



# Tsukimichi

## *Moonlit Fantasy*

# 2

Author

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The title 'Tsukimichi' is rendered in a large, stylized, white-outlined font. The 'T' is integrated with a crescent moon on the left and a sword hilt on the right. The 'i' has a dot that resembles a small moon. The 'h' and 'i' are also stylized. The word 'Moonlit Fantasy' is written in a smaller, elegant, cursive script below 'Tsukimichi'.

# Tsukimichi

## *Moonlit Fantasy*

Author  
Kei Azumi  
Illustrator  
Mitsuaki Matsumoto





**MAKOTO MISUMI**  
The protagonist of the story. A regular high school student summoned to another world due to his parents' circumstances. He possesses extraordinary physical abilities and excels at archery.

**REMBRANDT**  
A merchant who runs a trading company in Tsige. He holds significant influence in the town.

**LIME LATTE**  
The number one adventurer in Tsige. A person with a strong sense of justice.

**HAZAL**  
An adventurer who, along with Toa, was saved by Tomoe and Mio. His profession is alchemist.

**TOMOE**  
Originally a dragon known as "Shin." She transformed into a human after making a pact with Makoto. She is a fan of historical dramas.

**TOA**  
An adventurer who was active at the edge of the world. She was captured after a failed job request and was rescued, now accompanying Makoto on his journey.

**MIO**  
Originally a giant spider. She transformed into human form after making a contract with Makoto. Contrary to her demure appearance, she has a huge appetite.



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**Back Matter**



The background of the cover features a dark, atmospheric scene. In the center, a young man with dark hair and a scarf is depicted, looking upwards with a slight smile and a tear on his cheek. Behind him is a large, ornate stone archway. To the right, a large, glowing full moon illuminates the scene. The title 'Tsukimichi Moonlit Fantasy 2' is written in a stylized, glowing font at the top, with 'TABLE OF CONTENTS' written in a simpler font below it.

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# Tsukimichi

## Prologue

**A** deep sigh echoed from the back of the carriage.

I glanced around from the driver's seat to see four heads poking out the windows, probably all trying to catch a glimpse of the high stone walls up ahead. Although we were still a couple of hours away, the walls exuded an overwhelming presence.

*So, this city is real after all...*

In the end, it was Toa-san, an adventurer I'd met at the Edge of the World; her younger sister, Rinon; and three other adventurers who decided to travel to the city of Tsige. Feeling guilty for destroying their base and leaving them without a place to stay, I'd agreed to let them accompany us.

To my left sat Mio, dressed in a kimono, while Rinon occupied the seat to my right, also gazing up at the high walls in awe. We must have made quite the sight: Makoto Misumi driving a carriage flanked by a young girl and a former spider who'd assumed human form.

My other follower, the former dragon Tomoe, went on a "training journey." The truth was I only let her go to avoid potential trouble.

So far, my plan was working perfectly.

When Tomoe declared her intent to go on said training journey, Toa and the others had looked at me with utter shock. They probably couldn't believe anyone wanted to go solo in such a dangerous place... or that I had allowed it.



Honestly, I preferred having Mio by my side. She was much calmer, at least when kept within my line of sight.

Out of our traveling companions, we only really spoke with Rinon and Toa. After all, there wasn't much benefit in befriending adventurers who were only after a big score. I didn't even bother asking for their names. Especially since they mostly spoke to Mio. Toa called her "Mio-sama" and wanted nothing more than to become her disciple.

For the time being, I figured I would interact with them just enough to keep things amicable while we stayed in Tsige.

"Wow! Look, big brother! Those walls are huge!" Rinon exclaimed in excitement. She always called me that now; it seemed she was quite attached to me.

The walls were indeed enormous. But...

*"Rinon, haven't you been through here before? On your way to the Edge of the World?"* I wrote in a magick speech bubble, playing along with the story that I couldn't speak common tongue due to a curse.

"Well, I went to the Edge using transfer magick circles, so I didn't actually travel around outside much," Rinon explained.

*Ah, transfer magick circles. That sounds like a convenient system.*

"Oh, transfer magick, huh? Wouldn't it have been faster and safer for everyone to travel that way?" Mio muttered.

"Um, Mio-sama, using transfer magick is quite expensive, so we couldn't really ask for that..." came Toa's voice from behind.

*"How expensive?"* I asked.

"From that base to Tsige, it would cost about twenty gold coins each," Toa answered. "Luggage costs extra, and there's a queue."

*Wow... Definitely for the wealthy.*

It was hard to imagine adventurers, who trained and sought to strike it rich, using transfer magick instead of choosing to battle their way through monsters. Such a system was probably meant for merchants and nobles.

“That *is* expensive. Well, we’re almost there, so there’s no point in using transfer magick now.”

“Haha, traveling by carriage is good enough. Actually, this trip has been so comfortable and safe that you could make a business out of it,” Toa said, and I noticed that she seemed to be enjoying herself.

Mio, just as susceptible to flattery as ever, hid her relaxed smile behind her fan.

In any case, this journey had indeed been incredibly safe.

Anyone who recognized Mio’s strength didn’t dare attack us, and anyone stupid enough to attack was wiped out instantly. It was like a game where the encounter, screen blackout, and return to the field map all happened before you could press a button. It didn’t even become a turn-based battle.

In fact, dealing with the aftermath took longer, as the adventurers would stare at the corpses of the beasts and insects Mio had slain... I wanted to keep moving quickly, but Toa and the others looked so disappointed that I eventually allowed them to gather the resulting materials along the way.

Since Toa looked just like a younger version of one of my juniors, seeing her stare at the remains of animals and insects with her sparkling eyes was actually pretty unsettling. However, thanks to her, I learned the basics of material gathering and harvesting.

The back of the carriage was quickly filling up with all the materials we’d amassed, which meant there wasn’t much space left for sleeping. But the other adventurers happily curled up in the limited space, clearly overjoyed with the bounty.

For my part, I collected some of the materials for my study as a merchant.

When Toa brought up my business, I told her, *“Yeah, I’m a merchant, but I don’t plan on making a career out of transporting stuff around the Wasteland. I want to see more of the world.”*

“Is that so?” she replied. “That’s too bad. With your strength, you could do so much more...”



For Toa, who had experienced the harsh realities of debt and gambling, having a stable income probably ranked pretty high on her priority list. Though it was kind of sad that the “strength” she referred to was mostly Mio’s and not mine.

*Well, I’ll think about the future once we get to Tsige and have some time to relax.*

“Big brother, there’s something over there!!!” Rinon said.

At the same time, Mio exclaimed, “Young Master, over there.”

I looked where they were pointing to see... insects. There must have been around a dozen of them; ants with scythe-like front legs, as well as wasps that were completely red. All were the size of large dogs.

If I recalled correctly, these were known as Scythe Ants and Red Bees, and both yielded a lot of materials.

Looking back, I saw that the others in the carriage had gone from staring at the stone walls to fixating on the insects. I resisted the urge to tell them that they looked like turtles the way they were craning their necks.

“R-R-Raidou-san!!! Look, over there!” Toa exclaimed excitedly, pointing at the swarm of monsters.

As a side note, Raidou was my alias.

*“Scythe Ants and Red Bees, right? What’s the problem?”*

“No! Those aren’t Red Bees!!!” Toa insisted.

“I can’t believe it... Ruby Eyes,” said Adventurer A, an elf girl, covering her mouth in astonishment. She looked exactly like the kind of elf you’d imagine using bows and magick.

“They’re real...” murmured Adventurer B, a young hyuman man who struck me as a skilled but unexceptional alchemist.

*Ruby Eyes, huh?* The wasp monsters looked like Red Bees from where I stood, but...

Judging by the reactions of the adventurers, these beelike creatures must have been rare monsters. There were six of them, and since they all looked the same, they were probably all Ruby Eyes. They'd noticed us, but we were too far away to tell whether they were going to do anything about it.

*"Are they rare?"* I asked.

"Extremely!" said Adventurer C, a dwarf priestess in full metal armor. Her voice quivered with excitement. "It's unheard of to find them so close to the city!"

"And they're incredibly strong!" Toa added. "Most magick gets nullified! They're way faster than Red Bees, and they have really powerful poison that's not just in their stingers but in the claws on their legs and their big jaws too!!!"

Hmm, they did sound much stronger than Red Bees. The adventurers were all bursting with excitement... but if they were so strong, wouldn't these monsters be dangerous?

*"Do you think you all can defeat them? If so, I'll leave them to you."*

I often let them handle battles to keep their skills sharp, so I intended to do the same this time if they could manage it.

*"Absolutely not! We'd all be slaughtered!!!"*

*Seriously?*

"To fight those guys, even only *one* of them, you need a well-coordinated and balanced party with each member at least around Level 130."

The only ones meeting that requirement were Toa and the dwarf girl. So, it had to be...

*"Mio, I need your help."*

"Ugh! That ant from the battle yesterday ruined my clothes, you know?" Mio complained, showing me the edge of her kimono sleeve... where just an inch or two had been damaged! I couldn't believe she was making a fuss over that.

*"We can fix it when we get to Tsige. Just help us for now, okay?"*

*"Okay... Fine,"* she agreed with a sigh.



Thank goodness she would fight.

“Mio-sama! Keep the Scythe Ants’ scythes intact, please!”

“Don’t crush the heads of the Ruby Eyes!”

“Or their wings either...”

Instead of cheering her on, everyone started listing their demands. *Such practical people*, I thought.

“Young Master,” Mio began, a hint of something ominous in her voice.

*“What is it?”*

“I don’t want to do this. I humbly ask you to handle it, Young Master.”

“Wait, what?!” came the surprised chorus of half a dozen voices, including my own.

*“Y-You want me to do it?”*

“Every single time... It’s such a hassle! ‘Leave this.’ ‘Aim for that.’ I’ve been patient up ‘til now, but I’ve hit my limit!!!”

*“B-But, Mio, these materials are valuable, and it’s good practice for you too, right?”*

“I’ve practiced enough while holding back! It’s time for you to get some training in, Young Master. I’ll let you handle it!” she said with finality, then turned away.

*Sigh... I am kind of tired of Toa and everyone seeing me as useless, so I guess I should do this.*

*“All right, I’ll do it.”*

“Huh?!”

Rinon was the first to express her shock.

*Wow, just how little do they expect from me?*

“Um, Raidou-san? We would die even if we tried! Let’s ask Mio-sama!” Toa’s plea was echoed by the others, who all tried to stop me.

I felt like crying at their low opinion of me, but instead I took out my bow and arrows, gave Mio a nod, and stopped the carriage.

*“Um, the weak spot of the Scythe Ant is the head, right? What about a Ruby Eye... Their head too?”*

“That’s not right!”

“Don’t aim for a Ruby Eye’s head!!!”

“You haven’t been listening at all, and now you want to fight?!”

I felt myself cringing as the adventurers hit me with one negative comment after another. I vaguely remembered someone saying not to aim for the head.

*“Okay, just tell me the Ruby Eyes’ weak spot.”*

“Wow, looks like this guy’s serious!” Adventurer B, the alchemist, muttered in disbelief. Even though he was the only other guy in the group, he showed no mercy.

“Come on, it’s not too late to convince Mio-sama to help,” the elf said in a calm, reasoning tone.

*You’re a fellow archer, aren’t you? I thought. You could be a bit kinder to your peers.*

“The weak spot of a Ruby Eye is its abdomen. Its developed front legs can block attacks, which makes it hard to hit,” Toa explained, causing the others to fall silent. She had a good eye. Maybe my true potential had leaked out when I picked up the bow. *Haha, I scare myself sometimes.*

*All right, the head and the abdomen.*

*With this distance, there’s no way I’ll miss.*

I readied my bow.

From a distance, I could hear the others whispering.

“Seriously, Toa?!”

“Be quiet! He’s concentrating.”

“It’s impossible. Magick would work, but not a bow at this range.”



“And isn’t he supposed to be Level 1? What’s he thinking?”

*Wow, that’s rude! This elf girl might sound calm, but ouch, she can be harsh. And she’s not using “sama” like she does for Mio!*

However, I had already locked on to six of the ten targets, then seven, eight, nine...

Just as I was thinking I would live up to Toa’s expectations...

“Don’t worry. If it comes down to it, Mio-sama will step in.”

*Toa-san.*

“Oh, I see.”

The dwarf girl seemed convinced.

“And besides, if Mio-sama entrusted him with it, maybe he really is amazing.”

*Good, this is heading in the right direction. Keep it up, Toa-san.*

“No, no, no, he’s only Level 1!”

*Shut up, hyuman.*

“Maybe it’s not Raidou-san but his bow and arrows. Maybe they have incredible abilities like advanced aiming or guaranteed critical hits.”

*Is that it? Is that really it?!*

I almost thought better of Toa.

“I hadn’t considered that. Well, bow aside, the arrows do seem quite well-made.”

*Indeed, the arrows made by Eld-san are exceptional, but the bow is just an ordinary one... No, that’s not the point.*

Since we both used bows, I had hoped for some empathy from the elf girl.

My patience was wearing thin.

*Should I put all of you to eternal sleep with perfect aiming? Fools!*

*Enough! Just watch and be amazed!*

“Are you okay, big brother?” Rinon asked.

She really was the best kid.

The enemy was about a three hundred feet away.

*All right, all targets locked on... Let's start with the Ruby Eyes.*

With a quiet exhale, I let the first arrow fly at one of the two Ruby Eyes advancing toward us. The arrow pierced clean through its abdomen, and the creature fell to the ground.

*Now, for the other Ruby Eye.* As Toa had mentioned, it did indeed use its sturdy front legs to protect its abdomen, but my arrow found its way through the small gap between them.

*Three, four, five...* I counted in my head as I systematically took down the targets.

From behind, I heard remarks like “No way...” and “What the...?”

*Okay, got it now? When it comes to using a bow, I'm not bad.*

Eight, nine...

And with one final shot to a Scythe Ant's head, it was over. The whole thing had only taken about thirty seconds.

*And just one shot each!* I congratulated myself. *Don't underestimate the power of long-range attacks.*

I hadn't been to the Demiplane recently, so it had been a while since I'd held a bow. It was reassuring to see that I could still manage just fine in actual combat.

“Amazing,” Rinon said with genuine admiration.

*Thank you for your honest opinion. Now you should have a better impression of me.*

*“That's how it's done. Have I redeemed myself?”* I wrote to the group behind me, handing over the bow.

“Incredible. It looks just like an ordinary bow...” said the dwarf girl, studying the weapon intently.



*Do you seriously—?! It's not the bow! Why don't they believe me... Is being Level 1 really that unreliable? Damn it!*

*"This is a NORMAL BOW," I wrote. "The arrows were made by a skilled craftsman, but they're not enchanted. I've been good at archery since I was a kid."*

"Well, it definitely doesn't have any enchantments," concluded the alchemist who had been examining the bow, ignoring my explanation. I decided I wouldn't bother trying to remember his name if he was going to be so rude. How could they question what had happened right before their eyes?

"Unbelievable," muttered the female elven archer. "The power, the range, the accuracy... I've never seen anything like it."

"That's right," Toa agreed.

To be fair, since this was the first time I'd actually done anything in front of them, I guess it was little wonder they were surprised.

In any event, it was time to gather the materials from the hunt.

I told Mio to move the carriage closer to the carcasses. As soon as Toa and the others got off, they rushed toward the corpses of the Scythe Ants and Ruby Eyes. While I didn't join in the material gathering, I went closer to observe.

*Wow, their eyes really do glow red... unlike Red Bees... So, I guess the name Ruby Eye fits.*

The adventurers worked silently, fully engrossed in harvesting the materials. It was a scene I still wasn't used to, no matter how many times I'd seen it.

Especially seeing Toa-san like this. *Don't look so happy...* I willed her silently.

*"Are you all done? Let's gather the materials fast and head to Tsige,"* I urged as the adventurers finished cutting off the curved front legs of the last Scythe Ant.

Seeing my speech bubble, the four of them wrapped up their work and returned to the carriage. From the six red wasp-like Ruby Eye monster bodies, we managed to recover twelve intact eyes. Being rare monster materials, they would be sure to fetch a high price.

With everything collected, we set off again for the city—the four adventurers, Mio, and me.

Around noon that day—about three weeks since the base was destroyed, and a little over two months since I'd arrived in this world—our carriage finally passed through the gates of Tsige, my first real city in this world.

# Tsukimichi

## Chapter 1

**“W**hat?! Zetsuya was *destroyed*?!”

Shock rippled through the Adventurer’s Guild in Tsige as Toa’s group told their story. While she did so, Mio and Rinon wandered around the guild, their faces lighting up with the excitement of a recent discovery.

Although I wasn’t in the guild room, I knew Toa and the others weren’t reporting events exactly as they’d happened. While Toa and Rinon accurately remembered what had occurred at the base in the Wasteland, I had magically altered the memories of the other three adventurers. Of course, it would have been easier to do it for everyone, but I felt uneasy about casting a spell on Toa and Rinon. That was just my selfishness.

So now Adventurers A, B, and C thought something like: “A horde of monsters overran Zetsuya, and we barely escaped with our lives.” To avoid complications, I’d instructed Toa and the others to align their stories with that beforehand.

“Zetsuya” was the name of the base that no longer existed—although the truth was that Tomoe and Mio had destroyed it. The other bases we passed on the way had shorter names, like Ringa and Ando.

Zetsuya was known as the highest-level base, with an average level easily over a hundred. Considering that the average included those who quickly perished, the actual level was likely even higher. It seemed that most active members were over Level 200.

Of course, there had been some unscrupulous individuals there. Toa and her group had nearly fallen victim to some villains. (I never did learn the name of the mastermind behind it all.)

Perhaps because of this, the three adventurers traveling with us didn't seem to have much attachment to Zetsuya or any regret about leaving it.

Toa, however, seemed a bit different. While she hadn't complained out loud, I often caught a wistful look in her eye when the base was mentioned. *If... if Toa-san ever decided to go back to Zetsuya...*

I wouldn't be able to say anything. I just hoped she would take care of Rinon.

As for Tomoe and Mio, their registration information had disappeared. Since Zetsuya didn't have the facilities to share information with other guilds, their records had been destroyed along with the guild.

That meant we'd had to put off reregistering the two of them until reaching Tsige, which had the necessary facilities. We'd stopped by three "bases" on the way to Tsige, but those turned out to be nothing more than slightly upgraded campsites, with guilds similar to the one at Zetsuya. And there was always the chance that another base might collapse by some unfortunate event.

*I'll handle the reregistration after Tomoe gets back, I decided. I'll summon her tonight, and we can go to the guild tomorrow.*

*Okay, so I need to find an inn, check out some shops... Oh, and I need to register with the Merchant Guild too...*

*Finally, finally, we've reached a town! There are so many things I want to do!!!*

It seemed Toa and the others had finished their report. A clerk got up and stepped away into the back room, probably to fetch someone important. Losing a base was a significant event.

*Speaking of which, I wonder what the highest level and rank here are...*

As I looked around the guild, I noticed a bulletin board advertising quests and other information, and next to it a ranking board.

*Oh, there it is. Hmm, the highest-ranked person is...*

Level 201, Rank S.



I was surprised to realize how low that sounded to me. The adventurers from Zetsuya, and even my own traveling companions, had probably skewed my idea of “strong.”

The quests, too, seemed to have relatively low ranks, mostly Rank A or B+. Maybe higher-ranked quests were mostly assigned directly to individuals or parties, the S Ranks or special ranks. And if these were the leftovers, it might indicate that there were a lot of mid-level parties and that Rank D to B quests were the most popular.

Still, there were an awful lot of Rank A procurement requests still waiting to be taken. They must have either been incredibly tedious or required collecting parts from super-rare creatures like stray metal slimes.

*Either way, no thanks. I need to figure out which gathering quests are easiest to complete and their locations. That might be useful later.*

*Hmm... There's one S-Rank request left. Interesting.*

It was posted high up, so I lightly jumped up to grab the sheet.

Suddenly, I felt several eyes on me. *You guys don't see these get taken much, do you?*

Well, I didn't care. I looked over the details written on the request sheet.



# **URGENT RECRUITMENT!**

■ **RANK: S RANK**

■ **TASK: MATERIAL PROCUREMENT**

■ **DESIRED MATERIAL: 6  
EYES OF A RUBY EYE**

■ **QUANTITY: 6 PIECES (SINGLE  
PIECE SUBMISSIONS ARE ACCEPTED)**

■ **SPECIAL NOTE**

**PAYMENT FOR MATERIALS WILL BE  
ABOVE MARKET VALUE WITHOUT FAIL.**

**REMBRANDT COMPANY**



*Ruby Eyes! How timely!*

A request from a trading company even. *This is great. Could this be the start of building connections? My luck might be turning around.*

Plus, as an S-Rank request, it should come with a substantial reward.

In Zetsuya, I'd randomly called my trading company the "Kuzunoha Company," but apparently, establishing an independent shop was a significant step for a merchant. So, I kind of regretted naming mine on a whim. I wasn't registered with the Merchant Guild yet, and although Zetsuya had been destroyed, there was a chance the name of this fictitious trading company could have spread.

I wondered what aspiring merchants did before owning a shop. Did they study as apprentices somewhere? If so, when they could have their own shop wouldn't be certain. How did the system work?

*Well, that doesn't matter right now. For now, it's about the Ruby Eyes and the Rembrandt Company.*

*All right, I'll explain the situation to the others and take all the eyes from the Ruby Eyes for myself. I'm the one who hunted them, so it should be fine, right? Mwahaha.*

"Big brother, that's kinda scary."

"Young Master, are you plotting something?"

Apparently, both Rinon and Mio had followed me to the bulletin board—the former was looking a bit nervous but the latter seemed enthusiastic.

*"No, Rinon. I just found an interesting request."*

"I see... Oh, here comes my sister and everyone!"

I turned to see Toa and the three adventurers approaching us. No one from the guild accompanied them, so it seemed things had gone smoothly.

Considering the average level in this town, both Toa and the dwarf girl would probably be within the top ten here. *Hmm...*

Explaining the tragedy of Zetsuya to the guild in Tsige was actually a request we'd received at the previous base—a special request, so to speak. We'd shown the proof of that request at the start of our conversation, so it should have been fulfilled now.

“Welcome back, Rinon. Did you behave yourself with these two?”

“I was really quiet!” she confirmed. Indeed, she was a very good girl.

*“Welcome back,” I drew. “Did the request fulfillment go smoothly?”*

“Yeah, thanks to you. But are you sure? I mean, I know it was a request we accepted, but I think you two should share the reward too, right?” Toa said.

I appreciated her concern, but it would have been a hassle to tell Tomoe we'd completed a request and received a reward while she was away, and that our ranks had gone up too. So, I decided not to accept the reward this time.

*“No, no. We're adventurers. Fame is secondary. You can have it this time.”*

*...and in exchange for this, I'll take the eyes from the Ruby Eyes!*

“Thank you for everything,” the young alchemist said with a bow.

“Experience, money, rank, materials... You've really helped us. May the Earth Spirit bless you, Raidou-dono,” the dwarf girl said, following his example with a polite bow.

Then she added, “Tell me later where you learned archery.”

*That's impossible,* I thought with a wry smile.

“Thanks to you, my level and rank have gone up. It feels like a dream,” Toa said, her face beaming with joy.

One by one, the four of them all showed me their guild cards.

