damlos had triumphed in his battle against the lamprey, but he had little bite marks all over his body. None of them looked like serious injuries, but some of them were bleeding.

“Huh? Why should I? That’s not part of the quest we accepted,” I said.

I would have thought about it if he had been on the verge of death, but he wasn’t. I wasn’t the kind of saint who could ignore how he’d acted toward my party and me.

“Silence! Listen to me!” Damlos exclaimed. “You ought to be aware that I have the power to impose a ban on your healing business!”

Oh, did he actually do some research about me? Actually, I guess it’s possible that someone else looked into us before issuing the quest and summarizing our responsibilities on the poster. However...

“Sure, go ahead if you want. I’ve already closed shop,” I said casually. “But I’m not going to heal you even if you pay me, so if you want to get healed, I suggest you head back to town.”

His face flushed red. “Ugh, you insolent adventurer...!”

However, when Damlos noticed the cold expressions on the faces of the construction workers watching from some distance away, he gnashed his teeth and turned his back on us.

“I-I’ll report back your actions!” Damlos exclaimed. “You’ll regret this!”

He kept on yelling typical sore loser stuff as he hastily left the construction site, probably to return to Kiura. A while after he’d gone out of sight, all of the construction workers raised their voices in a cheer. *Everyone really hated him, huh?*

“Good riddance!” Kaho exclaimed. “He was nothing but a nuisance!”

“I don’t care what he thinks about us, but if he gives the local lord a bad impression of us, that might be an issue,” I said.

“We can simply move to another town to avoid trouble,” said Kaho. “It isn’t absolutely necessary that we stay in Kiura.”

“It would be a shame to let go of the house we’re currently renting, but it would be better than having to interact with *that* kind of person,” said Sae.

We all sighed in unison, but Nicolas-san laughed cheerfully. “Don’t worry about it! Duke Ohnick is a decent person, and I’ll turn in a report myself. I’ll write in detail about how hard you girls work—and about that guy’s actions. It’ll be fine!”

I nodded lightly. “Mm, I hope so. Anyway, I guess there’s no point in worrying too much.”

Nicolas-san laughed again, then clapped his hands. “All right! Guys, that nagging ‘boss’ is gone! And the project is almost done, so let’s work hard to finish the last stretch!”

Everyone raised their voices in agreement. Work resumed immediately, and the atmosphere immediately returned to what it had been before Damlos arrived. All of the construction workers worked very hard, as if to vent their stress and frustration, and the pace of progress accelerated to its previous level. In the end, the reservoir was finished ahead of schedule with no issues.



“Oh, this is a wardstone,” said Sara. “Do you want to sell it here?”

After completing our work at the reservoir, we’d headed back to the guild in order to receive our reward for the quest. When we’d split the rock, only king trout had appeared rather than a spirit fox, but it was still a strange object, so we had gathered up the pieces in the hopes that they would be worth some money. Now we were showing them to Sara-san.

“Wardstone? The name is unfamiliar,” said Kaho.

“It’s an alchemical material, so it’s actually worth a decent amount of money,” said Sara. “In fact, the pieces of wardstone that your party gathered are easily worth more than the reward for the quest.”

“What a windfall! Our earnings from the quest were hardly worthwhile considering how long it took,” said Kaho. “On balance, it was an easy quest, but other factors wore down our spirits.”

“One reason we didn’t come away with as much money as we could have is that we made some aramaki trout, Kaho,” I said.

Apparently some king trout had swum into the ditches that had been dug to drain water, and the construction workers had caught those. As a result, we’d kept all six fish that we’d caught and salted them, but we’d had to use a great deal of salt, and after factoring in the cost of salt, our earnings from the quest weren’t exactly impressive.

“The king trout were a pretty worthwhile reward in their own right, however,” said Sae. “They were even tastier than we thought they would be.”

“We have also learned a good method of preserving them!” Kaho exclaimed. “It’s all thanks to the wisdom that Nicolas bestowed upon us!”