Toa was a Level 125, Rank A, Dark Thief. *What's a Dark Thief? Sounds like a Job I wouldn't want to be close to.*

The dwarf girl was a Level 122, Rank B+, Priest Warrior (Earth). *So, a warrior serving the Earth Spirit, I guess.*

The alchemist boy was a Level 114, Rank B+, Alchemy Meister. *Wouldn't “Alchemist” suffice? Sounds like he could pilot a Gundam.*



The elf girl was Level a 108, Rank A-, Blaster Gunner. *Gunner... A musketeer?! But you were holding a bow! Does this world have guns?!*

They all had indeed leveled up.

The elf girl had been around Level 90, noticeably lower than the others. She had probably overextended herself by heading to Zetsuya and had gotten stuck there.

*If that's the case, maybe my efforts have pushed me to around Level 30...?*

*Shouldn't get my hopes up too much about my own level, but seeing this makes me curious, right? But I'll save that excitement for when I meet back up with Tomoe.*

"Looks like we're done here... Ready to go? Or do you still have something to do?"

"We don't, but Mio-sama and Raidou-san need to register."

The four of them nodded in unison. Perfect synchronization. *Why are they looking forward to this so much?*

*"We were planning on coming back with Tomoe, so it's fine for today. If we register ahead of her, she might get upset."*

"Tomoe would definitely sulk about that," Mio agreed. She understood Tomoe well. Even if we were acting separately, she'd want us to be together for important moments.

"So, this is goodbye for now," Toa said.

*"Yes. Let's have lunch, then we can distribute the luggage from the carriage. After that, we'll part ways for now."*

"For now?" Toa's voice was full of anticipation.

*"If you're not in a hurry, how about we have dinner together as a farewell party? We can also celebrate finishing the guild request."*

"All right!"

To my relief, all four of them agreed enthusiastically.

I'd prefer a place with a tavern-like atmosphere where we could dig in heartily. The journey to Tsige had been full of bland, preserved food, so I couldn't wait to sink my teeth into something delicious.

*"By the way, have all of you been here before?"*

They all nodded.

*"In that case, I'll leave it to you to choose a place where we can eat and drink freely. I'm looking forward to it."* I added one last condition. *"And, of course, a place where Rinon is welcome."*

*All right, with dinner settled, let's take care of lunch first. A place where we can have a light meal while we talk about how we'll distribute the materials would be good... I'll leave that to them as well.*

*"Shall we go, then?"*

※ ※ ※

By seven o'clock that evening, my stomach was starting to growl. After lunch, we had smoothly finished sharing out the materials (and no one had objected to handing over the eyes to me). Mio and I had then chosen an inn and wandered around the town, checking out random shops together. Soon after we arrived back at the inn, a message appeared on Toa's guild card, which we'd borrowed for communication.

When I touched the blinking part of the card with intent, a message began to write itself in the air. It was good to see that my strategy of talking through speech bubbles fit quite well in this world.

Fantasy worlds were surprisingly high-tech in certain areas. The guild card looked like an ordinary card, yet it had a messaging function.

I was kind of glad Tomoe hadn't returned yet; having her there at tonight's celebration would just complicate things.

We quickly checked the location of the restaurant on the card, then left the inn.

Seriously, don't underestimate the guild card. For example, at affiliated shops, you could make purchases without having to withdraw the physical money that you'd deposited with the Guild. Just like a debit card.

You could also send messages to people nearby. It was like a communication device in a world of swords and magick!

Of course, the communication range was nothing like what we had with modern devices, but the fact that you could send messages at all was amazing.

Another surprising feature was the encyclopedia function. A significant number of monsters and materials, including ores and medicinal herbs, were registered, and you could search and view the information.

However, the content was gradually made available according to your rank, so I was probably seeing more on Toa's card than the average person would.

*This is the benefit you get for a minimal adventurer registration fee! Take note, mobile phone companies!*

Well, there was something like an annual fee, but it was cheap enough not to be a concern. This guild card was truly wonderful. I resolved that next time I went to the guild, I would study up on the card's functions in detail.

Toa had only given me a brief explanation, but it seemed there were premium services available for a fee, and even more additional content was unlocked with rank, even beyond encyclopedia entries.

*This definitely makes me want to raise my rank!!!*

*Oops, got a bit too excited there.*

Thanks to Toa lending us her guild card, Mio and I were able to find the meeting place without any trouble. Normally, you wouldn't lend such a high-spec item to anyone... which made me wonder how much she trusted me (or rather, Mio).

As we walked together, delicious smells wafted from both sides of the street. Mio followed eagerly, gazing intently at the food stalls lining the road.

Amid all the enticing aromas, I spotted a sign with writing that was made from animal bone shapes to form the characters for the word "Butcher." That was

where we were meeting.

*Straightforward name. I like it.*

Entering the shop, I quickly spotted our group. They must have taken baths because they all looked clean and had changed clothes.

I briefly wondered if I should have changed too—then remembered I still only had the clothes I'd been summoned in.

Maybe I should stock up on clothes here in Tsige. I mean, in the future, I could be invited to soirées or parties... Hard to imagine now, though.

Seeing the drinks and food already laid out, I was drawn to one particular dish.

There it was, something that until this day had only existed in my dreams. Of course, I had hoped for it when I saw the name of the shop, but I hadn't let myself believe they had the real thing.

It was—

*—manga meat!!!*

*The dream of men, no, the dream of all humanity!!!*

"Ohhhhh, Glorrrrrriiiaaaa!!!" I couldn't help but shout. *What a miracle! I'm so glad I came to this world!*





“Raidou-san, do you really like it that much?” Even if she couldn’t understand my words, Toa must have sensed my overwhelming joy. She looked weirded out, but I just couldn’t contain my excitement!

*“This is... Where I come from, this is a highly coveted food...”* I wrote, almost squeezing out the words. *“Oh, and thank you for the guild card.”*

“Oh, you’re welcome... Really? Highly coveted? Here, it’s pretty common everywhere,” Toa said, puzzled. The others seemed equally surprised.

*Common, you say? So, people here eat manga meat all the time?*

*Fantastic. Although I haven’t tasted it yet. If it tastes like green juice, I’ll be furious.*

*“I’m stoked. Tonight’s going to be fun.”*

I reluctantly put the meat back on the plate and found two empty seats. Rinon and the elf girl were on either side of them... Not bad.

“Well then, now that everyone is here, shall we start?”

“Oh!”

“Indeed.”

“Aye, I’m starving.”

“Rinon is super hungry.” *Rinon, your words remind me of a certain tiny elf.*

“Okay, then. A toast to our return to Tsige and our meeting with Raidou-san and Mio-sama!”

“Cheers!”

And so, the feast began.

We’d toasted with mugs of a beer-like drink... Was it ale?

What was the legal drinking age in this world? *Well, as an otherworlder, I’ll interpret it as “feel free to drink.” Yeah, that works.*

I immediately took a bite of the coveted manga meat. *Chomp.*

*This is... delicious! Delicious! It’s amazing!!!*

*It actually tastes as legendary as it looks...*

*I'm so moved I could cry...*

"Raidou-dono, are you crying?!" the alchemist asked.

*You wouldn't understand this emotion, young alchemist. The depth of this feeling is something only I can grasp.*

*"Like I said, this dish is like a dream in my country. And this is my first time eating it. It's just too much... Sorry."*

I washed it down with some ale. *Ah, that hits the spot!*

Then, I grabbed a manga meat in each hand and gobbled them both up.

*"Mio, order more of these,"* I wrote as I continued to eat. And eat and eat.

"Impressive appetite."

"To think he likes it enough to cry," Toa commented. Both she and the alchemist looked like they didn't quite know what to think.

I didn't mind.

"It's cheap," the elf girl said more bluntly.

*That's fine. If it's delicious and cheap, it's a win-win!*

"Got it, but leave some for me too!" Mio replied.

*Don't worry, Mio. There's plenty more coming.* I had only been focused on the manga meat, but there were also lots of vegetables and seafood!

*Ah, I'm so happy right now.*

Just then, I felt someone's eyes on me.

Mio? No, it wasn't her. She was happily munching on a piece of manga meat, her face a picture of contentment. She was already on her third drink, and she'd sampled various dishes as well. It was good to see she liked the food here.

*So, the one watching must be... the elf girl next to Mio.*

Maybe she found my enthusiastic eating unappealing?

*"Is there something you want?"* I asked her without slowing down.

*This salad with thinly sliced meat is delicious! The coarsely ground Hamburg-like patty is great too. The grilled river fish skewers look like something from an outdoor setting, and they're excellent. And this tender white fish with simple salt seasoning is perfect. It's great as a snack with drinks or as a side dish. The vegetable sticks for palate cleansing are also good. There might not be any fried food, but who cares! Everything is delicious! I'm so happy!*

"You are a strange person," the elf girl murmured.

*"I see."*

"You're a merchant, yet you act like an adventurer... but you're not greedy for money. And even though you're Level 1, you're stronger than us."

*"I was raised in a unique place."*

"Even though you have power and money, you don't seem to have any greed or attachment. You're very... fluffy. Like a cloud... thing?"

*"'Thing?' That's a bit harsh."*

*Was that a compliment? But she didn't even treat me like a human! And she called me a "thing" at the end!*

"Sorry. I meant you don't feel like a typical hyuman. You don't even seem like a living creature."

Her apology was not helping.

I glanced around the table. The dwarf girl was urging the alchemist to drink more. Toa was focused on the food, dishing it out for Rinon, who was also eating steadily. Rinon wasn't drinking alcohol but juice, which made sense since she seemed to be about ten years old.

"And that archery. Where's it from?" the elf girl continued to question.

*"What do you mean by 'where'?"*

"The style. Especially your initial stance and the pause afterward—it's too unnatural."

Ah, indeed. In this world, which emphasized practical combat, my movements might have seemed unusual.



*“That’s not from any particular style. It’s my way of enhancing concentration.”*

“Concentration? If you did that in a real fight, you’d be attacked before you finished.”

I wondered how best to explain. Could she even grasp the concept of martial arts? She was from a race that lived in the forest, after all—an elf.

*Well, I’m in a good mood from the food and drink, so I’ll try.*

*“The first thing I learned was kyudo. It’s a unique form of archery that involves both bow handling and the cultivation of the spirit.”*

“Kyudo?”

*“Yes. It’s more of a discipline than a practical combat skill. It involves drawing the bow and hitting the target while incorporating ceremonial ritual.”*

“I don’t understand.”

*“Um... no. It’s really unique. You could say the goal is more about improving the spirit than the technique of archery. My opening movements are a remnant of that.”*

“That gives you all that power and accuracy?”

*“Well, not entirely, but yes.”*

“Kyudo... Never heard of it. But it was amazing.”

The elf girl was mainly eating salad but also partaking in meat. I was relieved to see she was an omnivore.

She seemed to have developed quite an interest in me since the archery incident. Our relationship had been so minimal that I hadn’t noticed at all.

Her doubts assuaged, the elf girl downed her drink, a deep red liquid, in one go. She had probably matched the others with ale for the toast but was now drinking something more like wine.

*Maybe I should try different kinds of alcohol later too. As long as I don’t get too drunk.*

“Raidou-dono.”

I turned to see the alchemist standing up and coming over to my side—an unnecessary movement given we were sitting at a round table.

*“What’s up?”*

“What are you going to do with the eyes from the Ruby Eyes, Raidou-dono? Are you gonna use them for enchantments on tools and weapons?!”

The dwarf girl had been making him drink quite a bit, and it showed.

*“No. There was a guild request, so I thought I’d use them for that.”*

“What?! That’s a waste!”

*“No, no. The requester is someone from a trading company. I thought it would help me build connections. That’s why I asked you guys to give them to me.”*

“Ah, networking! Well, that’s important for business. Some people will take advantage of you if you don’t have introductions or credentials!”

*“I’m sorry for taking something so valuable.”*

“No, no, no! It’s more like we got more materials than we deserved! We should be the ones thanking *you*!”

*“But you’ll need a lot of stuff to start over, so it might not be enough.”*

“Not at all, I have more than enough! With all this incredible luck, I feel like I could fly! Even our inn is a higher rank than usual!”

What an exaggeration. Before, he’d struck me as the quiet type, but he sure was a loud drunk. Although his comments about the inn’s rank were endearing and quite humble.

*“Glad to hear that. I was worried whether the distribution was truly fair.”*

“Don’t worry about it at all! Hahaha. Tomorrow, I’ll be at the guild, so let’s surprise everyone together!”

The youth returned to his seat, toasting to something by himself and drinking merrily. What a cheerful guy.

“Oh! Are you drinking? Yeah, you are! Come on, let’s drink more! Let’s eat more!”

Now it was the dwarf girl's turn. The alcohol had made her extra cheerful. You could say she acted like an old man... but her enthusiasm was quite charming. However, I doubted it would earn her any popularity points...

Even now, she was drinking with her right hand while holding two mugs in her left.

Whether those mugs were for drinking or for making others drink... It was hard to tell, which was a bit intimidating.

*"Of course, I'm having a good time."*

"That's good! Not enjoying alcohol is an insult to being born!"

*Well. That's quite a strong statement.*

She supposedly believed in Earth Spirits, but maybe she actually believed in alcohol spirits?

With her saying it in this atmosphere, I couldn't help but feel she might be right.

"By the way," she suddenly said, looking at me with a challenging gaze. Too close, her face was too close.

*She's hammered now! Seriously, how much has she had to drink?!*

Good grief, she might be a dwarf, but she doesn't have a beard and is definitely cute enough, so she should have some restraint!

"Yes?"

"Your archery during the battle today was seriously impressive!"

*"Thanks."*

"But that power. It's not something that can be achieved by technique or the quality of the weapon alone."

*"What do you mean?"*

"Raidou-dono, you must have some serious strength too, right?" the dwarf girl asked cheerfully.

That's right. Since I'd arrived in this world, I hadn't met anyone who could withstand my bare-handed strikes.

*"Well, yes..."*

"Hahaha! I like you! Let's have a match!"

No sooner had she said this than she cleared away the food and drinks in front of us with a sweep of her arm.

*Uh... what is she planning?!*

She placed her elbow on the table and extended her right arm toward me.

*Is this... arm wrestling?*

"Come on!"

Well, there was no doubt about it. *All right, I thought, this looks fun, so let's do it!*

*"I'm in!"* I stood up and clasped her hand.

Rinon had somehow already retreated to Toa's lap. *Smart kid.*

"I'm glad to see you know about our dwarf tradition of strength contests," the dwarf girl said with a confident smile.

*Is arm wrestling really traditional?*

"Rinon-dono, give us the signal?"

"Sure! Okay, here we go... Start!!!"

In an instant, the dwarf girl put all her strength into trying to push my arm down.

But I didn't budge. After all, she was quite weak.

"Nuooohh! How is this possible?!"

*"Hmph!"*

I exerted a bit of force and pushed her arm to the left.

"Whoa?! Oh no!"

Using her elbow as a pivot point, I flipped the dwarf girl over.

“Big brother wins! Amazing!” Applause came from around the table, and Rinon looked at me with wide-eyed wonder.

“Well, this is the first time I’ve lost like this. I’ve been defeated. The world really is vast!” The dwarf girl stood up, rubbing her right arm, and laughed heartily before resuming her drinking. Now she was chatting with the elf girl.

When I looked at Mio sitting beside me, I noticed that she was piling up empty plates faster than they could be cleared away.

Of course, I couldn’t say much since I was also eating a significant amount. Reluctantly, I moved to where Rinon had been sitting.

There, in front of me, was steak cut into strips and something that resembled boiled shellfish. Both were quite good. The steak was lighter than expected, and the meat juices were delicious. The shellfish tasted sweet, like crab, and it had a fluffy texture—not springy, but tasty in its own way.

“I’m glad to see you’re enjoying it. I was kind of worried since I didn’t know what kind of food you liked,” Toa said.

“Everything’s delicious, right, big brother?” Rinon chimed in, from atop Toa’s lap.

Indeed, everything we’d been served so far was excellent. The flavors might have been a bit mild, but it was all so good that I didn’t mind at all. The ingredients and the use of seasonings seemed very well thought-out.

*“It’s really delicious. Incredibly good. Mio and I are both impressed.”*

“Your hometown seems to have a different food culture, but is the seasoning all right?” Toa asked.

*“Overall, it might be a bit mild, but it’s all very tasty.”*

“Mild? This place is known for its strong flavors to complement the drinks...”

*“Oh, is that so? Then maybe where I’m from just has stronger flavors. But it’s really delicious.”*

“Raidou-san, you keep saying delicious!” Toa paused. “On another note, are you going to the guild first thing tomorrow morning?” Despite her merry laugh, something seemed to be weighing on her mind.



*“Tomorrow... I was going to meet up with Tomoe and register at the Adventurer’s Guild first. Then, I’ll go to the Merchant Guild. After that, maybe some sightseeing?”*

*“Oh, you’re going sightseeing?”*

*“Yeah, it’s my first time in this town. I enjoy traveling.”*

“Heheheh. Raidou-san, you really seem like a noble. Makes me wonder how big the trading company you’re going to inherit is.”

*“I’m sorry for being so naive.”*

*Do only the rich travel in this world?*

“Oh no, not at all. By the way, would it be all right if I visited your inn lodgings tomorrow night? I’d also like to get Mio-sama’s contact information.”

Now that I thought about it, they had asked for Mio’s contact information when I requested the eyes from the Ruby Eyes from the four of them.

In other words, they wanted to “exchange contact information.”

*Tomorrow night, huh? In that case, I’ll give out the contact info for Tomoe, Mio, and myself.*

*“Sure, that’s fine. Tomorrow night then.”*

Tomorrow’s schedule was quickly filling up.

First, I’d be taking Tomoe and Mio to the Adventurer’s Guild. Then, I was going to the Merchant Guild to establish my trading company, followed by some sightseeing around town. I would need to buy a map of this world, and another of Tsige and its surroundings.

*Anyway...*

The banquet continued late into the night, and all of us had a great time. And it only cost one gold coin.

*For all the food and drinks we’ve had, that’s incredibly cheap. This place is fantastic!*

Tsige.

The most prosperous place near the Edge of the World.

In other words, the gateway to the land of humans.

My journey through the Wasteland ended here.

It had been long.

*But delicious! And fun!*

# Tsukimichi

## Chapter 2

There was still no word from Tomoe.

True, last night I'd had too much to drink and failed to contact her. But I was a bit concerned that I hadn't heard from her either.

In our room at the inn, I'd created a portal—an ability I'd gained shortly after leaving Zetsuya—and entered the Demiplane, deep in subspace, with Mio. But Tomoe wasn't there. She must have been running around somewhere else on this continent.

If she was conducting the “investigation” I'd requested, that would be great. However, considering she hadn't contacted me, she was probably engrossed in her warrior training.

Now that I was able to make portals and enter the Demiplane whenever I wanted, I could find out directly from the residents there what Tomoe was up to. However, due to the nature of intermediaries, information was sometimes lost in the process, and as I relied heavily on reports via telepathic messages, I didn't know the details. Although there was one communication tool I'd recently acquired that helped compensate for that: Telepathy.

Telepathy was a relatively simple magick that allowed you to deliver your voice to a connected person. It didn't require any special talent, and both Tomoe and Mio could use it. It would only “connect” if you used a simple chant to preauthorize the telepathic connection, and the communication range varied significantly depending on the strength of the sender and receiver. In other words, it wasn't quite as user-friendly as a cell phone, but for this world it was a

highly advanced means of communication. Given the master-servant contracts I had with Tomoe and Mio, there might be differences from the general features I'd explained, but that was still under investigation.

Lately, however, Tomoe hadn't even used Telepathy to contact me.

"Even so... they're making incredible progress," I muttered to myself, half impressed, half bewildered.

Just three weeks since we'd gathered the materials, my house was starting to take shape. The construction site was already leveled, and the foundation was in place. In some areas, the workers had even started building the outer walls and columns.

But... it was an enormous building. *Are they purposefully trying to build something absurdly large?* I wondered. Tsige had some big buildings, but what they were constructing here was on a completely different scale.

Mio, standing beside me, looked at the construction site in astonishment.

*Think about it.*

*The total population of the Demiplane is only a few hundred people.*

Considering the number of people involved in the construction and their working hours, I felt a bit guilty. *I mean, I'm away all the time, and there's no need to rush...*

"The construction of Young Master's mansion is top priority!" announced the Highland Orc girl who stood next to us. Her name was Ema. An excellent communicator, she was the coordinator of the Demiplane, and she kept busy coordinating the various races.

"Ema-san, my house can be built later. Don't you guys have more urgent things to do now?"

"We're taking care of those things as well. Since the location for the city hasn't been strictly decided yet, this is the main collaborative task," Ema said with a smile. "Your mansion is also planned to serve as a meeting place for the residents, so don't worry."

*I see. In that case, it's fine. I'll gratefully accept the construction.*

Ema was a truly capable person. *Maybe I should rely more on her than on Tomoe for getting stuff done in the Demiplane*, I mused. *I'm quite serious about that.*

"All right, then. Feel free to use it for meetings or gatherings. By the way, do you know where Tomoe is?"

"Tomoe-sama went out alone a few days ago," Ema told me hesitantly. "She said she wanted to check the current state of the Demiplane. There are a few things that have come up as concerns, and she's looking into those too."

That was a relief; it seemed Tomoe wasn't acting purely out of personal interest.

"Concerns? Ema-san—"

"Young Master!"

"Yes?!" I replied reflexively.

"Please, stop talking to us with honorifics. Just talk normally!"

Ema-san seemed upset. Well, I tended to use honorifics naturally...

*Hmm. As a resident of the Demiplane, it wouldn't do for the highest-ranking human to be so polite. Are non-hyumans stricter about hierarchy than hyumans?*

"I'll try to remem— I mean, I'll be careful. So, Ema, you mentioned some concerns. I'd like to hear more about them. Also, could you give me a quick report on the past few weeks?"

Seeming pleased that I'd adjusted my speech, Ema returned to her secretary-like demeanor to give her report.

"Very well. I'll start with the points you were concerned about during your last visit. First, the living environment—there are no issues for any of the races. Thanks to Tomoe sama's teleportation, everyone has homes, and there's been no damage during the teleportation process. The distribution of living spaces has also been completed without any problems."

Tomoe's teleportation seemed incredibly useful. In fact, here in the Demiplane, I had been living in a tent since I didn't originally have a home, but

ances like the orcs and dwarves, who'd come as whole settlements, hadn't had any trouble with housing. They'd managed to move their belongings outside during teleportation, so there had been no need to worry about damage to their homes.

"The arachs are setting up residences in the forest and mountain areas. We orcs and the lizardfolk are helping them build their homes, fostering relations, and there are no major issues. While doing that, they're also surveying the surrounding area."

"They've been reporting their findings too," Mio added. "They're also compiling information on the flora and fauna they discover." The arachs and Mio had more of a parent-child relationship than a master-subordinate one, so the reports always came to her first.

"It's reassuring to know they're surveying the surroundings. I'll have to thank them later, Mio."

"You're too kind, Young Master. They'll be delighted," Mio said with a grateful smile.

"It's been a big help," Ema continued. "Also, about the investigation of the new forests that appeared since Mio-sama arrived in the Demiplane. That hasn't progressed yet, but we're getting ready to start soon. What's more, once the mansion is closer to being complete, we're planning on organizing the information we've gathered from our explorations there. Would that be all right?"

"Of course, that's fine. How are the dwarves doing?"