None of us actually had any idea how to make aramaki trout, but when Nicolas-san had overheard our discussion, he lent us some help. He was a very knowledgeable guy, since he had been in charge of reservoir construction projects in many different places, and he knew how to make preserved food that was similar to what we wanted to make. However, the method that he had described to us was something that could only be done in winter. It required exposing the fish to cold winds after salting them. It probably wouldn’t have turned out well if we had tried to dry food outside at this time of year, when it was so hot.

However, luckily for us, we had magic that we could use to solve that issue. Sae had worked very hard to dry the fish with her Water Magic, which she was still practicing, and I had used my Disinfect spell on the fish after they were dry, so they would probably last for quite a while. In addition, even if the fish turned a bit bad, it would probably be fine as long as we used the Disinfect spell again, along with the Bless and Resist Poison spells, before eating them, although I wasn’t sure if it would be necessary to force ourselves to eat them at that point.

“More importantly, I’d like to know more about wardstone,” said Kaho. “What is wardstone used for?”

“There’s a type of metal called elemental metal. Wardstone is necessary to create one of the materials used in creating elemental metal,” said Sara.

“Hm? Is it better than metals such as white iron?” Kaho asked.

Kaho’s new greatsword was made of high-quality iron. After all, she was our frontline fighter, so we’d spent more money on her weapon than anyone else’s, and it had been very expensive, partly due to its sheer size. *Oh, yeah, I remember Kaho saying she wanted to upgrade her greatsword to one made of white iron next.*

“Yes, it’s a tier above white iron,” Sara replied. “Elemental metal is worth ten times more even in ingot form, and it’s even more expensive if you want it forged into a weapon.”

“Ugh. Our means are insufficient at the moment,” said Kaho. “B-By the way, if

we hand over some of the wardstone, would it be possible to have someone craft elemental metal for us?”

“Not in this town, I’m afraid. There aren’t any alchemists here who are talented enough,” Sara replied. “And it won’t be cheap, even if you give an alchemist some wardstone. You might get a small discount based on the market price of the material, but that’s about it.”

“Ugh. Fair enough, I suppose,” said Kaho. “If an ingot of elemental metal is worth ten times more than one of white iron, it would be too much to hope for a large discount.”

“Since there aren’t any blacksmiths in this town who are capable of working with elemental metal, you’ll have to place orders from another town or go there yourselves if you really want a weapon made of elemental metal,” said Sara. “However, an order like that will take a lot of time and money, so it’s not like you’ll be able to get an elemental metal weapon made right away even if you provide some wardstone.”

Kaho’s tail drooped; she seemed a bit sad. “In that case, holding on to these pieces of wardstone would be pointless, so please purchase them from us, Sara. Sae, Yoshino, this arrangement is acceptable to both of you, correct?”

“Yeah, we don’t have any use for wardstone, and the pieces are pretty heavy,” I said.

“Mm. They’re too heavy to keep around, even if they could be useful to us in the future,” said Sae. “With that in mind, I agree with the idea of selling them right now.”

“Very well,” said Sara. “Please wait for a moment while I complete the assessment.”

The total amount of money that we received in the end was much more than what we had expected, so we were quite happy and returned to our usual lifestyle after completing the quest to help with the reservoir.



“A dungeon has appeared, Yoshino!” Kaho exclaimed.

A few days had passed when Kaho suddenly appeared with some news. She seemed very excited.

“Sae, what’s up with Kaho?” I asked.

Sae chuckled; she had accompanied Kaho when she’d headed out earlier in the day. “Well, we heard some rumors at the Adventurers’ Guild that a dungeon was discovered in one of the nearby towns.”

“Oh, so that’s why,” I said. “You didn’t know about this until now, Kaho?”

“What? Were you already aware, Yoshino?” Kaho asked. “If so, why didn’t you inform me?!”

“Well, I mean, it seems that we can’t actually enter the newly discovered dungeon, so it’s not relevant to us at all,” I replied.