"They're progressing with construction and repairs. They're also in charge of making weapons, and the skilled blacksmiths are working nonstop on prototype equipment for you, Tomoe-sama, and Mio-sama."

I recalled they'd mentioned something about presenting weapons before. They must have been working on several different items, not just the arrows I'd received recently.

"Finally, the lizardfolk are handling the security at each settlement. They're developing the areas they plan to use for farmland and procuring materials and



food supplies. They're quite well organized, so their work is progressing smoothly."

*Wow, those guys are capable of more than just being pure warriors—they can also handle development and procurement. They're not just fighters. And they're already talking about farmland. It feels like they're spreading themselves too thin...*

The residents of the Demiplane each had their own skills and were working in the right roles, so it made sense that things were going smoothly. But if we pushed for too much too quickly, we might end up with chronic labor shortages.

What I wanted was for them to slow down the pace of construction on my mansion and allocate more people to other tasks. Overextending would ruin everything.

"From what you've said, it sounds like there's clearly a manpower shortage, isn't there?" I asked Ema. But her response wasn't what I was expecting.

"If we were to expand recklessly, Young Master, you would be correct. However, we're still in the testing phase, so we're prioritizing establishing procedures and processes. Right now, we need people who can understand and process information."

"What do you mean?"

"The progress on our current tasks relies heavily on the information you provide us, Young Master. But that information's written in a language we don't understand, so we've been proceeding by constantly consulting with Tomoe-sama. However, that's quite inefficient. Since Tomoe-sama has been away for several days, we've been unable to process reports like 'What animal is this?' or 'What plant is this?' The flora and fauna in the Demiplane often match the knowledge you possess, Young Master, but they're beyond our imagination, which has caused problems..."

So, they'd been relying on Tomoe to consult a compendium she'd created based on my memories.

*I see. Hadn't thought about that.* Naturally, my memories were in Japanese. No wonder the orcs and lizardfolk struggled with them.

As an aside, a significant portion of my memories had been made accessible for the development of the Demiplane. Of course, there were also memories I'd had Tomoe seal off or mark as inaccessible.

Ema looked at me, clearly expecting something. Did she want me to help with some translation work?

Tomoe's mastery of Japanese was impressive. It's true what they say: passion breeds skill. In her case, it must have been the period dramas. However, even Tomoe probably didn't understand everything, and constantly being used as a dictionary would have been overwhelming. This might explain her recent silence.

I decided to deflect for now, as teaching Japanese all day would be tough. "Deciphering text, huh? That's a hassle for sure... But I can't stay here all the time, so I'll think of a solution. Anything else?"

"Then there's the issue you mentioned before, about seasons."

"Oh, how I said this place feels like a pleasant spring?"

"Yes, that. These days, the climate seems to be changing frequently. It gets hot and then suddenly gets cold... These changes are erratic and problematic. Last week, it even snowed. Is it normal for the season to change on a daily basis?"

*Snow?!*

Just now, it felt like a typical spring day—sunny with a gentle breeze. Very comfortable.

If it snowed tomorrow, that would indeed be a problem. We needed to figure out what was going on, and soon.

"No, seasons do follow a regular cycle... That's strange. The Demiplane is still full of mysteries."

"Indeed. On another note, this is more of a concern that Tomoe-sama mentioned, but—" *Tomoe? This doesn't sound promising.*

"—the expansion of the Demiplane has stopped for the past three weeks. This is the longest it's ever stopped expanding."

*What?*

Okay, this really was a problem.

Until now, the Demiplane had been expanding continuously, and not long ago Tomoe had mentioned that it was so vast she couldn't estimate its size. I'd asked her to investigate this expansion as part of her separate mission.

*So, it stopped expanding right after I gave the order?*

*Could her actions before or after the order have influenced the expansion?*

I didn't know, but I wanted to think that Tomoe was diligently investigating the issue.

"Stopped... Huh. Given how vast it is, that might actually be convenient..."

"I hope Tomoe-sama has found the cause. We haven't had any contact from her since she left..."

Ah, so Tomoe hadn't just stopped checking in with me; she'd ghosted the people here too.

"I'll check with her directly later," I promised. "Also, I gave Tomoe another task... What's the status on that?"

This was quite important to me, to ensure I wasn't the only one under scrutiny when handling Demiplane items in the future.

"Ah... I'm not entirely sure of the intent, but it's going well. To avoid wasting time, we've been having the others practice the common language with her while she's there."

*Okay, that's a big relief. That was the part I was most worried about.*

"Are you giving them any supplies when they leave?"

"Yes, as per your instructions. We've been giving them food gathered here and some provisions for their journey back. We've said it's a thank you for helping with common language practice. But Young Master, what's the real purpose behind this?"

Tomoe, who came and went from the Demiplane, had caught on pretty quickly, but it was understandably puzzling for Ema, who stayed here.

“In the future, when we take things out of the Demiplane, it would be problematic if I was the only one presenting them. It could lead to a lot of unnecessary suspicion and conflict. So, I thought it would be good to set the precedent of adventurers occasionally bringing items from here.”

The idea was to have adventurers occasionally mix into the Demiplane, not to fight but to be welcomed and then leave with some items. If those adventurers talked about it in the outside world, rumors would spread of a monster city that provided strange goods.

Once that became common knowledge among merchants, and the items were recognized as trade goods, Demiplane products would circulate more easily.

By rotating the races in charge, we would be able to spread rumors in different towns each time.

The goods I planned to handle likely weren't in circulation yet in this world, so it would be essential to lay this groundwork. Now, if a merchant suddenly appeared with unknown items, they might not attract any attention.

“The orcs, the lizardfolk, and the dwarves are taking turns, right?”

“Yes, and the arachs are participating as well. They've learned quite a bit of the common language.”

Those half-spider people were highly capable—just as expected from boss-level characters.

“So, the items being released include food, lizardfolk ornaments, dwarf-made weapons, and potions crafted by the arachs?”

It would be best to confirm the magical potions and alchemical products made by the arachs, as I wasn't fully familiar with them yet.

I trusted the dwarves' work. I couldn't imagine those stubborn craftsmen producing anything below their skill level.

“Yes, and a bit of our magical knowledge. But the items traded to the adventurers are mostly everyday items from each race.”

“That’ll do,” I told her. “What’s important is having products from here enter the outside world. As the scale increases, we can gradually improve the quality of what we release. I’d appreciate if you would keep that up.”

I could almost read the questions on Ema’s face. She likely felt a mix of emotions, possibly wondering why her people should cater to humans. I could understand that.

From her perspective, humans weren’t equals but occasional visitors—and not particularly strong ones. By the time adventurers reached the depths of the Wasteland, near Ema’s village, they were usually quite exhausted. So, of course she wouldn’t see the point in currying favor with such people.

This project was extremely important for me. It would ultimately affect the Demiplane, so I needed it done properly. Maybe it was best left to Tomoe. Anyway, for now the initiative seemed to be going well, so I would keep having adventurers occasionally wander into this “paradise.”

“Got it,” Ema said. “I’ll proceed with Tomoe-sama’s guidance. That’s all from my side.”

“Thanks. Hey, I’ve noticed those orcs keep looking at us. We’re done here, if you need to go talk to them.”

Ema glanced over to see the waiting orcs, excused herself, and quickly left. She was indeed a busy person, and I was truly grateful for her help.

“By the way, Mio, do you understand Japanese?”

She sounded the word out. “*Ja-pa-nese*? That’s the first time I’ve heard of that language. I don’t think I understand it.”

“Didn’t think so. It’s the language of my home country, but—”

“In that case, I do understand. I mean, we’ve been talking to each other just fine.”

She said this casually, as if it were obvious!

“What?! How come?!”

“It’s because of our contract. We need to be able to communicate with each other. In a Master-Servant contract, the servant can understand the master’s

language. In a Communion contract, the language used during the contract allows mutual understanding.”

*So that’s why! Tomoe, you should have mentioned that!*

*In that case, I’ll leave Mio here today. That should help things progress a bit. Then, I’ll visit the arachs—*

“Young Master!!!!!!”

*Whoa?! That’s a deep voice! What’s this now?!*

I turned toward the voice to see an old man with a magnificent beard, rushing toward us through a cloud of dust. With his short stature, he resembled a racing bullet.

As he got closer, I recognized it was Eld, an elder dwarf. The dark circles under his eyes were quite pronounced. *Is he getting enough sleep? Should an old guy like him even be running like this?*

“Ah, Eld-san. I apologize for Tomoe’s demanding requests.”

“Oh, a dwarf. I’m quite pleased with this iron fan. It’s an excellent piece,” Mio said.

*Mio expressing gratitude? She’s growing day by day, this gluttonous demon.*

“No, no, providing weapons to great warriors is the highest honor for us,” Eld declared, coming to a stop in front of us. “We would be troubled if you thanked us. More importantly, since you’re here in the Demiplane, I must ask for your cooperation!” he said, looking directly at me.

“But I was going to go see the arachs—”

“That can wait! This is urgent. We need to accurately understand your capabilities in order to move beyond the prototype stage of weapon creation!”

*I see. Tomoe has been proactive in communicating her needs, so they’re not having trouble making things for her, but Mio and I haven’t been around that much. I should probably go with him this time.*

“Mio, is it all right if we go with Eld-san first?”



“Sure, that’s fine. Those kids were eager to ask about the items they’ve gathered so far, so I’ll get them together somewhere.”

*Right, the arachs live in separate places. Visiting four locations is a hassle, so it’s better to have them gathered in advance.*

*All right, let’s head to the dwarves’ workshop then.*

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“No way.” My cold voice echoed through the workshop.

Before me was a grand full set of plate armor that looked like it belonged in a museum.

*I can’t wear something like this!!!*

It was bulky and looked uncomfortable. Plus, it didn’t look merchantlike at all!

But this wasn’t the first set of armor I’d had to reject, and it looked like there were lots more—all lined up in a row, like a showcase in an haute couture shop.

Eld was patting the shoulder of the dejected armor maker, looking hopeful for the next one.

*All right, if I have to choose from these...*

Full plate armor was out. Leather armor was out too. *What about something like a jacket that looks like everyday wear...?*

As I walked past each of their masterpieces, the creators fell to their knees, and Eld consoled them.

I resolved to show no reaction to their dramatic responses.

*Oh, this loose-fitting robe seems nice. Looks easy to wear. Ideally, I’d prefer a Taisho Roman school uniform, though... Hmm?*

I let go of the robe.

Two items down, standing out starkly against all the metal armor, was a set that looked like a coat and trousers. The coat was indigo with a crimson lining. This funky style—I needed to hear the story behind it.

I picked the set up and examined it closely before asking Eld, “What’s this?”

“Oh, does it catch your fancy?” Eld asked with a grin.

*Well, it’s not so much that I like it, but it does intrigue me.*

The fabric of the top would reach down to about the thighs, but it had slits so as not to hinder movement. It was much thinner than it looked—would it be comfortable?

But why did it come with the trousers? Was it meant to be full-body armor?

“Well, it looks a bit like the clothing from my country,” I finally responded. “That’s why it caught my attention.”

“This was made by someone who took an interest in the ring you asked for, the Draupnir,” Eld said with a glance toward the surly-looking dwarf who’d just stepped forward.

He looked ageless but seemed younger than Eld, with a slightly cynical air that screamed craftsman.

“Only someone unusual would request a ring like that,” came the craftsman’s blunt declaration. “Look here, start with the sleeve.”

There were thin chains coming out of a pocket-like part of the sleeve, five in total.

“These are meant to connect with the Draupnir to bring out its full potential,” the dwarf explained.

I looked at the ring on my left middle finger.

*I see, so it actually uses this...* The Draupnir absorbed my magick power, which would otherwise leak uncontrollably. When it was full, it turned bright red.

“So, this armor reaches peak performance by using the wearer’s magick power...”

“Sharp observation. Exactly.” The craftsman nodded. “The magick consumption is greater than that of the Draupnir. It’s armor that prioritizes performance over the user’s convenience.”

The craftsman looked rather smug as he said this, but for someone like me, who had an abundance of magick power to the point where even the Draupnir wasn't enough, this was actually quite welcome.

Although my magick power hadn't been growing recently, I still had more than I knew what to do with. I needed to find a way to manage it.

"Hmm, so what happens if I wear it without connecting it to the ring?"

"It'll directly drain your magick. Without the ring acting as a valve, you'll have to supply as much magick as it demands. An ordinary person would die instantly."

"I see..." I said as I picked up the coat and trousers.

"Young Master, you need to connect the ring first!"

*"Young Master," huh? Well, I'll let it slide for now.*

"It's fine," I assured him as I began to put on the armor. The trousers didn't sit right, but since this was just a fitting for the attire, I didn't mind. Next, the coat.

Hmm, I could definitely feel my magick being drained, but the effect was barely noticeable unless I focused on it.

"Is everything all right?" Eld asked anxiously.

"Yeah, it's fine. So, what are the features of this armor? Since it's a set, I can consider it full-body armor, right?"

"Of course," the craftsman said. "It has high defense against both physical and magical attacks. Normally, it offers significant resistance to physical impacts and magical wind and fire attacks."

He paused briefly, looking proud, then continued, "This armor can be used in two different modes depending on the situation during combat."

*No way, is he going to say it can transform? I don't want to deal with transformations.*

*Could it have something to do with the red lining?*

"You noticed the red lining, right?"

*Bingo.*

“Yeah, I see it.”

“Imagine it flipping around.”

*Like this? Whoa, whoa!*

The surface turned red!

*Amazing! I can switch it by just visualizing it! This is incredible! Fascinating!*

“In the red mode, it has higher resistance to slashes and cuts rather than impacts or blows. As for magical resistance, it’s stronger against water, wind, and light. This mode prioritizes mobility over defense. It provides a speed boost, and it allows you to move faster than usual. I’ve packed everything I could into this piece of work!”

The craftsman’s excitement had been palpable as he’d explained the features of the armor. He seemed to be enjoying himself quite a bit.

*Well, let’s see how this thing works.*

I lightly jogged toward the light at the entrance of the workshop. As soon as I accelerated slightly, my surroundings seemed to slow down dramatically.

*Wow, this is incredible! If I did this in the middle of town, I might become invisible.*

Not wanting to kick up too much wind, I returned to my original position as gently as possible. Even so, a strong gust swept in after me.

“That was amazing! How did you make something like—”

Before I could finish my question, a voice interrupted me.

“It’s quite a dangerous outfit, isn’t it?”

Apparently, Mio had returned.

“Oh, Mio, are you done already?”

“Yeah, I’ve decided to have some modifications made to my iron fan. As for the armor, I like this kimono, so we were just discussed adding some enhancements to it.”

“Wow, that was quick. Well, I think I’ve found my armor. This thing is amazing. It’s convenient, and it’s powerful. It’d be perfect if it had more durability, though.”

“I’m confident in its defensive capabilities! Defense is the foundation of any armor!” the craftsman hurriedly assured me. But he was missing the point.

“No, that’s not what I mean. I’m talking about this armor’s durability against my magick. Because look...” As I explained to the dwarf, I temporarily released the magick power I had been suppressing. Not at all of it, thankfully; I had been learning how to control the magick power that constantly threatened to overflow from me.

The coat began to glow and, in less than half a minute, a small rip began spreading along the fabric. I quickly suppressed my magick power again, removed the Draupnir, and showed it to the craftsman. The ring was dull red, indicating it was still capable of absorbing a lot more magick.

“See? It’s a bit fragile. I want you to go for much higher durability. It doesn’t matter how much magick it consumes, just make it so that it can withstand my magick.”

“Such a saturation of magick... I never imagined...”

The dwarf had drawn the magick power required to bring out the clothes’ full potential from me, and that part had gone well. However, when I released even more magick, the clothes, unable to withstand the overload, had begun to tear. The craftsman stood there, dumbfounded by this reality. It seemed I had far exceeded his design expectations.

That was all right. Given his craftsmanship and dedication, I was confident he would make the necessary improvements.

“Can you use this as the basis for my armor? As for the weapon, I believe I requested a bow. Is it ready?”

Eld answered, “The bow is nearly finished. We had already received your specifications through Tomoe-sama. Once it’s complete, we will require your presence again.”

“All right.”

After placing additional requests regarding the bow, I picked up a knife and a short sword, thinking they might be useful for camping and dismantling materials. The bow was based on a traditional Japanese yumi. Initially, I'd asked for a composite bow made from multiple materials, but since they had access to numerous special woods here, it turned out that a self bow, made from a single piece of wood, was often superior in various aspects.

If the strength and power were the same, I preferred the easier-to-maintain self bow over the composite bow, which required more care. While a composite bow might be suitable for practice, this one was for actual combat and would be my main weapon.

Having made the necessary arrangements for my bow and armor, I left the dwarves' workshop and headed to the arachs' location. Thanks to Mio, who had gathered everyone in one place, the discussions proceeded smoothly.

As we sorted and classified the items they had collected, I asked Mio to help with organizing my memories. I then left her in the Demiplane and returned to Tsige alone.

Next, I had to go to the Rembrandt Company. *I should probably tackle the Ruby Eyes request I found at the Adventurer's Guild, I thought. But first, I need to register there.* While I had planned to do this with Tomoe and Mio, I realized that registration was required to accept the request, so I should take care of it myself. Tomoe's time had run out, and as for Mio... Well, I would have to persuade her somehow.

Considering my level, accepting an S-Rank request might be challenging. It could be worth showing the guild an eye of a Ruby Eye to prove my capability. If that didn't work, I would consider having Toa and her group accept the request on my behalf.

It was going to be a long day, no doubt about it.

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At the Adventurer's Guild, where I met up with Toa, her sister, and the adventurers, I reregistered under the name Raidou. I was immediately asked



why Tomoe and Mio weren't with me, but I managed to dodge the question with a clever handful of excuses.

Of course, I was still Level 1. What could be causing this? If it was because I'd come from another world, then the two heroes summoned around the same time as me would also be stuck at the same level as me. *Well, they're heroes, I thought. With a bit of investigation, I should be able to roughly determine their levels. Public figures have no privacy, after all. Heh heh heh, my sympathies, heroes.*

Although I was registering as an adventurer, my main focus would be on my activities as a merchant. To build connections for my future endeavors, I would need to make sure the Rembrandt Company remembered me.

Toa had told me that she and her group planned to use this town as their base for a while. They had formed a party of four—brought together, no doubt, by the shared experience of falling into debt. Toa had also said that her new party could handle most of the requests available nearby; in fact, they'd already taken on a few.

This surprised me, as I hadn't known you could take multiple requests at once. *What is the limit?* I wondered. However, through our conversation, I learned that it was impossible for them to accept the S-Rank request on my behalf. Apparently, they'd already taken on the maximum number of requests allowed.

*Their lack of planning really puts on show the reason behind their past experience with debt.*

The party left that morning full of enthusiasm, promising to return by nightfall.

Their equipment had changed too, so maybe they'd gone shopping after all. *Adventurers certainly act quickly. I could probably learn from them. Perhaps I'm being too cautious...*

As I reflected on my conversation with Toa's group, I wandered around the Adventurer's Guild for a while before finally gathering the courage to approach the receptionist.

*“Um, I’d like to take on a request.”*

“Oh, Raidou-sama.” The receptionist greeted me with a warm smile. “Did you find a request you think you can handle?”

This guild had a lot of rookie registrations, so they were well-prepared to handle beginners. She probably didn’t expect a Level 1 adventurer who’d just reregistered to aim for an S-Rank request. While I was confident I could fulfil it, I had no idea what she would say.

*“Yes, I’d like to take this one.”* I handed over the S-Rank request for the eyes of a Ruby Eye that I had taken from the bulletin board yesterday.

Instantly, a wrinkle formed between the receptionist’s eyebrows. Her stern expression was quite intimidating.

“Raidou-sama, this is an S-Rank request, so you cannot accept it with your current rank and level.” She went on to instruct me to bring her a Rank D- or E request.

*“Well, actually—”*

“Huh?”

I took out a red gemstone from my pocket and placed it on the counter.

*“—I already have a Ruby Eye’s eye, so all that’s left is to deliver it. Wouldn’t this be acceptable? I don’t think it would damage the guild’s credibility.”*

*If I already have the requested item and can guarantee the request’s success, there shouldn’t be a problem... I think. Will this work?*

“Is this... the real thing?!”

*“Of course. I came to Tsige with Toa-san and her group earlier... This is from a creature we defeated on the way.”*

To preclude any suspicion, I didn’t add that I’d defeated said creature myself.

“I see... In that case, wait here a moment for me.”

The receptionist left through a door behind the counter marked “Authorized Personnel Only.” *Ah, looks like they’re bringing out someone important for this.*

I got up to take another look at the request board, but as I walked toward it, a different bulletin board caught my eye. I soon discovered that it was dedicated to requests concerning the Wasteland—all of them high level and high rank. Judging by the sheer number, it seemed demand far exceeded supply.

Before I could look at any request in detail, a man's voice came from behind the counter. "Raidou-sama, may I see the eye of a Ruby Eye?"

Was this the person in charge? I turned to see an older man standing next to the receptionist. Annoyingly, he was also quite a distinguished gentleman. *This world is truly full of handsome men and beautiful women!*

"Sure, go ahead," I wrote, returning to the counter and handing the item to him.

He probably wanted to verify its authenticity, which was fine by me. Having the Adventurer's Guild's endorsement would ensure no one could dispute it.

I watched as the older man examined the eye of a Ruby Eye with a serious expression.

"This is undoubtedly genuine. And not a single scratch on it. You must have struck the vital point in one blow... Impressive." The man announced his findings with a tense expression.

"Then, is it acceptable for Raidou-sama to take on the request?"

*Nice assist from the receptionist!*

"Yes, that will be fine. Change the request from S-Rank to a special rank, and allow him to accept it. I'll write a letter to explain the situation to Rembrandt-sama, so if you'll wait a moment..."

*Ah, I see. This way, they can follow the rules without issue.*

"No thank you, I'll head directly to the Rembrandt Company and explain the situation myself, so there's no need for a letter. Could I just have a map to the company?"

While I appreciated his offer, time was of the essence.

"I see," the man said after a moment's consideration. "Then we'll provide you with a map and a receipt." Turning to the receptionist, he added, "Would you

prepare everything for him?”

“Of course... Raidou-sama, here’s the map to the Rembrandt Company and the receipt. Once you hand over the requested item and get their signature, bring the receipt back to the guild. That will complete the request. Since it’s a special-rank request, completing it will promote you to Rank D.”

I nodded gratefully and had just turned to leave when the man addressed me again. “Raidou-sama, I heard you received this material from Toa-sama and her group...”

*“Yes, that’s correct.”*

“They sold a lot of their materials in town. They must be quite skilled. But why did they give something this valuable to you?”

*“Who knows... Maybe because I provided the carriage we traveled in? I’m not entirely sure.”*

“Hmm...”

*“Well then, if you’ll excuse me,”* I wrote, leaving the gentleman to his musings.

Once outside, I checked the map and realized the Rembrandt Company was quite close to the guild—just a few streets away, along some busy main roads. This meant there would be no risk of being attacked along the way.

The sun was high in the sky, and the sunlight was still strong.

*All right, may as well get going.*

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The location marked on the map turned out to be a large store, its shelves neatly arranged with weapons, armor, and a wide variety of everyday goods. It looked like a well-established trading company, and if I could make a strong connection here, it would be massively helpful.

Behind the counter stood the perfect image of an elderly butler, tall and slender with slicked-back hair and a beard. “If you’ll come with me, please,” he said, “I’ll fetch the master.”

The man took me to a reception room on the second floor, then left.

He seemed rather serious, but what would the master be like? In my experience the heads of these trading companies often had rather peculiar personalities. They could be extreme misers, ruthless in their methods, or perhaps spoiled second-generation heirs.

I hoped this one would be a reasonable person, although the chances of that seemed slim.

A few minutes later, the butler reentered the room accompanied by another man—large and burly, with well-defined muscles, long dark green hair, and an impressive Kaiser mustache—not exactly an appearance that screamed “merchant.”

He said, “My apologies for the wait. I regret keeping you, especially since you’ve accepted our request.”

His voice was surprisingly gentle, but this only added to my sense of unease.

Nonetheless, I stood up and extended my hand to meet his handshake.

*“Nice to meet you. My name is Raidou.”*





He seemed a little surprised when he saw the speech bubble but didn't show any signs of displeasure.

"I'm Rembrandt. Raidou-dono, is it? Forgive me, but I don't recognize the name. When did you arrive here?"

*"Yesterday. I traveled through three bases from the Edge of the World,"* I explained.

Both the butler and Rembrandt expressed their amazement with a small exclamation.

"I see. I try to remember the names of adventurers who can take on S-Rank requests, but since I didn't recognize yours, I was a bit apprehensive. My apologies."

I guess I understood their reaction if this was the first time hearing my name. Maybe they'd been verifying my credentials while I was waiting.

The master gestured for me to have a seat, and we continued our conversation.

*"No problem,"* I wrote. *"However, regarding this request, it's been changed from S Rank to a special rank. Please keep that in mind."*

"Oh, a special rank, is it? That's all right. So, Raidou-dono..." Rembrandt's eyes sharpened as he continued, "What are you considering for the payment timeline?"

In that moment, his demeanor had the unmistakable intensity of someone who'd faced more than his fair share of challenges. It made sense, given that he was running a trading company.

*What does he mean by timeline...? Oh, with these kinds of requests, it's about going out, getting the item, and bringing it back.*

Before I answered his question, there was something else I needed to clarify. The truth was, before coming here I had already made up my mind to be upfront. It wasn't in my nature to deceive people.

*"I'm sorry to change subjects, but there's something I need you to understand."*

“Go on,” Rembrandt said, his eyes narrowing slightly in suspicion.

*“I’m a Level 1, E-Rank adventurer. Also, I just registered at the Adventurer’s Guild today, and this is my first request. I hope you can understand that.”* I showed him my guild card. In hindsight, I should have let the guild write a letter explaining the situation. Oh well.

As expected, Rembrandt’s eyes widened in surprise. Then, with a troubled expression, he returned my guild card and said, “I’m sorry, but there’s nothing more for us to discuss. You should have done more research on Ruby Eyes before taking on this request.”

This was exactly the reaction I’d expected. *But this Rembrandt-san... He’s a good one.*

He seemed to be in his late thirties to early forties. Although gentle, he didn’t appear to be a soft person. And he didn’t come across as someone who had simply inherited his parents’ position. I could confidently say that he was a person of considerable capability.

Building a connection, having him as a backer, owing him a favor—whatever the case, he seemed like the perfect prospective. I wouldn’t have minded having him as a trading partner. In fact, I even thought I would like to learn the art of business from him.

I put away the card and held up my hand to stop him as he stood to leave.

“What is it?” he asked, his gaze already cold.

*“Even though I’m registered as an adventurer, I’m also considering registering with the Merchant Guild. I want to create my own trading company and live as a merchant—”*

Rembrandt interrupted, his face stern, “You’ve gotten the completely wrong idea. First, if you wish to join the Merchant Guild, you need to study properly and prepare for the examination. Next, if you plan to become a merchant in this town, it would be wise not to make an enemy of me. Finally, do *not* assume that selling items acquired as an adventurer will easily translate into a successful business. Trade is not that simple.”

*Huh? An exam? Well, that's the first I've heard of that. I should double-check with the Merchant Guild later... but for now, I need to keep the conversation going.*

*"Please, hear me out. I think that building a good relationship with you, Rembrandt-dono, would be extremely beneficial for me as a merchant. I didn't come here to cause you any trouble. Do you really think the Adventurer's Guild would assign a request to someone clearly lacking the necessary skills? There shouldn't have been any mistakes in the request receipt I gave you."*

Rembrandt had fallen silent, so I went on.

*"The reason I told you my rank was because I thought you might feel uncomfortable if you found out later."*

The guild's receipt was a simple one, stating that I had accepted the request to deliver an eye of a Ruby Eye. However, it did serve as proof that I had taken on the request.

Though the displeasure hadn't left his eyes, Rembrandt finally sat back down.

"It's still unpleasant to find out now," he said irritably.

*"I thought that by explaining now, we could establish a good relationship once the request is completed."*

"Are you saying you can defeat a Ruby Eye and bring back an eyeball? If you could do that, I would appreciate your honesty in disclosing your status. Even if your own combat ability is low, if you have the connections to get someone capable of defeating Ruby Eyes, I would like to maintain a good relationship with you. As far as I'm concerned, it doesn't matter who fulfils my request, so long as it gets done. The Adventurer's Guild's ranking system doesn't matter to me."

Good, I thought, feeling myself relax. *This might actually be working out.*

Still... This reaction made me feel like Rembrandt had a rather negative view of adventurers. *Maybe he's had a bad experience in the past, or he's had issues with requests not being fulfilled for ages?*

There was no point speculating about that right now. My priority was to explain the details of the request.

“Raidou-dono, how do you intend to fulfill my master’s request?” It was the butler who spoke up, his gaze sharp. *This person might be a former adventurer himself*, I realized. His actions were efficient, and his eyes were keen.

*“I can show you now.”*

“Show us? What do you—” Before Rembrandt could finish his sentence, I placed the red gemstone on the table.

*“You don’t need to worry about the timeline. Because I already have it. See for yourself.”*

Both of them hurriedly put on thin gloves and carefully examined the eye. *Oops, should I not have touched it with bare hands before? That might have been careless. From now on, I’ll handle items with gloves.*

They seemed to be checking not just the authenticity—which there should have been no issue with, as the Adventurer’s Guild had already verified it—but also the quality.

“I’m astonished,” Rembrandt said finally. “This is genuine, and it’s still slightly soft. It must have been harvested recently.”

*“Is that a problem?”* I asked.

“No. On the contrary, it adds to the value. It makes processing much easier.”

He carefully handed the eye to the butler, who wrapped it in a glossy cloth and placed it on the desk.

“I apologize. Because of its precious nature, it made us a bit nervous. Please forgive me for doubting your sincerity.” Rembrandt stood up and bowed his head, and behind him the butler followed suit.

As they raised their heads, I wrote, *“Don’t worry about it, it’s a natural response. By the way, could you tell me why you need the eye? A friend mentioned it could be used for imbuing items with special properties.”*

I mean, their reluctance to trust me *was* a natural response, and yet it still felt like an overreaction to doubt someone carrying an official request from the

Adventurer's Guild. However, there was no need to pry further into that just now.

"It's normal to be curious about how such a valuable item will be used. Allow me to explain as an apology for my earlier rudeness. Please, have a seat." He gestured as he returned to his own chair.

"An eye of a Ruby Eye is needed to create a special type of medicine," the butler explained. "As it's the key ingredient, it's indispensable."

*Medicine, huh?* So, the item wasn't just for imbuing items with special properties but also for treating diseases. No wonder an eye of a Ruby Eye was so valuable and traded at such a high price.

*"This eye is used as an ingredient in medicine? That's news to me."*

"The medicine it's used to make can treat common ailments as well since it's a universal cure," replied Rembrandt, who was suddenly in a much better mood.

*Huh? Common ailments as well... What does that mean?*

*"Are there diseases that aren't common? I come from far away, so I'm not too well-versed in local matters..."*

"No, if you want to live a normal life, you shouldn't let yourself become associated with these diseases," said the butler. "The reason we need this is that the people we need to save are afflicted with a cursed disease."

*"Cursed disease?"*

"Yes, it's a disease caused by a shaman through a ritual. Once one is afflicted, there's no cure except through magical medicine or having the shaman lift the curse. Some cases are so severe that even the shaman can't lift them, and once they take effect, there's nothing that can be done."

That sounded awful. I had an inkling that magical medicine would be expensive. The shaman would probably need a wide variety of materials and catalysts, but for the victims, it would be no laughing matter.

"The curse placed on our madam and the two young ladies is a Level 8 cursed disease," the butler went on with a pained expression. "Temporary relief of the

symptoms can be managed with expensive magical medicine, but for a complete cure, one needs a special magical medicine called Ambrosia. It can be made from the eye of a Ruby Eye.

“We captured the shaman and identified the level of the curse. That’s when we put out a request to the guild for the eyes. It’s been three months since then, and we’ve only managed to collect one. To make matters worse, several... fraudulent individuals have appeared, pretending to have procured the items. We were really at our wit’s end.”

*“Where’s the shaman now?”*

By way of answer, Rembrandt said, “I wanted to find out ways to alleviate the symptoms, but he insisted his curse was perfect and said nothing more than the level of the curse, until the end.”

*Until the end, huh? So, he’s no longer in this world. This situation is serious.*

“So, you’ve been suppressing the symptoms with magical medicine, and at the same time you’ve been trying to gather the eyes. But why did this shaman target your family in the first place?”

Rembrandt simply shook his head. The way the butler had said “Level 8,” it sounded pretty high. Running a large trading company, he was bound to have a few enemies...

“When a business grows, it inevitably attracts resentment, no matter how good of a manager you are,” Rembrandt confirmed. “I have plenty of rivals who would like to see me fail, but we couldn’t identify who was behind it. Recently, we even caught some people snooping around our house. After interrogation, we found out they were just adventurers hired to watch us and didn’t know anything more.

“Even before the incident with the shaman, we had plenty of those types around, and the clients that hired each adventurer were different. It’s a dead end,” he added with resignation.

“But targeting our madam and the young ladies is the height of cowardice!” the butler said, his tone agitated.

Rembrandt continued, trying to calm him, “They probably thought it would be difficult to get to me because I have strong security. The real fault lies with me for not having the foresight to make sure my family was protected.” He looked down, disheartened.

I couldn’t find the right words to say. The pain of watching his family suffer for three months without being able to do anything was unimaginable to me. If I knew there was someone out there responsible for such suffering, I doubted I could remain as composed.

At least Rembrandt was trying to keep a level head about it, which was commendable. A heavy silence filled the room.

*So, there are people out there who just want to make Rembrandt suffer. No demands for a cure or ransom, just a curse that leads to death. That’s truly cruel.*

“Recently, my wife and daughters have even started to speak of wishing for death. We were truly in despair... but now, at least, we can take a step forward,” Rembrandt said, lifting his head to smile at me. The smile showed that he had walked a long and dark path, but even his Kaiser mustache seemed more spirited now.

*Wishing for death... If my sisters or my parents were in that kind of situation... No! I can’t even think about it!*

*“A step forward?”*

“To create the medicine for one person, we need two eyes. We’ve already secured enough other ingredients for three people, so this means we can save at least one person.”

So, they had everything else, and the last thing they needed was this extremely rare ingredient. Indeed, this could be considered a step forward for those who could only continue to prolong their lives.

*“That’s good news. And the preparation of the Ambrosia, is it feasible?”*

“Yes, we have some fairly high-level adventurers gathered in Tsige,” came the butler’s answer. “As long as we provide the method and materials, an alchemist of Level 80 or above should be sufficient.”

*Level 80... That's not nearly as high as I was thinking for such a valuable medicine.*

*"It must be difficult to gather the materials and follow the recipe."*

"That's right. In this case, you can also learn the recipe for Ambrosia, which by itself is valuable enough that an alchemist would usually have to pay for it. Given the circumstances, we're treating this as a standard request."

Indeed, for a specialist, once they'd made it, they would be able to remember the method. The recipe for Ambrosia, counted among the universal medicines, would surely be something many would want to know.

*Then maybe I should bring this up with the young alchemist traveling with Toa? Or with Mio or the arachs... No, let's go with the alchemist. Mio's unpredictable and might mess up, and the arachs still can't transform into humans.*

Now, if I could watch, Tomoe could record it for me later... *All right, let's ask Rembrandt.*

*"By the way, do you think I'd be able to see the medicine being made? I promise I won't get in the way."*

"Hmm, well..." Rembrandt thought for a moment, no doubt considering whether he wanted the precious recipe to be needlessly spread. But I didn't think he could refuse my request. After all, I still had two aces up my sleeve.

*"I have a friend who's an Alchemy Meister at Level 114," I added. "If I ask him to make the medicine, it should save you the time and trouble of making a request."*

"Oh!" A sigh of admiration escaped from Rembrandt. It seemed like he had no more concerns.

*"Also..."*

I took out five more red lumps from the bag and placed them on the table. Given that the fulfillment rate of his request was so low, the guild had probably kept Rembrandt's request up even though I had promised to deliver one eye of a Ruby Eye already.



The reception room fell silent. The two men were struck dumb while I smiled smugly. This was the perfect time to show off.

*“There’s all six eyes, as desired. That completes the request, correct?”*

In that instant, the two men hugged each other tightly and started bawling—prompting a handful of servants to burst into the reception room without knocking. As soon as they realized what had happened, some began crying on the spot, while others embraced whoever was closest to them.

I waited for the commotion to settle down before letting Rembrandt sign my receipt. I told him I’d bring the alchemist tomorrow, then made my way out of the store—but only after Rembrandt got the attention of everyone inside and they gave me a grand send-off, cheering loudly.

I hunched my shoulders and headed to my next destination, the Merchant Guild. The sun was beginning to sink low in the sky, but my day was far from over.

# Tsukimichi

## Chapter 3

**F**inally, I was at the Merchant Guild.

Whether you're setting up a store somewhere or taking on the ways of a traveling merchant, joining the Merchant Guild and obtaining a Guild Card was absolutely necessary. You'd become a hunted man if you were a black-market merchant!

I was bursting with excitement to join, but—

I'd just found out that there was a prerequisite for membership in the Merchant Guild: an exam. *Can't believe I didn't think of that!* And even worse, it was an annual exam. *Please, spare me. I'd prefer a rolling admission, honestly.*

*Clang, clang.*

The bells that sounded as I opened the door brought to mind a Showa-era coffee shop.

The shop floor wasn't that spacious; it was somewhere on the larger side of a convenience store. Especially for a town this size, I'd have expected bigger.

In front of the reception counter sat a few long benches. In fact, the whole inside had the feeling of a small bank in a regional city.

The lady at the front counter looked to be in her late twenties and was exuding a calm, mature allure. When I approached, she greeted me with a bow and a smile.

"Welcome, how can I help you today?"

Her mouth and brow twitched slightly at my bizarre appearance, yet she maintained her businesslike smile. *Impressive... It's making me tear up just saying this.*

So, she was at the level of the Rembrandt Company's butler. *Well, he didn't even bat an eye, so maybe it's harsh to compare.*

After a bow, I created a speech bubble in the air before me, writing out, *"Can you read this?"* The lady glanced at it, her expression momentarily shifting to startlement before her smile returned, and she answered, "Yes, I can."

*"Excuse me,"* I wrote, *"but I'm considering joining the Merchant Guild."*

"Joining, are you?" She tilted her head slightly in suspicion.

*Wow... Very charming. Still can't believe how good-looking everyone in this world is.*

Now that I thought about it, I realized I'd come across a few—very few—people in Tsige who resembled me. They were beastkin though; a mole and a tanuki.

"You appear to be a magician."

*"No, I'm an adventurer."*

*Adventurer*—I liked the sound of the word. It sounded impressive, like a freelancer.

"An adventurer... So, you're considering joining our Guild without any introduction?"

*"Yes, I discovered some rare trade goods and thought I'd try my hand at trading."*

The lady seemed to ponder for a moment, during which I wondered if maybe they weren't accepting new members.

"If you did join us, you'd also be able to sell your trade routes to us."

*Wow, so you can sell trade routes for money here. What a strange world. But maybe it's common knowledge. She doesn't seem to be making any special offer.*

I really wanted to become a merchant, so I would have to make it clear that I was determined to join. Sure, I was interested in trade routes, but not right now.

*“I actually want to start my own business.”*

“But hiding your face and being unable to communicate in the common language, even if you pass the exam and meet the conditions, the world of commerce, where trust is everything, might be...”

Ah, so rather than seeing a problem for her, she was worried about my future based on my appearance. This lady was quite, no, extremely kind.

*“Thanks for your concern,”* I wrote. *“I have two people with me, so worst-case scenario, I can avoid appearing in public. Could you tell me about the exam and any other conditions?”*

“Ah, you have companions... I see, I apologize.”

Then, the lady kindly explained the test and the rest of the conditions, and even gave me some pro tips about it all.

Apparently, there was an “exam season,” in which several large trading companies all offered the test. Most first-time merchants took the exam then. However, the exam was always available. During the offseason, it wasn’t uncommon for there to be only one applicant.

The exam consisted of two stages: a written test and a procurement test. The written part assessed basic knowledge required for merchants, while the procurement test evaluated practical skills.

For the written exam, the Guild sold textbooks that you could study in advance.

The procurement test came afterward, and it involved gathering a variety of materials. But you had significant freedom in *how* you acquired these materials. Simply put, it would be easy for those with financial resources. As long as you didn’t use illegal methods that would trouble the Guild, anything went. However, there were also notoriously difficult tasks, known as “flops.” If you drew one of those, you were basically guaranteed to fail.

The other conditions basically all came down to money: the exam fee, security deposit, and annual Guild membership fee. I guess the nature of this work meant that you needed to prove a certain level of financial stability to be accepted into the Guild.

You could take the exam as many times as you liked, but you had to pay the exam fee each time. And each time you failed, you had to wait six months before trying again.

*Hmmm, so I should be sure I'm ready before I try it. First things first, I should check out the textbook she mentioned.*

*"Could I get the textbook, please?"*

*"Oh, yes. That will be two gold coins."*

*Two gold... that's about 200,000 yen?! What kind of textbook is this?!*

*Wait a minute...*

*Books might be quite expensive in this world, I mused. So, all those books Rembrandt had in his office... Wow.*

*But I can't afford to skimp on this...*

"You don't have to buy it if you can't afford it," the lady suggested with a sympathetic smile. "You could also consider working for a trading company and studying there."

While it was true that her suggested course of action would provide me with valuable experience, it just wasn't feasible for me right now. *Who knows how long I'd have to be an apprentice before I'd get the necessary knowledge?*

*Well, that's fine. I'm willing to pay for something important.* I still had plenty of money left from selling my hoard of jewels (note: they were fruit), so it wasn't like this would break the bank. Besides, I was expecting to collect payment tomorrow for a recent job.

*"No, that's fine. Two gold, right? Here you go,"* I wrote, handing the coins to her.

She seemed a bit surprised but accepted the money. *Do first-time applicants not usually buy the textbook?*

*All right, let's see what's in this.*

*Flip, flip.*

*Flip, flip.*

*Flip...*

*Huh? This is—*

*Flip, flip, flip, flip...*

*Thud.*

*“Um, can I take the exam right now?”*

“What?!” The lady’s voice exploded, causing a stir within the guild.

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I was directed into another room and told to wait there. While I sat there, I quickly skimmed through the textbook.

After a while, an examiner entered the room with a set of test papers, and I began looking at the questions.

They involved some basic arithmetic and a few rote questions about prohibited items and items you needed special licenses for. However, it was clear that the emphasis was on arithmetic, with minimal memorization required.

The calculations could be handled with middle-school level math skills. As for the memorization questions, I was lucky enough to have scanned the relevant sections of the textbook. *This is a piece of cake.*

I handed my papers back with about half my time remaining. As a high school student, this was honestly a breeze.

Since I was the only examinee, the facilitator began to grade my work as I watched. But... something strange was coming over him. As his eyes swept over my answer sheet, they grew wide, and the man began to tremble.

After a moment of tense silence, the man squeezed out one word. “Pass...”

His face twitched. Then he muttered quietly, “I’ve never heard of a perfect score before... It’s a miracle.”

Once he’d mostly composed himself, he told me excitedly that in the case of a perfect score, the deposit amount remained the same, but it could be paid in flexible installments.

I tried to hide my disappointment; I planned to pay in full anyway, so I would have preferred a different perk.

Oh well; I’d cleared the first stage!

What did it mean that a perfect score was considered a miracle for a test of this level? Probably that there were no “schools” in this world. The existence of an educational system itself seemed doubtful.

When I asked if I could proceed with the procurement test immediately, the examiner said I could.

“In that case, I’ll have you pick one ball from this box.”

He handed me a box with a hole just big enough to fit my hand and too dark to see anything inside it. I did as instructed and handed my selection to the examiner, who checked the number on the ball and passed me back a note.

*Let’s see what it says.*

*Rido Crystal, Maze Forma, Illumina Tusk, Howl Fang. Please bring these four materials, or items of equivalent value, within three days. The Guild will have an expert assessor evaluate their worth.*

I had never heard of those four materials before. While I was staring at the note, the examiner spoke up. “You seem to have drawn the short straw. Unless you happen to know a Level 50 adventurer, gathering these materials is impossible.”

Judging by his tone and expression, my task was hopeless. *Ah, so this is what they call a “flop,” huh?* Incidentally, the easiest task was reportedly “one empty potion bottle.”

*Hahaha, just my luck!*

For the average merchant apprentice, sourcing these materials by themselves would be impossible. So, one would need to hire some experienced adventurers, which would cost money.

*But it says “items of equivalent value,” right?*

*In that case, the materials I gathered from the monsters in the Wasteland should do the trick! After all, that place required at least a Level 95 to enter.*

*I take back what I said—I’m actually lucky! I might be able to pass today!*

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“I’m here!!!” I announced, so excited that I accidentally slipped into physically speaking Japanese.

The Merchant Guild still had its lights on and there were signs of activity inside. Perfect!

*“Hello, it’s Raidou.”*

“Oh? Raidou, you’re in the middle of your procurement test, aren’t you?”

*“Yes, I’ve finished it. Can you check?”*

“What?!” The lady’s loud voice echoed through the guild for the second time that day.

*“Like I said, I’ve brought the four requested materials, or items of equivalent value. If you can check them for me.”*

“Yes! Just a moment! Examiner! Examiner!”

The lady turned and called out to the man I’d been working with earlier, then ran toward him anyway. He was in the back holding some documents, behind the door marked “No Entry Except for Authorized Personnel”—which had been left wide open. They probably weren’t expecting any visitors at this hour.

Immediately, the examiner and the receptionist began walking back to the counter. *Are they going to verify it right here?* I wondered. *That would make things easy.*



“Raidou? It hasn’t been long since you were given the task, you know? Don’t mess around—”

*“Please just check these.”*

I opened the lid to reveal around eight items. Since I wasn’t sure about the evaluation criteria, I’d brought double the amount just in case. I’d even included small and duplicate items... So now we just had to see how this went.

“Huh? Hmm?!”

*“How are they? I believe they meet the requirement.”*

“Where did you get these?!”

*“From an adventurer I traveled through the Wasteland with recently.”*

“All of these?! From whom?!”

*“A group led by Toa-san, a Dark Thief. They said they’ve already sold their share of the materials... Can you verify that?”*

The old man shot a sharp glance at the lady, who quickly leafed through a thick ledger-like file. It didn’t take her long to find the entry she was looking for.