I would have been interested in the new dungeon too if we could have entered it, but that wasn’t the case, so it was a waste of time even thinking about it.

However, Kaho smirked at me when she heard my words. “Very well. Perhaps this new piece of information will change your mind. The party of adventurers that discovered the dungeon is called Meikyo Shisui.”

“Oh, that really doesn’t sound like a name for a party of typical adventurers,” I said. “It sounds more like a party full of mages or scholars.”

“Why are you so calm about this, Yoshino?! Think again about the name Meikyo Shisui itself!” Kaho exclaimed. “I asked Sara about it earlier, and her response was that she didn’t understand the meaning of the name, but she thought it sounded strange!”

“...Huh? Are you saying it isn’t just how I heard it?” I asked. “I assumed it was a problem with the basic language abilities that were granted before we arrived in this world.”

“Correct!” Kaho exclaimed. “The name is, in fact, a Japanese idiom—‘clear and serene as a polished mirror and still water’!”

I blinked in surprise when I finally realized what Kaho was talking about. “That means it must be our classmates, right? They must have used that name

deliberately as a signal to the rest of us.”

“Most likely,” said Kaho. “So, are you interested now?” She had a grin on her face and seemed very proud of her discovery.

I nodded. “Yeah, I am—interested enough that I wouldn’t mind heading to the newly discovered dungeon to meet them. I don’t know which of our classmates they are, but the fact that they’ve been successful probably means that they’ve worked hard for it, so we might get along with them.”

“I’d like to meet them as well,” said Sae. “We’ve managed to survive on our own so far, but I feel a bit uneasy about being a party of three girls without any relatives or anyone else who we can rely on.”

It wasn’t easy to survive in this world without a clear plan. The Adventurers’ Guild had proper rules and was more lawful than I had expected, and it treated criminals very harshly. There was no way that the guild would recognize criminals as the first people to discover a new dungeon. In addition, there was the issue of Damlos. So far, we hadn’t suffered any reprisals for our treatment of him, but I was still a bit wary of the future. With all of that in mind, there wasn’t really any danger in us meeting up with the Meikyo Shisui party, and we had reasons of our own to head out of Kiura.

“Mm. In that case, let’s go meet up with that party!” I exclaimed.

“Yeah!” Kaho and Sae replied in unison.

Afterword

That's Volume 6 of *To Another World... with Land Mines*! I'm surprised that I got the opportunity to say that. Does that mean people were actually purchasing duplicate books for archival purposes and to help popularize the series?! Yay—actually, probably not. It's really thanks to the people who bought copies for themselves.

Now then, this volume is a particularly memorable one for me because it happens to be my twelfth published work overall. Finishing double digits of books was actually one of my goals when I started writing. As for why I say it's the twelfth instead of tenth, that's because my tenth and eleventh works were published at the same time, so I wasn't sure where to write about this. My next goal is for one of my series to hit ten volumes, I guess? Hmm.

To be honest, this volume was a struggle to write due to scheduling issues. Back in the spring, I received the great news from my editor that Volume 6 had been greenlit, and I was asked if I could make a November deadline. However, I already had deadlines for Volume 5 of *Management of a Novice Alchemist* as well as the first volume of my new work *Custom Orders from a Grimoire Workshop*. And there was another item on my to-do list: the anime adaptation of *Management of a Novice Alchemist*. I begged my editor for mercy; I said it would be a bit too much for me to work on three different volumes in parallel and asked that the publication date of Volume 6 of *Land Mines* be pushed back so I could have a more relaxed writing schedule.

However, I ended up deleting about half of what I initially wrote because none of it felt right to me. I had to start over from the beginning at the same time that I was dealing with all sorts of other business, so I was very busy. I'm usually the type of writer who finishes a book with plenty of leeway, so it was actually my first experience of feeling hounded by deadlines. Volume 6 also happens to be the longest volume I've written so far. It has fewer pages than Volume 1, but there are about fifteen percent more words. That being the case, you, the reader, will get more out of this volume than usual. Hopefully, that is.