“That’s correct... A large quantity of rare materials was brought to the trade and materials exchange this morning. They’ve already been distributed to stores and research institutions handling synthesis and enchantment.”

“This must be a part of those rare materials!”

The old man held his head in his hands, evidently frustrated that his test had been so easily passed.

*“Right.”*

“You said your name was Raidou, correct?”

*“Yes.”*

“Congratulations, you pass with flying colors.”

*“Yay. I’m really happy.”*

“You don’t seem all that excited. You’re the first person to ever pass the merchant exam on the same day they applied. Truly remarkable...”

Well, it's not that I wasn't happy... It's just that since I only expressed myself through speech bubbles, I might not have seemed as ecstatic as I felt.

*"Thank you very much."*

"We'll have your Guild Card ready by tomorrow afternoon. Are you available to come by then? We'll explain the regulations, and what you can do with your card."

*"Sure, that's fine."*

"Good. Then... she'll help you with the paperwork." The old man left the room as if sleepwalking, leaving the lady to handle the procedures.

*Did I mess up? Oh well, it doesn't matter.*

"I'm amazed!" she exclaimed as soon as he had gone. "You're really something! I can't believe you passed so easily."

*Hmm! This lady's view of me seems to have leveled up!*

"No, I was just lucky," I assured her. *"I passed using the knowledge and materials I had."*

"Hehe, and you're humble too. Now, here are the forms for the registration process. How would you like to take care of the deposit and the first-year Guild fee?"

*So, she's asking if I want to pay now...*

*"I'll pay everything now. The deposit is ten gold, and the Guild fee is one, correct?"* I stacked eleven gold coins on the counter.

"Paying in full... I see. Really, who are you, Raidou?"

It seemed my actions had piqued her interest; this conversation could get lengthy.

*"What kind of person, you mean? No one particularly unusual, except for communicating through writing. And this,"* I added, pointing to my mask.

"It's not every day I see someone wearing a mask... If you don't mind my asking, why do you wear it?"

She was brimming with curiosity—and honestly, it felt nice to have a beautiful woman take an interest in me.

*“It’s from when I was a kid, so I don’t remember much, but apparently, I was cursed. This mask weakens the curse, but now I can’t take it off.”*

“A c-curse?” the woman asked nervously.

*“Yes. It’s also why I can’t speak the common language. This writing is a desperate work-around. Fortunately, I can use magick, which has been my saving grace.”*

“Th-That’s unfortunate. I hope you’re able to take the mask off soon.”

As expected, mentioning the curse had made her wary. Curses were horrifying things, especially unknown ones.

*“Thank you. I can speak several other languages, so I can still communicate with some people.”*

In truth, it was because the Goddess didn’t consider me hyuman that I couldn’t speak the common language. However, I could understand and speak the ancient languages used in magick, the spirit language for summoning contracts, and the unique languages developed by non-hyumans like elves and dwarves.

*Damn that Goddess. One day, I’ll make sure she fixes this ridiculous condition!*

“Wow, that could be a tremendous advantage in trading,” the woman commented. “You might be able to handle goods that aren’t common among hyumans.”

*“Yes, I’m looking forward to my future business. Here, is this all filled out correctly?”* I asked, handing her the form.

“Hmm, yes, everything is in order. Written in such beautiful common language too! Uh, and...”

Was there something else on her mind? As nice as our chat had been, I wanted to get home soon. I decided to gently cut her off before she could ask any more questions.

*“Well, it’s getting late, so I’d better go. I’ll come back tomorrow.”*

With that, I left the guild.

*Passing both parts of the Guild exam on the same day, I thought, shaking my head. Hopefully, it adds some prestige to my merchant career.*

Just then, a loud grumble from my stomach reminded me that I hadn't properly eaten today. Time to get some food.

*I should just grab some dinner, I thought. But eating alone felt kind of... lonely. I still couldn't shake off the fun I'd had at that party the other day.*

I stopped and thought for a moment.

*Oh, I'll call Tomoe and Mio! We can eat while they give me their reports on the Demiplane.*

While I waited, I ducked into a less crowded restaurant and took a seat in a secluded corner. I ordered a fruit juice, thinking that shouldn't affect my appetite too much.

After a few minutes, my juice arrived.

*Hmm, it's yellow. Citrus flavor, maybe? It looks promising.*

*Let's give it a try.*

*Just a sip...*

*Not bad. Tastes like banana, weirdly enough. And it's so thin. As I took another sip, my opinion began to change. Well... guess I don't really like watery banana juice. Ugh.*

"Did you hear about the forest just before the Edge?"

"Yeah, apparently the people who've been sneaking in haven't been coming back. There's a search request out."

"No, no, it's worse. The people who went looking for them haven't come back either. The request rank just shot up!"

I perked up at the gossip. *The forest just beyond the Edge... That's on the way to the Edge of the World from Tsige. We didn't pass through there.*

*It's not a good sign if people are going missing that close to town.*

To enter the Edge, you needed at least to be at Rank C, and I was currently Rank D. If the request rank had gone up, it would be even more irrelevant to me. I was starting to understand just how difficult it was for adventurers to meet both rank and level requirements—which was why there were idiots who tried to sneak into the Wasteland.

Regardless of rank, anyone who sneaked into it without a high enough level or rank to reap the benefits was truly unhinged... and not the adventurous kind of unhinged, but the you-don't-value-your-life-very-much kind. Those rank and level requirements existed to prevent unnecessary deaths among adventurers.

*Well, perhaps in a way, those people are the truest adventurers.*

Given what I'd just heard, it sounded like whatever was happening in the Wasteland was beyond the capability of those who entered legally. Personally, I would strongly advise any new adventurers to stay clear. As for the trespassers, I couldn't have cared less.

Perhaps a strong monster from deeper in the Wasteland had settled in the forest. It's true that there were quite a few strong-looking monsters around the Edge of the World for a while. I had actually been glad whenever they showed up; it could get lonely around there with no encounters. Thanks to Mio's presence, those monsters kept their distance, making the place feel more like a safari park. But if higher-level monsters appeared around here, even Toa's group would struggle, or maybe get wiped out. And if they actually made it into the city... I couldn't imagine the death toll.

After a moment of silence, one of the men said, "That's troubling... By the way, did you hear what happened? They say someone accomplished that task."

"Oh, someone did? Even though Lime asked us to mess with their procurement, the encounter rate is so low I thought it wouldn't matter. I assumed it was another scam."

"No, apparently, they're celebrating. The guild is on board too, and Lime's on edge for the first time in a while."

"Come on. It's got to be fake. Even Lime would have a hard time getting that stuff. And those guys trying to ruin our jobs for their own business deserve what's coming to them."

“Yeah. Easy requests that even beginners can tackle help our juniors grow, and they don’t seem to get that. No wonder Lime’s mad.”

“Taking a few years off a daughter’s youth isn’t deadly; it just makes her sleep. They’re overreacting.”

“Exactly. When the girl wakes up, we should celebrate too. With a feast.”

“You’d celebrate anything just to drink, wouldn’t you?”

“So, where are we going tonight? I’m getting thirsty.”

“Yeah, let’s head to...”

*Lime.* If I recalled correctly, one of the top rankers in Tsige was named Lime Latte.

So, there was some conflict going on... They’d mentioned adventurers, taking away time, waking up... It sounded complicated, but not like anything that particularly concerned me.

*Lime Latte.* Although the name sounded like a singularly unappetizing combination, the guys I’d overheard seemed to respect him. *A top ranker with a good reputation and a brotherly demeanor—sounds like someone worth knowing.*

*So, what should I do next? Since I’m out and about, I should stick to my principle of finishing whatever I order. Even if I don’t like this juice... Hey, who knows, I might even develop a taste for it.*

As for Rembrandt’s curse, there was nothing more I could do just now. The actual perpetrator was already dead, and while I would have loved to find the mastermind behind it and make them regret ever being born, if the Rembrandt Company’s extensive network couldn’t find any leads, there’s no way I could, even with cheats. If I had some sort of hero’s blessing, maybe an event would occur, but things never went that smoothly. Still, if the mastermind was constantly monitoring the Rembrandt family, they were probably already aware of my presence, and they might try something. I should stay alert and be ready to react defensively.

*If they do attack directly, I might let Tomoe take the lead and show them how powerful we are. Hehe.*

Speaking of Tomoe... I was still curious about the state of the Demiplane. Sure, I'd just been there that morning, but it made me uneasy leaving Mio behind to handle things alone.

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*Wait, though. I'm in charge here. And another thing I almost forgot—I'm hungry.*

I'd intended to call Tomoe and Mio so we could get dinner. And I was going to have them report on the state of Demiplane.

*That's right, why should I be chasing after them to get their reports? They're the ones who should be coming to me!*

*All right, let's summon the two of them...*

But just as I was about to use Telepathy...

*"Young Master! Young Master! Are you available right now?!"*

*Ah, there's a troublemaker I haven't heard from in a while. Your timing could not have been more perfect.*

*"Yeah, what's up?"*

*"What's with that lethargic tone?!"* Tomoe asked.

*"Well, it's just... when someone who hasn't contacted me in a while suddenly shouts asking if I'm available... I've been busy too, you know?"* I hoped she could hear the annoyance in my voice. *Seriously, she didn't bother reporting on the task I ordered, she left it all to Ema, and now she has the nerve to act so high and mighty!*

*"W-Well, I have properly achieved the tasks I was given and am ready to report my findings. That's why I needed time, Young Master!"* she stammered.

*Yeah, right.* All that from the type of person who'd happily skip a few meals to buy a game that just came out. No way could I fully trust her. She definitely

needed to work on reprioritizing her hobbies. I wouldn't have been surprised if she skipped a crucial report and suddenly, with a straight face, said, "I found some rice!"

*"So, is it urgent?"* I asked.

*"Yes, please come over here right away! Something's wrong with Mio!"*

*Mio?* Now that she mentioned it, I hadn't communicated with her once since we parted ways in the morning. Usually, at times like these, she'd insist on talking via Telepathy every half hour. But I'd been busy all day, and it had slipped my mind.

*Could it be... that the mana I supplied her has dried up, and she's going berserk?!*

*"No way, did she turn back into a spider?!"* I asked worriedly.

*"It's worse than that! Just hurry up and come, Young Master! If anyone can do something, it's you!"*

*Worse than reverting to spider form? Oh, come on!* I quickly finished my drink and slipped out the restaurant's back door into an alley. After confirming no one was around, I created the Gate of Mist. If I remembered correctly, Mio should be in the archive.

It was the room Tomoe had built in the basement of the building Ema's crew worked in, the place where my memories were stored. Intended to be relocated once my house was completed, it was a simple setup for now, but from my perspective it was quite a respectable underground library.

Since I'd asked her to do her organizing work there, she shouldn't have been anywhere else.

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As soon as I arrived at the archive in the Demiplane, the scene that met my eyes was—

*"Tomoe-san! The next episode, quick!"*



“Mio, let’s end it here for today. Look, it’s already dark outside. Young Master should be getting here soon, don’t you think?”

“Then let’s keep going until he arrives!”

“How long do you think I’ve been doing this nonstop! It’s over, over!”

“Oh my. Is that so? In that case, this crystal panel might get a little scratched up.” Mio pulled out a transparent panel about the size of a sheet of paper and held it in her hand.

“Aaah!” Tomoe shrieked in an unintelligible cry and writhed in agony. “You! That’s the Mito Komon I painstakingly edited the commercials and noise out of!”

“I really, really want to see the next episode!”

“Ohhhhhh! W-Wait, be careful! If anything happens to it, I won’t work with you ever again! Are you okay with that?”

“No way! If that happens, I might be so shocked that I’ll eat everything here in one go!”



“What?! What?! What?! What?!”

—*What the heck?*

*Mio’s pleading for something and Tomoe is trying to stop her?*

There they were in the archive, having a childish argument. *And, Tomoe, editing out commercials and removing noise? What kind of video editor are you?*

I’d wondered what form my memories would take down here. But if that entire Mito Komon series was on that one panel, that kind of storage capacity would amaze even modern people. That was beside the point, though. Was anyone else here other than the two of them?

Looking around, I spotted an arach a little distance away. “Hey, what’s going on here?” I asked, walking closer to her.

“Young Master, after we met, we kept working on the organizing and categorizing here with Mio-sama.”

*Wow, she’s gotten much better at speaking. Impressive... She’s learning at an incredible pace. I couldn’t manage that even after a lot of practice. Jealous.*

“Yeah, and then?”

“Along the way, Tomoe-sama came back and began something called ‘Kansho.’”

*Kansho, as in appreciative meditation, huh. Come on, Tomoe. You have a mountain of work to do, don’t you? Please, act like the leader you are!*

“Mio-sama joined in as well.”

*You guys are accomplices?!*

“But then I scolded Tomoe-sama, and she came back to help right away.”

*Oh, a model student. Then how did this situation come about?*

“Mio-sama went to organize those materials over there.”

I looked in the direction the arach pointed. *Ah, right, she mentioned something about other videos and memories besides historical dramas. The*

arach's explanation was long-winded and a little hard to understand; I appreciated her earnest and polite effort, but I was eager for her to get to the point.

"And then it turned out like this."

*What?! Didn't we skip all the important parts?*

"Mio-sama was standing there, frozen, and then Tomoe-sama was being dragged away."

*What on earth happened here?* I wondered, but I thanked the arach for her explanation and walked over to my two "loyal" followers, who were still bickering.

Now that it had come to this, I had to ask them directly.

"I'm here, Tomoe. So, what's going on?" I couldn't help but let out a deeply exasperated sigh. Well, anyone would, seeing this scene.

"Oh, Young Master! Thank you for coming! Can you please stop this idiot?!"

"Young Master. Isn't it unfair that Tomoe-san is the only one who gets to have fun?"

"What are you talking about? This is my legitimate enjoyment, approved by the Young Master!"

*"The only one"? "Approved"?*

*Oh no, could it be? Has Mio gotten hooked on historical dramas just like Tomoe?* That would be a situation and a half.

If Mio was using the Mito Komon footage as a threat, then maybe that wasn't the case.

Within seconds, the two of them started squabbling again. For now...

"Calm down!!!" I shouted.

*Why are these two supposed adults arguing like children? And why am I the one mediating?*

The archive fell silent.

“Ahem, have you calmed down? Mio, first, can you give that back to Tomoe?”

“Yes, I’m sorry,” Mio said.

“Good.”

Tomoe hugged the Mito Komon panel to her chest, her expression that of satisfaction.

“Now, Tomoe, explain to me what’s going on. Especially why I had to come here to break up your fight.”

“Uh... well, when I came here this afternoon, they were already—” Tomoe began.

“First off, that’s strange,” I interrupted. “You were supposed to be handling a lot of different tasks. Why did you come here first? You should have reported to me before that.”

“Uh, well... I had a few things to check...”

“As in, checking out historical dramas, perhaps?”

“Ugh! No, it’s just that I needed a break...” Tomoe mumbled incoherently. So, she’d decided to take a break before reporting in. *I’m surrounded by optimistic people.*

“So, why did you end up arguing with Mio... Hmm, what’s this?” I was distracted by a familiar image. It was probably a rerun, but it was nostalgic.

“Young Master, please listen...” Tomoe begged, her voice weak.

“Tomoe? Why do you look like you haven’t slept in a week?”

“Mio... Mio has been using me like an appliance!!!” Tomoe collapsed, sobbing.

*An appliance... Tomoe, how much more modern are you planning on becoming?* Anyway, her terribly exhausted state seemed genuine. In contrast, Mio wore the mischievous smile of a child caught in a prank.

“Young Master, I heard you gave Tomoe-san permission to watch historical dramas. Because of that, Tomoe-san has been neglecting her duties and doing nothing but editing videos,” Mio explained.

*So, she was so absorbed in video editing that she didn't contact me when she got back. What a fanatic.*

"Oh, that's a problem."

"But! Given how captivating it is, I can understand why." Mio's forceful words felt ominous. "I beg you, Young Master! Please give me permission to watch them as well!"

*But you were already watching, weren't you? Permission or not.*

*I see, I was tricked. It's because of my prior compromise with Tomoe.*

Inspired by Tomoe, who had permission to watch historical dramas, Mio had watched something on TV from my miscellaneous memories and gotten hooked.

*Mio, I asked you to help Ema and the others with their work by organizing documents and petitions since you understand Japanese. What are you doing deep in the archive? Even if you can't read the text, I thought you'd be useful since you can understand the spoken language... What a mess.*

"So, historical dramas? I don't mind—" I started.

"That's not it! I'm not interested in that sort of thing!" Mio exclaimed.

"Mio! How can you say 'that sort of thing'!" Tomoe exploded. "How rude! Historical dramas are the epitome of Japanese culture!"

*So, Mio got hooked on something else. I'll ignore Tomoe's rant for now.*

The only ones allowed to access my unorganized memories in the depths of the archive were the arachs, Mio, and Tomoe. Ema and the others could only view the organized knowledge compiled into encyclopedias near the entrance. They didn't need permission to go deeper.

*Something else, huh?*

I looked at the screen again. *This is... an anime, right?*

*Oh no. Oh no, no, no, no, no!*

*Is this for real?!*

I almost recoiled in shock.

“Mio, you want to watch *this*?” I asked.

It was a long series, rivaling Mito Komon in number of episodes.

“Yes, I would like your permission to watch this!” Her face was full of determination.

*Why do I have the complete series?* I couldn’t help wondering. *I don’t remember collecting it, and I certainly didn’t have the DVDs.*

*Ah, right, it must be that guy.* Last summer, my rich friend from the archery club had forced me to watch this show nonstop. We’d marathoned it in his perfectly air-conditioned media room!

The more I remembered it, the more I hated it.

“All right. Tomoe, let Mio watch it. I’m drained.”

“Young Master?! Are you sure? But my time will—” Tomoe complained.

“Thank you very much, Young Master!!!” Mio said excitedly.

“Oh... just remember, it’s *fiction*. Don’t confuse it with reality. Tomoe, give me your report.”

*I’m going to become a merchant, right? Naturally, these two are my followers. They’re like employees. Yet one is obsessed with historical dramas to the point where she seems like a samurai or a bandit, and the other is clueless about common sense and can get hooked on that kind of stuff. My future isn’t looking so bright.*

After having Tomoe give her report in a separate room and scolding her for disappearing so suddenly, I was mentally and physically exhausted. Not wanting to deal with the hassle of being absent at the inn, I returned to my room despite my fatigue.

“So tired...” I muttered as I looked out the open window.

It was already late into the night, and Tsige quieted down surprisingly early. The people partying now probably wouldn’t be for much longer. Of course, the town’s entertainment district might have had places that never slept.

I was sitting in a rocking chair, which I suddenly realized was my favorite piece of furniture in the room. It provided the best comfort to my weary heart.

It had been a hectic day, and it had been a long time since I'd felt this tired, either mentally or physically.

Other than the chair, the room held two beds and a large sofa. Normally, followers would take turns using the sofa, but both of them were sound asleep in the beds. Just a while ago...

"Feel free to join either bed!"

They had both nodded enthusiastically.

What a joke this was turning out to be.

*Can I really manage this? Sigh, I guess I'll sleep on the sofa tonight.*

So, it was decided. I was pretty sure I was a healthy high school boy, but I felt absolutely no attraction toward those two. Maybe it was because I knew their true nature, or maybe because they were such problem children.

Spending the night looking out the window perhaps wouldn't be so bad. There was nothing like watching the moon and feeling a faint night breeze to calm you down. It reminded me of Tsukuyomi-sama. Though it also reminded me of the Goddess, which balanced it out.

The Goddess... Given my conversation with Tsukuyomi-sama, she might be a moon deity. I hoped and prayed that was not the case.

Tomorrow, I would visit the Rembrandt estate. I'd already contacted the alchemist, and the two of us would be meeting in front of the Adventurer's Guild. He was ecstatic to work on the Ambrosia, the fabled elixir.

The other members seemed to be on break and were just looking for a cheap and comfortable inn to stay at.

We needed to find a place where we could stay for a long time too. If we were going to do business here, we would need a warehouse to store goods. There was a lot to get ready; I would probably be running around the city for a while until things settled down.



A chill in the wind coming through the window tightened my chest. These days it felt like autumn, although I still wasn't sure if this world actually *had* a thing called autumn.

"I need to stay focused," I muttered, a little disappointed in myself. "Both of my followers seem to be developing strange hobbies. That's not good."

In the end, shivering slightly in the cool night, I thought about how I might become a victim of Tomoe's fascination with swordplay and Mio's obsession with the two-dimensional world.

*I should sleep. Just sleep.*

# Tsukimichi

## Chapter 4

It turned out the Rembrandt Company was much larger than I'd thought.

Last time, when I'd been shown into that grand room, I'd assumed it served as both the store and the residence. But it was merely the store's reception area.

When I arrived with the alchemist at the appointed time, the butler was waiting for us. He led us outside to a splendid carriage, and then we were on our way to an enormous mansion on the outskirts of Tsige—the kind of mansion that makes you wonder if it belongs to a noble or royal family. It was encircled by a vast garden, the likes of which you rarely saw in Japan.

Both the alchemist and I were speechless. To be honest, though, I think the scale was just too much for me as a commoner to grasp, so I wasn't as nervous as I might have been.

Since we were supposed to create a special potion, I'd decided to accompany the alchemist and observe the authentic (or so it was considered) alchemy process.

While I might have been planning on a relaxed day, the Rembrandt Company's plans were far more ambitious. They intended to not only complete the potion today, but also to administer it.

The change of plans caught me off guard. My image of alchemy involved long hours of simmering assorted ingredients in a cauldron, so I thought today would be solely dedicated to potion-making. But I should have asked Rembrandt for more details prior.

I also couldn't help but wonder if it was safe to expose his wife and two daughters to us, whom they had just met. But if Rembrandt said it was okay, then it must be.

All that to say, the day was already shaping up to be challenging.

Especially including the peculiar cases of Tomoe and Mio, my anxieties in this world rarely turned out to be unfounded.

So, I was nervous, but I decided to trust Rembrandt.

"Raidou-dono, it's my fault for jumping on the potion idea without asking for details," the alchemist told me nervously while we waited in the reception room. "But I wish you'd told me it was the *Rembrandt Company* we were dealing with here!"

Well, I wasn't going to let myself feel bad; it was he who had agreed so enthusiastically the second I mentioned the potion.

Anyway, I really hadn't known that the Rembrandt Company was such a well-known and wealthy establishment, even if it wasn't a particularly old company. *Honestly, I thought, if I'd known what this mansion was going to look like, I would've dressed up.*

I should have worn one of the dwarves' prototypes. I think they had some items that would suit being invited to such a mansion. But showing up in the outfit I'd been traveling in... Definitely inappropriate.

Anyway, there we sat, in a reception room much larger than the lobby of the inn we were staying at, on a ridiculously soft sofa, waiting.

Even the drink on the table in front of us had a luxurious smell.

Although I relentlessly deployed detection Realms during our travels, I generally only did it outside. I tried to avoid them in towns, especially indoors.

I think my caution was somewhat half-hearted.

Perhaps because I grew up in a world strict about personal information and privacy, I didn't want to pry just because I could.

After all, this mansion housed a wife suffering from illness and probably two daughters of a sensitive age.

Spying and eavesdropping would certainly be inappropriate.

*"It's my first time in Tsige, so I didn't know about the Rembrandt Company's reputation,"* I wrote to the nervous young alchemist.

"Ah, I see," he replied. "My apologies. In Tsige, his name holds quite a bit of weight. To be honest, it's uncomfortable being here, knowing he'll be watching us."

*"I see. That would make one nervous."*

"Exactly! And on top of that, the request to refine Ambrosia! Even though the method's already prepared, I've been worried about it all day..."

I wondered if there would be retribution if we failed. No, that wouldn't be normal... would it? Even if loved ones' lives were at stake, these were merchants, not the mafia.

*"It should be fine,"* I wrote, as much to reassure myself as the alchemist. *"They said it would be easy for someone at Level 80."*

"The Ambrosia potion... I've heard it's a universal antidote made mostly from the nectar of the Ambrosia flower, which some people even say is extinct," he muttered, lost in his thoughts. "I wonder how it's made..."

Rembrandt and the butler still hadn't arrived.

*How long are they going to make us wait? It's not that I'm angry, I just can't stand being in such an expensive room!*

When I had drunk about half of the beverage, which I took to be some kind of tea, a maid quickly replaced it with a new one.

Based on the alchemist's previous job and level, there shouldn't have been any qualification issues.

Even so, considering the situation, I should have made an effort to remember this kid's name.

*Click.*

We turned our gazes toward the sound of the door opening.

"Sorry to keep you waiting." Rembrandt and his butler entered.

*Finally...*

“Everything is ready, so we came to escort you. The facility is in the basement, if you’ll follow me,” the butler said.

“I heard Raidou-dono will be observing as well,” Rembrandt added. “Please go with Hazal-dono.”

*Thank you, Rembrandt-san! So, his name is Hazal. I thought it was something like that. It would have been a bad look if I’d brought someone along and not even known his name. That was a close call.*

“What will you do, Rembrandt-dono?” I asked my savior.

“I’ll go to my wife and daughters first,” he replied. “Once the potion is ready, I’ll have someone bring you to their room. We’ll speak soon.”

Obviously, he wanted to be by his wife and daughters’ sides while they waited for their cure. I would have done the same thing.

*“Of course. See you later then,”* I wrote.

Rembrandt bowed to Hazal and me, then left the room.

The butler quickly explained to us that we would be going down to the basement, then we set off.

As we walked, Hazal fell into step next to me. I glanced over to see vacant eyes staring out of a pale face. He looked like he was marching to his own execution rather than to a potion-making session. *Is he going to be okay?*

All I could do was follow as the butler led the way below the mansion.

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Ambrosia flower nectar and a frozen, medicinal liquor cocktail.

That was basically the recipe for making the Ambrosia potion.

You put a certain amount of various medicinal liquors and Ambrosia nectar into a container. Then you took something like ice made from a special water (frozen at around negative twenty degrees) and crushed it finely, like shaved

ice. The mixture of nectar and medicinal liquor was then poured over the ice in specific amounts several times.

That was it. Alchemy was used to adjust the temperature, quantities, and the external environment. In this world, the magick of the alchemy field seemed to mainly involve adjusting the environment and temperature, creating sterile or clean-room conditions, although it also triggered and promoted chemical reactions.

The process seemed simple. Even Hazal gave me a look that said, *“Is that all?”* However, the spells used in this process were incredibly inefficient.

I wanted to shout, “What the heck!” The chants and the way the spells were crafted were so sloppy, it was like using ten units of magick power to produce one unit of magick.

Even though they were using lower-ancient-language spells, it was still awful. I wanted to ask if such magick was really okay. But... I guess that was the standard of magick in this world. Even the attack and support spells Toa and the others used during our journey through the Wasteland were like this. *Isn't this a waste of magick power?*

If they traced and reproduced words closer to the essence of the spells, the chants could be more efficient, even with lower ancient languages. Maybe the more user-friendly magick I'd learned from Ema was a very rare style.

Watching the potion-making process, I reconfirmed the most crucial part.

The key was procuring Ambrosia nectar. That was the only hard part.

As Hazal mentioned previously, the greatest hurdle was acquiring a significant amount of Ambrosia nectar, from a plant that was likely extinct. The rare eyes of a Ruby Eye negated their necessity. By applying a special process, it was possible to extract components identical to that nectar from them. This was probably the biggest secret technique.

Even as I watched the technique, I didn't fully understand what I was seeing. If Tomoe could view my memories later in the Demiplane, we might figure something out. My alchemist arach should be able to replicate the procedure.

I was surprised to learn that Ruby Eyes weren't variants of Red Bees but instead were Red Bees that fed mainly on Ambrosia nectar, turning their eyes red.

So, there must have been a hidden grove of Ambrosia flowers in that area. Without knowing the Ruby Eyes' range of activity, it was hard to say how far away it was, but it certainly existed.

In other words, the flower wasn't extinct after all. This was valuable information, indeed.

After a while, the frozen cocktail, which finally absorbed all the liquids, solidified and turned into a crimson crystal.

As a crack appeared in the crystal, a liquid, much clearer and pinker than the crystal's color suggested, began to flow into the container below.

The crystal became an even deeper crimson. It was quite beautiful.

Hazal quietly closed the lid of the container, examining the contents for a moment before letting out a great sigh of relief.

*So, that means...*

"It's done... the Ambrosia potion," Hazal confirmed.

A chorus of admiration filled the room. In addition to Hazal, the butler, and me, a few members of the Rembrandt Company were present as assistants.

Though the process was simple, given the potion's effects, it was quite costly... mainly due to gathering the ingredients.

Still, the resulting amount was much less than I'd expected; maybe about two-thirds of a small energy drink had collected in the container.

Finally, Hazal breathed easily. But we still had to do this two more times. Would he be okay?

To mitigate the consequences of failure, we'd decided to prepare the three doses in three separate batches.

Of course, we'd hunted six Ruby Eyes, so we had enough raw materials for as many doses, but I planned to keep that a secret if possible. If the extra eyes

weren't needed, I was sure we would think of another use for them.

After all, during our rather long journey to Tsige, we'd only encountered Ruby Eyes once. Valuable items, indeed.

Later, I would ask the lizardfolk to look for Ambrosia in the Wasteland. If it could be cultivated, it could become a profitable business... ♪

*Right, I should get Mio involved too. She seems knowledgeable about medicines. That would ensure success.*

*Hehehehe.*

"Then, I'll deliver the potion to the master right now! Hazal-dono, you continue with the rest, please!" The butler gently took the vial in both hands and hurried out of the room. Although his expression remained impassive as always, his tone implied he was quite pleased.

*Well, they won't need me up there, so I'll just stay down here and watch them make the next potion.*

Rembrandt and the butler were probably crying tears of joy again. Honestly, it was uncomfortable to be around grown men crying like that.

More relevantly, I wanted to give Hazal a chance to vent his honest feelings, considering how much stress he'd been under since we arrived at the Rembrandt estate.

"It seems we were successful," I said in the ancient language. I figured he would understand, since he'd been chanting it earlier.

The assistants blinked at me, uncomprehending.

"Raidou-dono?! You can actually *speak* the ancient language?" Hazal marveled. I remembered Tomoe saying that it was sometimes used as a simple code, so it shouldn't be that strange... Well, I suppose that was already dated information.

"Yes, I've mastered several languages other than the common tongue," I told Hazal. "I thought one of them might be useful for communication."

"Ah, indeed. Not being able to use the common tongue really would be... annoying."



*Absolutely!*

“No one else understands this, so it’ll work well for us. Let’s hurry and make the other two doses. I want to cure them as soon as possible.”

“Indeed,” he agreed. “It seems we have less time than I thought.”

“I’m not well-versed in cursed diseases, but I will admit I’m angry at whoever ordered this, *and* whoever carried it out.”

“Raidou-dono, you’re kind... I, on the other hand, had rather unscrupulous thoughts about selling my favor dearly.” Now that he knew no one else could hear, Hazal was more than willing to let his true feelings slip.

For him, cursed diseases were nothing new, and he seemed to be quite accustomed to making these kinds of potions. Or perhaps living a transient life as an adventurer had hardened his spirit. Unlike me, who got emotionally involved in every situation, maybe his was a necessary mindset for survival.

“The reward will be substantial. Now, let’s go.” With that, Hazal hurriedly returned to his work.

Although I assumed the ancient language allowed us to have a private conversation, now that I thought about it, there was always a chance one of the assistants understood. Maybe I shouldn’t have risked it.

As I watched, Hazal quickly completed the second potion. Good thing for Rembrandt that the process was simple. If the success rate were low at this stage, the hope we clung to would be too fragile.

Nevertheless, the process felt like wasting everything but the finest parts of a tuna, which seemed to unnecessarily increase the value of this elixir.

In other words, if we could improve this to be made more efficiently, we could make the price a lot more affordable. It might even become a flagship product for the Kuzunoha Company.

A product idea—now that was something I hadn’t expected to get out of today’s session. Rare elixirs could certainly make an impact.

*Considering the headache that Mio gave me just yesterday, this does ease my mind a little.*

“Pheew! Potion-making complete.” Hazal came toward me, wiping his brow with one hand and holding the two potion bottles in the other.

*Ah, come on, be careful! You should follow the butler’s example and carry them with both hands, stupid!*

*Bang!!!*

“Raidou-sama! Hazal-sama!”

*What the—?!*

The oblivious intruder was the butler!

“Whoa?!” I turned to the direction of the voice. Startled, Hazal had released both bottles from his hands.

With perfect timing, they went their separate ways and began to tumble toward the floor.

*Hazal, I will hit you later!*

I glanced over to the falling bottles.

Despite being dumbfounded, I managed to move. *Thank you, superhuman body.*

With a leap that could be best described as a spring, I dived toward the potion on my right. My outstretched hand securely caught the target. *Careful now, don’t break it!*

Unfortunately, from this position, I couldn’t possibly grab the other bottle, which was falling in the opposite direction.

*Damn it, still—!*

I placed my left hand on the floor and applied a very light burst of magick.

The impact from it lightly propelled my body toward the bottle, but my hand still couldn’t reach it.

*Please, land somewhere on my back!!!*

*Did the gods hear my prayer?*

There—something light settled onto my back. The next moment, I felt an impact to my head.

*Damn it, I hit the desk. But as long as the potion is safe, it's fine.*

“R-Raidou-dono, a-as expected!”

*You, Hazal. I'm definitely hitting you twice!*

※ ※ ※

We followed the butler back upstairs and down the hallway. At one point, I caught a sickly-sweet smell, the kind you'd encounter in a perfume shop, wafting from behind a closed door.

Rembrandt waited for us in the reception room. But something was wrong—he was seated on the sofa, his left arm covered in blood. A nurse sat next to him, bandaging the wound.

“Huh,” gasped the young alchemist.

*Was he attacked by a monster or...?* Judging by the wounds, which looked like they were made by fangs or claws, the attacker hadn't been very large.

Noticing us, Rembrandt looked up. “Oh, it's Raidou-dono. And Hazal-dono too,” he said weakly.

“Don't worry,” I told him. *“The medicine is here.”* No way could I trust Hazal with the bottles after what had happened, so I'd held on to them myself.

“What... what happened?!” Hazal asked, clearly panicked.

Rembrandt only shook his head feebly. It wasn't that he couldn't speak; it seemed more like he didn't know how to explain.

Hazal opened his mouth to ask more questions, but I put out a hand to stop him. I wanted to wait for the man to regain himself. The only sound in the room was the bandaging of Rembrandt's arm.

Then, even that sound stopped.

“I apologize. Thanks for giving me some time; I feel a little better now.”

*“What happened?”* I asked. Before I came to this world, seeing someone so gravely injured would have thrown me into a panic. The calm I felt now was probably a sign that I had adapted to life here.

I could only think of one possibility: perhaps someone tried to abduct Rembrandt’s three sick family members, and he’d risked his life to protect them.

*“When Morris delivered the elixir,”* Rembrandt began quietly, *“I heard a noise from my wife’s bedroom.”*

*Ah, the room that sweet smell was coming from.*

*“A noise?”*

*“Yes. I thought it was just one of her usual fits.”*

*“Fits?”* I wrote, interrupting Rembrandt’s explanation. This was the first I’d heard of such.

*“Oh, right. I haven’t explained the symptoms yet. At first, all three of them just had a persistent fever, but...”*

The symptoms had begun like a common cold, but gradually his wife and daughters’ conditions worsened. They started to fear water and light, occasionally losing their sanity and becoming violent, destroying the walls and objects in their rooms. It sounded a lot like a case of rabies in dogs.

Next, the cursed disease began to ravage their physical appearances. Their once-beautiful hair fell out, their cheeks grew hollow, and their eyes shone a bright, mad red. They were transformed beyond recognition.

Upon regaining their sanity and seeing their own miserable state, they were devastated, weeping and apologizing to their family members.

As Rembrandt recounted the agony his loved ones had endured, I couldn’t find any words to say. I couldn’t even meet his eyes.

*“And then, they started to lash out with incredible strength,”* Rembrandt continued. *“Though lately, they’ve become too weak to even do that. The best they can manage is a faint groan.”*

Once again, I found myself thinking that if it were me, I wouldn't be able to talk about this so calmly. Without a doubt, I'd be tracking down and killing the perpetrators, the ones who'd ordered this, and even their families.

"Today was supposed to be the day this hell would end! And yet, and yet—" Rembrandt shouted in anguish. "When Morris delivered the medicine, I went straight to my wife. The thought of finally being able to save her brought tears to my eyes. Just as I got to the bedroom door...

"At that moment...

"The sounds of chaos grew louder, and suddenly, a lifeless arm burst through the wooden door.

"It all happened so quickly. My wife... she attacked me—" He had desperately tried to protect the light that had finally appeared. "—my wife, who was supposed to be saved by the medicine... snatched it from me and smashed it."

Rembrandt took a deep, shaky breath and continued, "All of a sudden, that sickly sweet scent filled the air, and my wife attacked me again. She was completely deranged. It's all thanks to the guards and Morris that I even survived; they subdued my wife. But my wife kept on screaming and baring her fangs. Eventually, she collapsed and fell asleep."

That brought us to the present.

Was there any way the timing of that violent episode could have been worse?

Hazal broke the silence. "That wasn't a fit." His tone was heavy. "Most likely, that's how she reacts when the elixir comes into proximity. It's a defense mechanism designed to prevent the medicine from being administered. The victim herself becomes the final obstacle to the cure."

Though he didn't have a precedent to reference, Hazal added that it was certainly possible with a Level 8 cursed disease.

"According to the injured guards, it would require a considerable level of close combat skill to restrain her."

A body that could barely move was now exerting enough strength that it took several fully grown adults to hold her down... No wonder combat specialists

were necessary.

*“Considerable level of close combat skill,” huh? I know a few people who fit that description.*

I was Level 1. Logically, I understood that I should contact Toa and the others and have them handle the situation.

Yet I decided to do it myself.

Seeing the injured Rembrandt and the guards, I felt a strong sense that this task was my responsibility. Whenever something happened, I was the only one who could ensure it was dealt with right.

Looking at the despondent Rembrandt and butler, I wrote, *“I’ll handle this. Let’s go.”*

“Raidou-dono!” Rembrandt exclaimed in shock. “You can’t do this! After all, you’re—”

I stopped him with a hand as he tried to stand up and glared at him in angry determination. He sank back into his seat.

Next, I grabbed Hazal by the collar and pulled him close, instructing him to use the remaining materials to make one more dose of the elixir.

Without a word of objection, he dashed off to the underground workshop. Even if he failed this time, he could use the eyes we still had to create another dose. If I went to the Demiplane, I could bring back additional eyes, but that would take time. If there was still a chance to make the medicine, I wanted to save Rembrandt’s family as soon as possible.

I handed one of the two elixirs I’d brought to Rembrandt.

*In the underground lab, the smell was controlled, so I hadn’t noticed, but did the elixir really smell like that? The symbol of despair having a sweet scent... What a twisted sense of irony.*

*Now, let’s put an end to this ridiculous curse.*

※ ※ ※

*“Hurry, the medicine.”*

I was restraining Mrs. Rembrandt, who had been reduced to a shell of her former self, holding her arms and body tightly from behind. Once again, the elixir’s presence prompted superhuman strength.

Along with that side effect, her hair had fallen out, her cheeks were sunken, and her eyes were bloodshot red. And she was drooling uncontrollably. She had an undeniably terrifying presence.

What was that movie again, the guy who lived with his beloved dog in a city ravaged by a mutated virus? She looked like one of the zombies from that film. Or maybe more like a ghoul. Even though I’d never met her before, it was hard to believe she’d once been a beautiful woman.

She was still thrashing her legs, but getting the medicine into her mouth would be possible.

“Are you really Level 1?” Rembrandt asked in a hushed voice, momentarily forgetting what he was supposed to be doing. Of course he would be surprised; a Level 1 was akin to a child, meaning my numerical strength was undoubtedly inferior to his own.

*“Quick, the medicine,”* I repeated with urgency.

“Oh, right!”

My words snapped Rembrandt back to reality. His wife’s body structure hadn’t fundamentally changed, so techniques that worked on humans would work on her. Though it might sound grandiose to call it a binding technique, my sister, who practiced judo, had taught me a few ways to immobilize someone. I hadn’t had much success back when she taught me them, but with my current physical abilities, it was possible.

In fact, my current strength was extraordinary. Even though Rembrandt’s wife was exerting power beyond her body’s limits, she’d only been a regular woman before. So, this was no problem. However, people don’t realize how strong the human jaw is. Especially in her current unrestrained state, her bite would be terrifying for any ordinary person, let alone a non-adventurer.

I had to hand it to Rembrandt; even as she chomped down on his fingers, he didn't flinch while he administered the medicine. From the determination etched on his face, I could tell he was ready to lose them if necessary. Gradually, her entire body began to tremble, and the crimson madness in her eyes slowly faded. Eventually, she slackened completely and began to breathe evenly as she slept.

"Oh... Lisa. Now... now, I can talk to you again, we can laugh together again...!"

Rembrandt's tear ducts were working overtime. As much as I wanted to make a witty comment, this was clearly not the moment. The merchant was crying openly, clearly not caring who saw him. Even Morris, the ever-stoic butler, was discreetly wiping at his own tears with a handkerchief.

After a respectful pause, I asked Rembrandt, *"So, which of your daughters should we treat first? I think we should prioritize the one in the worst condition."*

I already knew that I would have to restrain whomever we gave the medicine to next, so I couldn't help them both at the same time.

Besides, Hazal was still working on the third dose, so a decision had to be made anyway.

Still crying with his wife in his arms, Rembrandt turned to face me. "Right, my daughters... The younger one's worse, so you can start with her."

He rubbed his eyes and straightened up, but his face remained red. *Also, please, Rembrandt, stop sniffing so much.*

*"All right."*

Morris led the two of us down the hallway to Rembrandt's younger daughter's room. Thankfully, it was some distance down the hall. If the rooms had been closer, Rembrandt might have been attacked and killed by all three of them at once.

"It's just up ahead," he said, indicating a door at the end of the hallway.

*"Got it. I'll strike first. Give me the key."*

"Are you sure about this?" Rembrandt asked with an anxious voice.



*“Yes, it’s fine. Once I have your daughter restrained, I’ll signal you with a light spell. However...”*

I paused for effect.

Rembrandt and Morris both gulped nervously.

*“If I accidentally touch her chest or backside, please don’t get mad, Dad.”*

*“?!”*

As the tension deflated from their faces, I waved my hand nonchalantly and opened the door. A little humor would help ease the tension... I’d hoped.

*Click.*

I turned the doorknob and carefully opened the door. It didn’t look like she was on the bed in the back right corner of the room. I moved a bit farther into the room and stopped in the center. The room was dark and silent. I gave it a more careful scan...

...and there she was.

She was in a blind spot from where I stood, clinging to the ceiling in the left corner, behind me, glaring down at my back. *Like a monkey. Or a spider-person.*

Suddenly, she leaped at me. It seemed the scent of the elixir had transferred to me as well. In this case, it was a fortunate accident. She saw me as an obstacle.

Though her condition was supposedly better than her mother’s, her small size and agility made her ferocious when she went berserk. She still had strength left.

As she kicked off the wall and lunged at me, I turned and grabbed her outstretched hand. She screamed incoherently, her free hand and gaping mouth still straining for me. But before that attack could reach me, I flipped her over my shoulder, carefully ensuring she wouldn’t hit her head as she fell to the floor. This momentarily winded her, allowing me to securely pin her down.

*I did it. Thanks, Yuki-neesan. I used to think you were just bullying me, but it turned out to be pretty useful.*

With the girl restrained, I used a light spell to signal Rembrandt and Morris, who hurried inside, not attempting to mask their footsteps.

*“Quick, give her the medicine.”*

As his daughter struggled even further at the sight of the elixir, I held her down with more force and urged Rembrandt to administer it. Given that she was a young woman, I didn’t want to resort to knocking her out. I think I managed quite well this time.

After the potion was administered, she quickly fell asleep, just like her mother. I released her from my hold and gently laid her on the bed.

Then the maids came in and started to clean her up, changing her clothes and tidying the room. Had this been Rembrandt’s idea, or Morris’s? I hadn’t noticed before, but it was a considerate touch.

At that moment, the sound of hasty, unrefined footsteps echoed into the room.

“Huff, huff! Raidou-dono, I managed it somehow! The composition is identical to the elixir, this is Hazal’s masterpiece— Whoa?!”

*You idiot!*

*Falling over again is absolutely unacceptable!*

This time, I couldn’t intervene—the distance was too great. But Morris, with his deft movements, managed to save the elixir from Hazal’s fumble.

*This butler is incredible, I thought. I wish I had someone like him. Better yet, come to the Demiplane and be my assistant!*

*As for Hazal, tonight’s dinner is on you. I’m going to order the most expensive dishes, whether they taste good or not! Of course, after I give you a good punch!*

*“Today, I’m grateful for this miracle. Goddess, thank you.”*



*Don't thank her!* I thought in annoyance, silently sending my heartfelt denial to Rembrandt's prayer.

The older daughter, our final patient, was quicker and stronger than the younger one, but not by that much. I was worried whether the elixir made from the remaining ingredients would work, but Hazal assured me that he'd properly matched the components, so I decided to trust him.

The girl still had some semblance of reason left, her crimson eyes flickering as if fighting against the madness, her gaze occasionally gaining lucidity. It weighed heavily on my heart to see her struggling, attacking me while silently pleading for me to run.

Even though I knew she couldn't understand, I whispered in Japanese, "It's okay, I'm here to help. Just a little longer."

Steeling my resolve, I called for Rembrandt and gestured for him to administer the elixir. *Phew.*

I laid his daughter down on the bed and took a deep breath. With the task done, I hoped they'd forgive me for taking a moment of reprieve.

"To think Raidou-dono would become a merchant seems like a complete disregard for his aptitudes," Hazal announced casually, as if he'd forgotten all his previous blunders.

Rembrandt and Morris both nodded in agreement. "Your binding technique was impressive. I think there must be some mistake about you being Level 1," Rembrandt added.

"You're clearly better suited to being an adventurer," Morris suggested earnestly.

*Please don't say stuff like that so seriously, butler. I just renewed my resolve to do my best as a merchant, and now my seniors in the trade are telling me this?*

*"My followers have trained me well,"* I replied.