There should be some wonderful and sexy illustrations in this volume as well. As of writing this afterword, I haven't seen them myself, so I don't know exactly what they look like, but I'm looking forward to seeing your art, Nekobyou Neko-san!

Now, then, I'd like to cap things off by following up on the blatant advertising that I wrote earlier in the afterword. An anime adaptation has been announced for one of my other works, *Management of a Novice Alchemist*. I'm quite surprised by this myself. It's scheduled to air in 2022, so please look forward to it. The first volume of a manga adaptation, with art by kirero-san, is also being published. On top of that, my new work, *Custom Orders of a Grimoire Workshop*, is being published by Fujimi Fantasia Bunko, and I'd really appreciate it if you checked that out as well. It has fantastic cover art by Nimoshi-san, so it's very easy to spot! Last but not least, thank you all for your continued support of my works, and I hope we'll meet again.

Itsuki Mizuho

Mission

Let's Cut Down Some Trees!

Haruka touched the huge tree, which looked like it had a diameter of over two meters.

"If there aren't any cracks or anything inside this tree, then it would probably fetch over ten million yen back in Japan," said Haruka. "The number of large trees in Japan has decreased in recent years, and there's been a shortage of timber needed to repair buildings like shrines and temples."

Touya

Nao

"Honestly speaking, I feel a bit hesitant about cutting down a tree this large," said Natsuki.

"Mm, definitely," said Yuki. "I wonder how much time it took for it to grow this large."

"It's probably many times the length of our own lives so far," said Haruka.

"Nao, please forgive me—I couldn't cast aside my sense of shame just to get a laugh!" Yuki exclaimed.

"Uh, I mean, I wasn't expecting that kind of thing at all," I said.
"Besides, would it even be funny?"

"You girls look perfect in those swimsuits, ha ha!" Touya exclaimed.
"I can't believe you all went with navy blue, though!"

"Oh, do you prefer the color white, Touya?" Yuki asked. "That's a really niche fetish!"

"No, that's not it!" Touya exclaimed.
"I just think that it would've been better if there were a little more variety!"

"Unfortunately, there aren't that many colors of dye available that are cheap and hard to see through," said Haruka.
"Do you think navy blue is too plain?"

"Nah, you all look cute," I said.

The spring in front of us was quite large, with beautiful and transparent water.

"Where's your name tag, Yuki? Did you forget it?" Touya asked.
"Are you in fifth grade or sixth?"

"Are you implying that my figure is like an elementary schooler's?!" Yuki exclaimed.
"Well, I mean, I did want to attach name tags, but Haruka was against it, so..."

"Oh, you're free to attach a name tag to your own swimsuit, Yuki," said Haruka.

"Ugh, no, I'm not brave enough to be the only one," said Yuki.

Haruka

Riva

Luce

Yuki

Natsuki

Aera

Mission

Let's Enjoy a Vacation!

To Another World...

with **LAND MINES!**
6

An illustration featuring four anime-style characters. At the top is Tomi, a boy with black hair and a large black beard, wearing a white shirt and brown suspenders, with his fists clenched. Below him are three girls: Sae on the left with long pink hair and purple eyes, Kaho in the center with blonde hair and fox ears holding a white paper, and Yoshino on the right with brown hair and a blue outfit, pointing her index finger. The background is a soft-focus green with white bokeh circles.

Side Story 1 Tomi's Fishing Trip

Tomi

Kaho

Sae

Yoshino

Side Story 2 Jade Wings: Episode Three

story
Itsuki Mizuho
art
Nekobyou Neko

To
Another World...

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Side Story 1 Tomi's Fishing Trip

Tomi

Kaho

Sae

Yoshino

Side Story 2 Jade Wings: Episode Three

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To Another World... with Land Mines! Volume 6

by Itsuki Mizuho

Translated by Yen-Po Tseng Edited by Shakuzan

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