*"With companions as strong as yours, it's no wonder. After all—"*

*Hey, Hazal. You've made enough mistakes for one day. Do you want me to teach you how to read expressions through the language of my fists?*

“—both of your followers are over Level 1,000.”

*Goddamn it!*

*What should I do with this blabbermouth?*

As the two of them froze at Hazel’s words, I looked up at the heavens in despair. *Please, at least know the difference between what should and shouldn’t be said.*

※ ※ ※

Thanks to Hazel’s slip of the tongue, Rembrandt questioned me thoroughly, but I deflected all his inquiries with a smile. In the end, I left his mansion with a promise to come back some time so he could thank me properly. (He also invited me to stay for dinner, but I politely declined on behalf of myself and Hazel, as a bit of payback on the alchemist.)

I did ask Rembrandt to please, please keep Tomoe and Mio’s levels a secret. Given that I’d saved his wife and daughters’ lives, I was pretty sure he would oblige... although I couldn’t really expect the information to stay secret, as news like that tended to spread on its own.

The sun was still high in the sky when I parted ways with Hazel, so I immediately called for Tomoe and Mio. Now that Rembrandt-san knew about their existence, there was no point in hiding them any longer—it was time to get them registered at the Adventurer’s Guild.

But then...

“Die.”

Before I could react, a magick circle appeared at Tomoe’s and my feet.

As I wondered why Mio hadn’t been targeted, I quickly leaped out of the circle. No way I wanted to face this unknown magick head-on. Fortunately, the spell didn’t seem to have the ability to track me.

Tomoe, however, remained calmly standing inside the magick circle. *Why?*

Now that I thought about it, I hadn't heard any chanting before the magick circle appeared. *Could it be a technique I'm not familiar with? If so, I'd love to learn it.*

When I turned to the source of the person who'd threatened us, I saw a tall, skinny man standing a short distance away. At his signal, a gray-robed figure, almost hidden in the forest, made a series of complex hand movements. *Wait, is that what they're doing instead of chanting?*

At the conclusion of Gray Robe's hand motions, a pillar of fire shot up from the magick circles at our feet. Even from where I stood, I could feel the intense heat.

The fire pillars—no doubt meant to kill—blazed hot and fierce, reaching up to engulf Tomoe, but—

"Hmph."

With a flick of her left hand, Tomoe snuffed the flames instantly. I sighed, realizing she had just been testing the attack's strength. *She's really a combative lady.*

"Just dodge it already... seriously," I muttered.

"No, no! I have to see how strong our would-be assassins are. To think they'd attack us right after you invited us over... You certainly know me well, Young Master," Tomoe said, looking pleased.

*We weren't attacked for your sake!* I thought. *Though this situation is so cookie cutter.*

There were one, two, three... *Oh, come on, did they send so many just because it's a quiet stretch from the Rembrandt estate to the town center?*

Two of them, the skinny man who'd shouted "die," and the robed figure, were visible through a gap in the forest.

Upon expanding my awareness, I sensed many more hidden presences. There must have been close to... twenty people there!

*Could this be related to Rembrandt-san? Or is it a personal grudge against me?*

Given the location and timing, it likely did involve Rembrandt. Even so, we would certainly defeat them, and these guys would have to pay dearly for their crimes, regardless of who was behind the attack.

The approaching leader, the skinny man, looked cool and composed. Probably an average thug in this world.

“You dodged it and you’re unscathed... Tch, even the one not in black is strong, huh?” he muttered. He sounded frustrated.

*He knows about Mio’s strength? Maybe he saw her overpower enemies on our way to Tsige.*

The man continued, “Hey, you over there, the lady in black. Could you do us a favor and just watch quietly? I promise we won’t lay a hand on you.”

His tone was still calm and unruffled. Did this mean he hadn’t seen Mio fight directly but had only heard rumors?

Using Telepathy, I discreetly suggested to Mio that she should agree to his proposal. With Tomoe by her side and the request coming from me, she immediately played along.

“You’re asking me to stand aside for free?”

“Not for free... How about ten gold coins?” the man offered.

“All right then, I’ll pretend I didn’t see anything this time,” Mio agreed.

“How dare you, Mio?!” Tomoe played at being angry, lunging at her. She was in on it too, of course; I could sense her excitement leaking through our connection.

Nimbly dodging Tomoe’s grasp, Mio distanced herself from us, assuming the stance of an uninvolved spectator.

The man chuckled. “Sorry about that. Should I give you the money now?”

“Later’s fine. Just make sure you don’t get hurt,” Mio responded with a smile.

“Got it. You’re one tough lady. Sorry, fella, that’s just how the world works sometimes,” he said, laughing heartily before turning back to us. He exuded confidence; was it because of his high level?

To me, he was small potatoes. A truly capable opponent would have already sensed something when facing Tomoe and Mio. This guy lacked the instincts or the intuition to gauge true strength. Then again, this might not apply in this world's context.

I remained silent.

"You lot are no match for me alone!" Tomoe declared, her voice brimming with bravado.

That seemed to be the sign the rest of the attackers needed. They began to melt out of the trees, with some taking stances at a distance. Archers or magicians, perhaps? I was curious to see their strategy.

"If you hadn't gotten involved with Rembrandt, you wouldn't have to die! Get them!" the man shouted.

*Right, a full-on brawl it is.*

On the surface, it looked like we were about to be overwhelmed. But even as they brandished their weapons, I knew we had nothing to fear. With my magick and aura, I could defend us so thoroughly that they'd be the ones in danger.

Tomoe remained still, effortlessly deflecting or avoiding their attacks without going on the offensive.

"Hey, Tomoe! Get to work already!" I called out.

"But, Young Master. We need a signal," Tomoe said.

*A signal? What...*

Unwilling to spoil the mood by saying it out loud, Tomoe switched to a telepathic whisper. *"You know, Young Master, the cue to teach them a lesson. The smoke signal to start the battle. I've been waiting for it!"*

*What is she talking about?*

I was so confused by her bizarre statement that I almost got hit by the enemy's next attack, which I instinctively dodged just in time.

*Well, I guess there's no avoiding it. Time to get serious.*

"Um, Tomoe-san?" I called out.



“Yeah!” she replied enthusiastically.

“Teach them a lesson,” I said reluctantly.

“Yes!!!” she responded even more enthusiastically.

*This is so embarrassing. Will there ever come a day when I can say, “Teach them a lesson!” with confidence?*

“Ugh!” A man who looked like a thief charged at Tomoe with a short sword. Tomoe cheerfully backhanded him in the face—holding back enough to send him flying without killing him.

If she had gone all out, his head would have exploded. Tomoe was truly skilled.

Punching, kicking, throwing... One by one, she dealt with the attackers.

*She’s really in her element, I mused. As someone who calls herself my second-in-command, she’s handling them all bare-handed.*

*I guess I can’t just stand here doing nothing.*

A dozen feet away, a woman with a single-handed sword stood facing me.

*She’s coming!*

In that same moment, she rushed at me. Her weapon was unusual... The tip was double-edged for easy thrusting, but the rest of the blade was only sharpened on one side.

In this world dominated by Western-style swords, double-edged swords were the norm, so I’d seen very few asymmetrical single-edged swords like this one. It was close to a Japanese katana, allowing for nonlethal strikes with the blunt side. It must have been custom made.

The fighter had healthy tan skin. Her arm muscles were impressive, and her abs were a perfectly defined six-pack, unapologetically showing off her beautiful muscles. She looked like someone who should’ve been wielding a great sword or a battle axe.

As I considered whether to dodge her attack and deliver a knife-hand strike to her neck, a shadow moved between us.

*Oh, come on, Tomoe. How eager are you?*

*Wait, she's looking straight at the weapon. When she jumped between us, she was definitely looking at the weapon!*

*Could she be interested in that sword? Is she like Benkei, who collects weapons? I mean, it looks similar, but it's not a Kogarasu Maru.*

*Well, as long as she's protecting me, that's fine. I'll focus on evasion.*

As expected, the long-range fighters were hesitant to attack, likely afraid of engaging in friendly fire. The melee attackers only dared to come at us two at a time, not wanting to accidentally hit each other.

To think that we were setting the terms of this battle even though there were only two of us and they had us surrounded—*how low-level...*

The woman who had jumped in earlier seemed more competent than the rest. As I stood there, she tried once again to break our rhythm and target me.

Thanks to my training with the lizardfolk, I was fairly accustomed to fighting multiple opponents at once, as was Tomoe. Both of us positioned the enemies so they got in the line of fire of their own archers and mages.

I thought Tomoe might clash with this woman, but instead...

"How are you even wearing that outfit?" I wondered aloud.

A sword strike came at Tomoe from above. Timing her counterattack perfectly, Tomoe delivered a roundhouse kick to the side of the woman's head. *How does she manage a kick like that in a kimono?*

"Ugh!" The muscular beauty smiled at Tomoe for a brief moment before her eyes rolled back, and she collapsed to her knees, unconscious. *A clean hit to the head. No wonder.*

"Finally got myself a weapon for blunt attacks!" Tomoe exclaimed.

*Was that your goal? You could at least pretend to ask if I'm okay!*

With a swift movement, Tomoe switched her grip to hold her weapon for nonlethal strikes which used the sword's blunt edge.

*Crunch!*

*Thud!*

*Snap!*

*That last one didn't sound like sword impact...*

*"Aaaaahhhh!!!"*

*"Eeeeeeeek!"*

*"How am I not dead?!"*

*Ah, the last one gets the punch line.*

One of the enemies now had a deeply indented shoulder. *That bone must be shattered*, I realized. *Human shoulders shouldn't bend like that.*

No one could keep up with Tomoe's swordsmanship. It seemed she had become quite skilled with the sword, despite all the tasks I'd given her.

*"Ugh!"*

*"Ouch!"*

*"Why am I still alive?!"*

Yeah, the last one was not good again.

Occasional screams echoed from the forest. Between her practice strikes, Tomoe picked up weapons dropped by fallen enemies and pelted them into the forest, hitting hidden foes.

"You... you bastards..." Finally, the skinny man's face was showing signs of panic. He and the remaining mage were quietly regrouping a short distance from us.

*"Is that all you've got?"* Tomoe asked in a bored tone.

They apparently had nothing to say, and I couldn't blame them.

*Oh. Come to think of it, I haven't said a word.*

*Since I'm more of an artsy guy, let's just say I'm eloquent in my mind. Yeah, silence is golden.*

"Hey, lady! You're on our side now! Help us out!" the man pleaded with Mio.

*Ugh, how uncool!*

“No, thank you,” Mio replied curtly, which only increased the man’s panic.

“Don’t you want the money?!”

“It doesn’t matter if I take it from you while you’re alive or from your corpse, does it?”

“You... Do you even know who you’re talking to? I’m Lime Latte, the number one adventurer in Tsige... Rank S, Level 201!”

*Lime and Latte... It just doesn’t sound like a good combination. Why not just go with Café Latte or Lime Soda?*

*And the number one in Tsige, huh. Just like with Zetsuya, it seems every guild’s top adventurer is either an idiot or a villain.*

The mage began mumbling something unintelligible. “Great divine horse with eight legs, I beseech thee... Grant me passage to the place where I left my mark...”

*Wait, is he chanting in the common language? Is that even possible? Is he trying to escape?*

Apparently, Lime wondered the same thing. “Are you trying to run away?” he shouted.

“It sounds like a teleportation spell, Young Master,” Mio informed me.

“I see,” I said, and realized that was probably the first time I’d spoken aloud this whole time.

I rushed toward the chanting mage. “Sorry about this!” I said.

“Wha—? Ouch! Uwaah!”

I grabbed his face with just enough force and slammed him into the ground.

“One Punch!” I exclaimed.

*Let me explain! One Punch is...*

**It’s an extremely painful but nonlethal finishing move that leaves the target with an injury that’s just shy of fatal.**

With a unique blend of magical control and martial arts, this technique was originally developed by Makoto during training in the Demiplane as a consideration to avoid hurting the residents too much.

While it's not limited to punches, the first time it was used was with a punch, and the highland orc who received it was knocked down in such a way that everyone thought they was dead. The warriors in training, filled with fear and resentment (or maybe something else?), named it "One Punch," and the name stuck. Since then, any instant knockout blow from Makoto has been referred to as "One Punch."

#### **Source: Well-informed individual**

*Did I just hear some kind of commentary in my mind?*

The mage flew through the air, kissing the ground so hard it seemed like smoke might come out of his ears, then lay completely still.

"Well done, Young Master!" Tomoe shouted in admiration.

The skinny man stared open-mouthed at the fallen mage.

"You're the only one left. Prepare yourself!" Tomoe advised.

"Don't screw with me!" the leader shouted.

"Hah!"

"Wha—"

"Teya!"

"No way?!"

"There!"

"Ugh?! My nose is bleeding! Damn you—"

"Sei!"

"Huh? I'm in the air, wha—"

"Hmph."

"Eek! I'll do anything! Just spare me!"

All right, let me explain.

Enraged by Tomoe's words, the man drew a dagger and slashed at her. But Tomoe discarded her sword and caught his blade with her bare hands.

With a light snap, she broke the dagger. Then, with the same hand, she took a jab at his face.

As he tried to resist further, she effortlessly threw him with an outside leg sweep, sending him sprawling.

Once Tomoe stabbed the Kogarasu-Maru-like sword into the ground right next to the man lying on his back, he immediately surrendered.

*Lime, you're way too weak!*

"Young Master, do you have any questions for him?" Tomoe asked, gesturing at the villain who now sat quietly in front of us in a formal seiza position.

*"Why did you attack us?"*

Seeing my speech bubble, Lime was momentarily startled, but he quickly composed himself and started talking.

"Writing? No, nothing's strange about that! It's totally normal! The reason, right, you want the reason!"

Lime explained that the Rembrandt Company had expanded its operations by creating subsidiary organizations that took on low-level transportation and procurement requests. As a result, the number of simple requests available to adventurers drastically decreased.

For Tsige's more powerful adventurers, this only meant a slight decrease in pocket money, but for weaker adventurer groups, it was a matter of life and death. Some had to quit or moved to other towns, and there were even reports of some starving to death because they couldn't find work.

Those who were left channeled their pent-up frustration and rage into this revenge plot. They clearly saw themselves as delivering righteous justice, not allowing the corrupt merchant to monopolize all the profits.

Lime Latte, as Tsige's top-ranked adventurer, decided to join the cause.

Given all this, I now understood why the eyes of a Ruby Eye procurement request hadn't been fulfilled as expected. No one wanted to take it seriously...

Perhaps I'd been marked from the moment I'd accepted it.

*It really feels like the adventurers brought this upon themselves, I thought. What's the point of adventurers who can only handle simple tasks around Tsige and never venture into the Wastelands? Wouldn't it be better for them to retire and find another line of work?*

In other words, I couldn't sympathize with Lime's story. The reason for tormenting Rembrandt's family with such a malicious curse was just too selfish.

*"But, you lot, didn't your conscience hurt using such cruel methods?"* I asked.

"Cruel methods?" Lime asked. "It's just a sleeping curse that makes them sleep for a few years. I heard they used a strong spell to ensure it wouldn't break midway."

*What? Is he lying?*

*"What are you talking about? The curse placed on Rembrandt-san's family was a deadly Level 8 cursed disease... with some nasty side effects."*

"Huh?"

"Don't play dumb, you bastard!" Tomoe shouted, drawing her sword and preparing to strike.

"I'm not lying! We never intended to hurt anyone! We just wanted to show Rembrandt that taking away opportunities for adventurers to grow would have consequences!" Lime didn't look like he was lying.

However, to be certain, I decided to borrow Tomoe's power.

*"Tomoe, can you read his memories?"* I asked her telepathically.

*"Leave it to me,"* Tomoe replied.

I watched as Tomoe nodded and then focused. After a moment, she declared, "This guy's not lying."

*Looks like she saw his memories. There's nothing more to ask then.*

*Well, where did things go wrong? While there was some misunderstanding, it's probably good that no one died. (I hope.)*

Okay, so it hadn't ended neatly, but for now, we could consider this situation resolved. Even if we did question Lime further, he might not tell the whole truth. Anyway, we could always confirm the details with Tomoe later.

"All right, that's enough."

"You're letting us go?" Lime asked in surprise.

"Yes, go tend to your men," I told him.

"Heh, thank you!"

As Lime attempted to get up—

*Clasp.*

His hand was immediately grabbed.

"What is it, lady in black?" Lime asked nervously.

The one who grabbed him was Mio, who had silently returned to my side.

"The money," she demanded.

"Oh, the money, right. I got it right here... Wait, what?!"

Mio snatched the pouch he was using as a wallet and emptied all the coins—clearly more than the ten he'd mentioned—into her hand.

"What is this...?"

"Here," Mio said, returning the now-empty pouch to Lime.

"No way! That's too much, lady!" Lime protested.

"It's interest," Mio replied firmly.

*Interest? Dozens of gold coins as interest? Even a loan shark would be shocked. She must have learned the word recently, but she's definitely using it wrong.*

"In-Interest?"

"Yeah, interest."

"That's ridiculous..."

*Exactly.*



“In-ter-est!” Mio said with even more force.

“Yes, ma’am. Understood,” Lime relented, intimidated by her intense stare.

*Mio... you’re a scary one!* Poor Lime looked quite pitiful. I felt bad for letting him go just like that, so I decided to help a bit.

*“The dagger my companion broke seems like a fairly valuable item. I’ll get you something to replace it later, so please forgive us,”* I told Lime with a pat on the shoulder.

“Huh?” he responded, confused.

I nodded to confirm. The broken dagger lying on the ground emanated magical power. It was undoubtedly a magick-infused weapon.

*“I’ll leave a message at the Adventurer’s Guild under the name Raidou. I’m sorry for the trouble. Now, if you’ll excuse us,”* I wrote.

“You don’t need to do that, Young Master!”

“Young Master, wait, please!” Lime called out.

No doubt taking her cue from Mio, Tomoe began searching the pockets of the men who lay groaning on the ground. To prevent this from escalating into straight up robbery, I just started walking away, motioning for them to follow.

# Tsukimichi

## Chapter 5

### Tomoe

Later...

Lime Latte, accompanied by Young Master, visited Rembrandt at home to apologize for the cursed disease incident.

Even though things hadn't gone exactly to plan, the fact remained that Lime had intended to harm the Rembrandt family. So, it was natural that Rembrandt's attitude was cold. However, Lime visited again and again over the next several days, apologizing not just to Rembrandt but to Young Master, myself, and Mio as well.

With the encouragement of his benefactor, Young Master, Rembrandt eventually forgave Lime and even absolved him from the financial responsibility of his actions. Of course, the master's forgiveness wasn't unconditional.

Rembrandt had demanded restrictions on Lime's activities as an adventurer, but it was Lime himself who'd taken the idea to its extreme.

Retirement from adventuring.

When Young Master asked him what he planned to do next, Lime had just smiled and said he still had connections and could find work.

Well, he was still in his mid-twenties and could start over. Young Master didn't press for details.

After we all had left the Rembrandt estate that final time, we walked for a while to a small hill that offered a panoramic view of Tsige's cityscape. Lime stood alone. I approached him silently.

"You said there's plenty of work. But in reality, there aren't many jobs that address your concerns. This means you might have to step into the underworld."

Lime turned to me, startled.

"What are you planning, Lime?"

The man's expression relaxed when he saw I wasn't an enemy, but he said, "Tomoe-neesan. You shouldn't be here."

"I see, I understand. Is that your main worry?"

"What?!"

Once again, Lime was taken aback by my words. He stared at me in astonishment, but I completely understood what was going through his mind. He had been gazing at a particular building in the distance, and it was clear that he was concerned about that place.

"It's totally normal, you know—supporting the place that helped you. Not to make them adventurers, but to get them into more respectable jobs, huh. Of course, taking care of their education would cost a lot more than just donating money."

"You and Raidou-danna aren't just strong, are you? No one knew I had ties with that place."

Ignoring Lime's words, I continued, "Instead of taking such a troublesome path, wouldn't it be easier to make them all adventurers and take care of them together?"

Sitting down, Lime looked up at me with a mixture of amazement and resignation. There was a reason I'd so easily uncovered what Lime was hiding.

I could read people's memories.

It was a powerful ability that wasn't hindered by minor obstacles, and it was impossible to make anything up.

“Don’t say stupid stuff like that,” Lime finally said. “I know all too well what it means to be an adventurer. If there were other paths, I wouldn’t have chosen to be one. And if it gets out that I have connections with that orphanage, who knows what trouble might arise.”

When the weakness of a well-known adventurer was exposed, there would naturally be people who tried to exploit it. If it were just an individual, it might be manageable, but if the entire orphanage became a weakness, it would be impossible to protect. Lime seemed to foresee the tragedy that awaited.

“Being an adventurer might have suited me, but it’s not something you can do for long. Even if you reach a certain level, it’s not something to be proud of. Compared to me—”

“The woman your age who supports the orphanage is much more admirable, right?” I cut in.

“I don’t know what to say. Am I that easy to read?”

“Yes, very easy. You should learn a bit from our Young Master.”

“Young Master-danna is too mysterious,” Lime responded with a bitter smile.

Before the attack, Lime had tried to gather information on Young Master, but it was impossible to find detailed information about someone who’d appeared out of nowhere in the Wasteland. He found Young Master mysterious, and in a way, he was right. In reality, though, his personality was quite simple.

“Heh. Here, this is a gift from that mysterious Young Master.”

“Huh... A sword?” Lime looked puzzled as he caught the sword I tossed to him.

I knew why he was confused. The sword had a slender blade and a hilt with unique decorations. It was a lot like what you would call a katana in Japan, but Lime wouldn’t know that.

As he touched the scabbard, Lime gasped, feeling its power.

“Oh! You can recognize its value just by holding it. Young Master had intended on giving it to you through the guild... but maybe we need to reconsider.” Seeing Lime’s reaction made me happy.

He stood up and drew the katana from its scabbard with a snap.

“This is... amazing,” Lime breathed, holding the sword with both hands and staring in wonder at the exposed blade.

“What do you think?” I asked. “It’s the finest weapon... in both strength and beauty.”

“The finest weapon...”

“It’s a variation of a sword called a katana. I mean, it’s a lesser piece, but its quality as a weapon is already considerable.”



“This is for me?”

“It is. It’s from Young Master. It’s a unique piece just for you. I’ll teach you how to take care of it later, and if you want to show it to a craftsman, just let me know anytime.”

Lime hurriedly shook his head. “I can’t accept this. This sword has to be worth much more than the one Nee-san broke.” He sheathed the sword and tried to hand it to me, but I pushed it back into his hands.

“I also think it’s too good for you. Young Master decided on the grade, and I chose the type. If you really can’t use it, just display it at home. If you give it back, Young Master will be mad at me.”

“Haha, even if it turns into a fight, you’d still be stronger, Nee-san.”

“What nonsense. During our sparring sessions, I’m always the one running away.”

Lime was silent.

“Even Mio and I together can’t beat Young Master.”

“Why don’t you start a mercenary group instead of a merchant company?”

“Well, if that was what Young Master wanted, I wouldn’t mind. Now, about you...”

He didn’t say anything.

“If we leave things like this, I’m afraid you’ll end up selling it for money... and that would be pathetic.” I must have struck a nerve; Lime’s expression twisted.

“Ugh.”

“You really want to protect that orphanage, don’t you?”

“Is that so bad?” he asked.

I already knew that during his years as an adventurer, he never stopped making anonymous donations to the orphanage. It was obvious he wanted to protect it at all costs.

“No. Being kind to your own is admirable. Young Master’s the same.”

“Young Master-danna too...”

“It seems you understand the value of the sword too. How about it? Would you work for me?” I asked.

“For you, Nee-san? As in, join your business?”

“That might happen eventually. But for now, you’d be gathering information,” I explained.

“Gathering information?”

“That’s right. Fortunately, you seem to have connections. This job will make use of your experience as an adventurer. At first, I would be considering you for a trial period, but would you be interested in working as my spy?”

“A spy... You mean becoming your dog.” Lime’s expression momentarily hardened.

“Sure. Your main job would be to report to me on what’s going on here in Tsige.”

Lime’s expression remained stern. *Well then, let’s poke the bear a bit more.*

“What’s wrong? Will your pride not let you become a dog?”

I might have said that a bit too maliciously. But Lime responded with a bitter smile. “Not at all. But are you sure about this? Even I have to admit, I’m quite a money sink, you know?”

Maintaining the orphanage, including vocational training and education... It certainly wouldn’t be cheap.

I knew that his sarcastic remark had just served to hide his embarrassment.

“You’d better be prepared,” I continued. “What you’ll see from now on will go way beyond your imagination. Being involved with us means being exposed to our secrets. Here; your advance and something for your expenses,” I added, tossing him a pouch.

“Hehe, what are you saying? I’m just an informant. I already know that Young Master-danna and you are quite abnormal...” As he spoke, Lime opened the pouch, and his eyes went wide. “Wait, this is the *advance*?!”



“Does that really seem like a lot? Maybe you’re underestimating the job of a spy. It’s a dangerous job; I mean, you could lose your life at any point. But if you devote yourself to this job and meet my expectations, I’ll protect what’s important to you no matter what happens to you.”

“I feel like I’m being heavily relied on,” Lime said, a smile spreading across his face. “I trust those words.”

“I have high expectations,” I replied with a smile of my own.

“By the way, how much is in this pouch...? Wait, are these all *gold* coins?!”

“Of course they’re all gold. About 170, I think. Sorry, it’s just what I happened to have on me. I’m sure you’ll earn more than that soon. Got it?”

“What a dream job.”

*Heh, make sure to become a useful spy, Lime.*

*You should thank me, or rather, thank the Chief Investigator from the Oni Crime Reports.*

*Young Master, I’m truly grateful that you watched all the Oni Crime Reports.*

*Hmm, but this means I’m the chief, doesn’t it? Well then, Young Master would be the youthful Lord of Kyoto. Yeah, that works!*

*Lime, you should be proud. You’re our first official spy.*

*I’ll train you well, so you won’t be an embarrassment anywhere you go.*

*Hehehe, just don’t die on me along the way, okay?*

And so, Lime came into our employ... and thus, without Young Master knowing, our (my) first spy was born.

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Surprisingly, Lime really knew nothing. I had thought he might have touched on some aspects of the incident’s truth, but... he had no information about the cursed disease cast upon Rembrandt’s wife and daughters. If that was the case, the best course of action would be to look into the mind of the shaman who

cast the curse, but that guy was already dead. The memories of someone whose body and soul no longer existed were beyond even my reach...

Every day, though, Lime was constantly bustling around. Though he'd only just started working, he was doing well. His desperate training with the sword I gave him was commendable. Having originally wielded a double-edged sword, adapting to a new blade, like this one-handed sword, would take considerable time. Yet, at this rate, I thought he might master it relatively quickly. He didn't skip his basic training and started practical combat training around Tsige, including in the Wasteland. If it had been Young Master, he would spend months just practicing swings and forms before actual combat, but Lime was quite decisive.

Anyway, Lime had so far been an exemplary student who required little guidance and continuously strived for excellence. He was a promising find, and I figured I might even invite him to the Demiplane for one-on-one training to push him to greater heights. Young Master would surely respond positively to that.

I was thinking all this while browsing a Tsige bookstore when I sensed a strange presence.

"Hm, isn't that... Rembrandt's butler, Morris? Is he spying on me? Hmm."

He probably thought I hadn't noticed him yet. As if a hyuman could get close enough to see me first. *Who does he think I am? Am I being underestimated, or is he just that confident in his own abilities?*

Admittedly, among the hyumans I'd encountered, Morris's movements were top-tier. Of course, if an average person tried standing and reading like I was, they'd have been kicked out, no questions asked. Unlike in Young Master's world, printing and bookbinding techniques weren't advanced here, and knowledge came at a high price. Opening a book could damage it, and peeking inside meant obtaining information for free. Both were the worst offenses.

The shop made an exception for me because I bought a substantial number of books with cash each time I came. Young Master was also a regular here. He didn't browse much, though. Mio, on the other hand, was never seen here—she didn't read at all—which was fine; more for me.

Just then, Morris entered the store. He was using the shelves to remain in my blind spot, but in his next move, he would lose sight of me for a moment. *Now!*

“Do you need something? You’re... Morris, right?” I placed my hand on his shoulder from behind, greeting him with a smile.

As I enjoyed the startled look on his face, a thought struck me. The shaman in Lime’s memory hated Rembrandt with a passion. Although said shaman was no longer alive, perhaps Rembrandt or someone connected to him knew the reason behind this hatred.

I decided to delve into Morris’s memories while making small talk to calm his nerves. Rapidly sifting through his memories, I discarded anything irrelevant.

*No, no, no...* I narrowed in on memories before he came to Tsige, before he met Rembrandt. It was no surprise that the Rembrandt Company engaged in quite a few shady dealings. If a company rose to prominence within a single generation, it was usually through deceit, takeovers, pressure, bribery, or even... murder.

*Wow, I can’t report all this to Young Master as it is. Looks like Rembrandt himself has softened quite a bit since having kids, but his past is awful.*

*Hmm... This guy looks kind of like that shaman. Let’s rewind...*

“I see.”

“Tomoe-sama? Is there something—”

“Never mind.” I shook my head and ended my conversation with Morris.

After making my usual bulk purchase, I headed for the Rembrandt Company to read Rembrandt’s memories as well. As a savior of his family, I was granted an audience right away, even unannounced. Before leaving, I also took the opportunity to complain about the butler’s attempt at spying on me.

Next, I brought the books to the Demiplane, then headed to my room. Usually, I would have gone straight to the archive, but today I went directly to my personal chamber.

Sorting through the memories I’d obtained from both men, I couldn’t help but sigh.

“Rembrandt, this is truly the consequence of your own actions. It should have been you who faced that punishment.”

If this were a period drama, Lime might have been held accountable, but Rembrandt would undoubtedly have met his end. A sigh escaped me. It would be difficult to secretly dispose of Rembrandt now, especially given how highly Young Master valued him as a capable merchant. Even I had to admit he possessed a certain fiendish charm.

Unlike the benevolent figures of Yoshimune or Mito Komon, stories involving such demonic figures often carried a bitter taste, and it was not always about rewarding good and punishing evil. Many were former villains who turned into saints... yet, they all received some form of punishment.

In Rembrandt’s case, it was the illness that befell his family. Knowing his past, I found this a rather light punishment, but there wasn’t much I could do about it.

There was no denying Rembrandt was a valuable asset to Young Master. And yet, if Young Master knew the truth, his sense of justice might not allow him to forgive Rembrandt. He disliked keeping secrets, and I didn’t want to deceive him.

*Someday. Yes, someday, when the time comes, I’ll reveal everything. Until then, this vile story will remain my burden alone.*

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The Hanza Company.

It was once a well-established business in Tsige. Given the city’s role as a base for adventurers who challenge the Wasteland, a company known for making such high-quality weapons was naturally quite influential.

Hanza had extensive dealings with craftsmen, and they were so renowned that no adventurer visiting the city could claim ignorance of their name. Despite this prestige, they remained humble, selling weapons to everyone.

It was then that a young Rembrandt and Morris arrived.

Back then, Morris was no butler; he had been visiting Tsige as an adventurer. Although their master-servant relationship had already been established, they kept it concealed, with Morris handling the dirty work.

Noticing Tsige's unique environment as the most developed city near the Wasteland, the two had relocated from another city, intent on doing business there. After they hired a few employees, they established the Rembrandt Company.

On the surface, they presented as clean, up-and-coming merchants. But behind the scenes, they were ruthless, using Morris as a pawn to employ mafia-like tactics to eliminate their rivals one by one.

Rembrandt himself had already met his future wife, but they weren't married yet, and she had nothing to do with the company; she wasn't even in Tsige.

Cleverly hiding his darker side, Rembrandt rapidly gained power, eventually moving toward acquiring the lucrative Wasteland rights. The Wasteland, if handled well, was a goldmine. Rembrandt wasn't the only one who saw its potential, but reaching this stage in such a short time was a testament to his extraordinary talent and ruthless pragmatism.

However...

No matter how much Rembrandt expanded his product range and strengthened his influence in Tsige, as long as the Hanza Company existed, he remained capped. Hanza not only employed the best craftsmen and boasted a long track record; it also claimed the loyalty of many adventurers.

For a newcomer like Rembrandt, the existing order was the greatest obstacle.

Rembrandt had trouble overthrowing the Hanza Company through conventional means. After all, they had greater financial power and a strong influence in the city and not just with adventurers. Of course, outwardly Rembrandt maintained a respectful relationship with them as a senior partner, but he was always plotting ways to bring down this "enemy."

And so, when Morris reported to Rembrandt that the head of Hanza Company had died in an accident near the entrance to the Wasteland... Let's just say Rembrandt was about as surprised as Morris himself.

A true villain, indeed.

In any case, the Hanza Company underwent a leadership change, and Rembrandt saw his opportunity. The new head was an unmarried girl in her late teens with limited merchant experience. However, given the size of the company, they had more than enough capable staff to fill in while she got up to speed.

Rembrandt carefully began to build a business relationship with her, sometimes even happily incurring losses for the sake of Hanza. The company's executives were suspicious at first, but after years of devoted efforts, they came to trust him. All the while, he was working to ensnare the young head of the company.

The Hanza and Rembrandt companies entered a period of close cooperation that seemed like a perfect match. Although the two heads weren't actually married, their relationship was more than cordial. Hanza's reputation as the top trading company in Tsige grew even more prominent, while the Rembrandt Company supported them like a good wife.

In reality, the young head was completely under Rembrandt's control—and behind the scenes, their relationship was devoid of the loving warmth that they showed to the public. Nonetheless, Rembrandt bided his time, waiting for the right moment to make his final move. He dedicated himself at least as much to the Hanza Company as he did to his own business. He even halted the aggressive expansion he'd been pursuing since his early days in Tsige. Seeing this, everyone believed that his association with Hanza Company had matured him from a brash, young merchant to one who was considerate of the entire city's well-being.

The rumors about a romantic relationship between Rembrandt and the head of the Hanza Company only served to enhance his credibility, as he never exploited their relationship for personal gain. If he had, it would have raised concerns and sparked negative rumors. His extreme caution paid off.

Everything was within Rembrandt's grasp. The public persona of a good-natured executive spread not only within his own company but also within the Hanza Company and among the townspeople. People began to see him as

someone who might eventually marry the head of the Hanza Company and support both businesses.

The hidden side of Rembrandt laughed at this point.

He must have judged that the time was right. All he needed was an opportunity... and it came sooner than expected. When the head of the Hanza Company went to negotiate a deal in a neighboring town, Rembrandt happened to be out in the Wasteland.

This really was a coincidence. But he secretly moved his employee Morris... and had the entire party from Hanza Company traveling on a safe route massacred.

When Rembrandt received the report of mission accomplished, his voice and expression showed no pity or guilt. On the contrary, he looked exceedingly satisfied. For the truth was Rembrandt had no romantic feelings for the head of the Hanza Company. To him, she was nothing more than an incompetent, easily manipulated fool. He had no intention of making her his puppet forever.

The day he'd met her, he had decided; once everything was in place, she would be eliminated.

Rembrandt held her lifeless body, crying loudly, and spent his own money to bring the "perpetrator" to justice.

Even though not one of those tears was heartfelt, those around him were moved by his actions, and they felt terrible for the poor man who had lost his beloved.

Meanwhile, the Hanza Company's executives, seeing no other option, implored Rembrandt to take the reins. In effect, Rembrandt absorbed Hanza; even now, many former members of the Hanza Company worked for the Rembrandt Company, having sworn loyalty to him.

He welcomed Morris, who had finally retired from adventuring, as his butler and bodyguard, thus forming the prototype of the current Rembrandt Company.

In all of Tsige, there were only two people who had ever seen the dark side of Rembrandt: his wife and Morris. Perhaps it was different in other cities, but

here, it was just these two. As time passed and his daughter was born, that ruthless side gradually faded. Thus, the new Rembrandt, the doting father and family man, was born.

Today, in Tsige, Rembrandt was known as a man who'd overcome tragedy, a compassionate individual, and a caring parent. During the merger, some craftsmen who had dealings with the Hanza Company refused to continue their relationship and cut ties, but no one considered it a significant issue. Rembrandt had gained absolute power in Tsige.

Among those craftsmen, however, was *him*. The shaman who cast the cursed disease on Rembrandt's family. Changing careers from a weaponsmith to a shaman was a significant undertaking, but this man had hated Rembrandt that much.

Who was this man? The former lover of the Hanza Trading Company's head.

In fact, the two lovers were torn apart because she became the head of the Hanza Trading Company. The heartbroken young woman, feeling the sting of lost love, was eventually won over by Rembrandt's eloquence and warmth, transforming her memories of her former lover into mere recollections. It was not an unimaginable tale, but it was pitiable nonetheless.

Given this background, the former lover harbored an unrelenting grudge against Rembrandt, suspecting every move he made. By the time of the funeral, he had likely uncovered Rembrandt's true nature, or at least found enough evidence to convince himself. While Rembrandt mourned the death of the head of the Hanza Company, shedding fresh tears at her funeral, the shaman looked on with eyes full of hatred.

When Rembrandt returned to Tsige with his soon-to-be wife after finishing his work far away, stirring up the town...

When he announced his support for adventurers and welcomed the former adventurer Morris as his butler...

When he proudly announced the birth of his daughter to the entire town...

Each time, the shaman's hatred grew deeper.



Creating a uniquely deadly cursed disease, leaving a small glimmer of hope, spoke to the depth and intensity of his hatred. He manipulated Lime and enlisted the adventurers to help execute his plan. He probably even expected that his plot would leave him dead or captured.

*A life consumed by revenge... It seems so pointless to me, but I wonder if he felt any satisfaction. Even when he confronted Rembrandt and Morris, he never said why he did it, just smiled. Rembrandt didn't even remember the man. He died without sharing the reason for his vengeance, leaving behind a dark smile that brought despair to Rembrandt.*

*That smile... it seemed satisfied, and at the same time utterly empty. I need to make sure that Young Master never wears an expression like that.*

*So, goodbye, nameless shaman. Your story will stay in my memory. I can't risk writing it down and letting Young Master see it. Forgive me.*

*Will I ever tell Young Master, or will I take this secret to my grave? What a heavy decision I've been given.*

# Tsukimichi

## Interlude 1

The Hero of Limia

The royal capital was bustling with activity.

The Kingdom of Limia, located at the northernmost edge of the hyuman territories, served as the final defensive line against the demon race. To the east lay the great Gritonia Empire, and together, these two nations shared a formidable alliance against demon invasions. Because of this, their influence over the other nations was considerable.

The reason the kingdom had the air of a grand festival, despite the escalating war with the demons? The divine revelation from the Goddess.

For the past ten years, the Goddess had remained silent, ignoring the prayers of priests, nobles, and commoners alike. As the unprecedented demon onslaught loomed, hyumans, deprived of the Goddess's blessings, suffered a crushing defeat. One of the five great nations, Elysion, was obliterated, drastically altering the continent's map. The demons, who had once dwelled in the harsh northern icefields, now possessed ice-free ports and fertile lands, and were quickly establishing a powerful nation.

If even Elysion had been swallowed so easily, small and medium-sized countries hardly stood a chance, and several demi-human states also fell helplessly. The continent, once a paradise for hyumans, was becoming a haven for demons.

Amid this turmoil, when it seemed the Goddess had abandoned them, a divine prophecy was received. It was no wonder the country was in a festive mood. The popular rumor in the capital suggested that the Goddess, distressed

by the growing power of the demons, had used her power to grant Limia a once-in-a-lifetime hero capable of finally annihilating the demons. Or at least, that was the rumor. The actual content of the divine message was far simpler:

*“I grant you a hero. Defeat the demons.”*

That was it. The simplicity of the message was almost laughable, casting doubt on the Goddess’s divine nature. It was less a prophecy and more a hastily scribbled memo.

In response to the divine prophecy, Limia treated the hero as a savior and a beacon of hope. Of the three individuals summoned from another world, the hero of Limia received the most favorable treatment.

The now-destroyed religious nation of Elysion, which had been annihilated by the demons, had constructed temples to the Goddess in the capitals of various nations. In one such temple, now integrated into the castle, a sudden burst of golden light exploded. Offerings scattered in all directions, and when the light subsided, there stood a young girl.

She had deep-black hair, appeared to be in her mid to late teens, stood a little over five and a half feet tall, and had a well-proportioned figure and an attractive face. Most notable were her sharp, dark eyes, filled with strong determination. The priests were bewildered by her abrupt appearance. Though she was an unknown intruder, the golden light, which unmistakably symbolized the Goddess, caused their confusion.

Then—after ten years of silence—the Goddess’s voice echoed once more.

*“This person is a hero. Treat her well.”*

The priests stood dumbfounded. Among the older priests, some had fled from Elysion to Limia and had heard the Goddess’s voice in the past. They wept with joy.

The Goddess had awakened. Not only that, she’d sent a hero! The usually quiet temple resounded with their loud rejoicing.

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Standing at the altar, Hibiki Otonashi could only smile wryly as people began to bow down in worship and offer pieces of fruit at her feet.

To her, everything since her encounter with the Goddess felt like a dream. In a bizarre, sparkling golden space, she had listened to the Goddess, a stunningly beautiful woman with golden hair, explain the situation.

The Goddess explained that her world was being invaded by the evil demon race. She pleaded for help, promising to grant Hibiki all the power she could. She mentioned that only a person from another world, someone whose wavelengths aligned with hers, could cross worlds, and she had no one else to rely on.

Even to Hibiki, the story was suspicious, especially the “evil” part. Thinking of her family and friends, the girl at first said no thanks. But then she reconsidered. If it was truly possible to go to another world... well, she’d always wanted to do that.

The Goddess promised to enhance her physical abilities, grant her immense magical power, bestow charisma to attract people, and even transfer divine artifacts to her. This offer was sounding better by the second. Hibiki was bored with her world and, honestly, didn’t have many attachments.

Born into a wealthy family, she never struggled with finances. She was blessed with good looks and had talent in both academics and sports. She was the epitome of success, always ending up at the top without much effort. It had always been this way for her—among her siblings, in elementary school, middle school, and now high school.

Stunning looks. Competing at the national level in academics. A national-level competitor in kendo. A formidable athlete in other sports too. Unanimously elected as the student council president. Well-liked by everyone with a kind and caring personality.

Because she excelled at everything, Hibiki never shared struggles with anyone. She had many acquaintances but no true friends, at least none she felt deeply connected with. There was one interesting student at her school, but they weren’t close, and now there was no opportunity to change that.

In other words, Hibiki had everything except attachment to her reality, to her world. And so, the word “hero” had always intrigued her. Someone who overcame hardships to achieve their goals, someone with something to strive for.

Even before the Goddess offered the perk of a body that wouldn’t gain weight no matter how much she ate, Hibiki had made up her mind.

“Oh, hero. May I ask for your name?”

The priests were all lined up, and the highest-ranking one had stepped forward to address Hibiki.

“My name is Otonashi Hibiki,” she replied, her voice calm yet strong.

A murmur rippled through the assembly. Hibiki felt a wave of relief wash over her as she realized she could understand them. Though the Goddess had assured her that language wouldn’t be an issue, there was still a lingering fear that communication might be impossible, especially since these people looked so different with their distinct hair and eye colors.

“Hibiki-sama,” the priest repeated. “That’s a wonderful name.”

“So, where am I? And what’s your name?” Hibiki asked the priest.

“Please forgive my rudeness. You’re within the castle of the Kingdom of Limia. I’m High Priest Henry Lunamius Ira Portga Elysion.”

“That’s a long name,” Hibiki remarked, unable to hold back her surprise. She wondered if his name included not just his surname but also his origins and perhaps even his parents’ names.

“Then please, call me Harry,” he said.

Hibiki, momentarily amused by the drastic shortening, was brought back to seriousness by the priest’s next question.

“Hibiki-sama, you’ve descended upon this land as a hero. Is that correct?”

“Yes, the Goddess has asked me to defeat the demon race.”

A chorus of awed voices rose once again.

“Um... Hibiki-sama, may I ask, are you a battle goddess?” one priest inquired hesitantly. Their reaction would clearly differ if she were divine rather than human.

“No, I’m just a human. The Goddess has granted me a few blessings and some artifacts,” Hibiki explained, showing them the silver sash. The Goddess described it as an item that repelled darkness and enhanced magical power. Though Hibiki held it in her hand now, she thought it would be best worn around her waist as a decorative belt.

“An artifact from the gods,” another priest declared, bowing his head. Since it was a gift from the Goddess, calling it a divine artifact was certainly fitting.

“A human... the race said to be the ancestors of us humans,” the priest remarked.

“Humans, you say? I believe I’m just like you,” Hibiki responded.

“Although we don’t look all that different from each other, what lies within us is. Among our race, there are very few who possess such immense magical power as you do, Hibiki-sama.”

Hibiki furrowed her brows at the priest’s words. Had they been studying her without her knowledge? The thought made her feel uneasy—which must have shown on her face, because the priest quickly waved his hands in denial.

“We’ve done nothing to know this. It’s just that the magical power emanating from you is incredibly strong.”

As Hibiki thought about it, though, she realized that even allowing her magical power to leak out could be problematic. If others could gauge her strength so easily, it would leave her with fewer options in a confrontation. Right then, she resolved to learn how to conceal her magick.

A smile crept across her face. She’d always loved a challenge.

“Well, that’s fine. So, what should I do now?” she asked the priest. “Should I stay here for a while?”

A sense of relief spread through the room. Hibiki loved seeing how strongly her words and actions influenced others.

“Oh, no! We... we’re sorry for the sudden request, but you *have* to meet the king. We’ll secure an audience with him immediately.”

“Can I really meet the king just like that?” she asked, surprised.

“You’re a hero,” the priest assured her. “You’re a special existence!”

A smile played on Hibiki’s lips. Though she wasn’t much of a gamer, she felt she could understand why people loved RPGs. She was special and because of that she was about to embark on an extraordinary adventure. This beginning brought a pleasant, rare feeling of exhilaration.

“Oh, by the way—” Hibiki suddenly stopped while being led through the luxurious castle by the priests.

“What is it?” one of them asked.

“—there’s supposed to be another hero besides me... Do you know where they might be?” Hibiki asked.

“Another hero?” The priest’s face contorted in surprise.

“Yes... the Goddess mentioned that she’d already sent another hero ahead.”

A buzz of murmurs erupted among the priests.

“Another hero... Could it be that the Empire has a hero too?”

“The Goddess would never send a hero to *that* place before us!”

“Why didn’t she send both heroes to *our* country?”

In their fervent discussion, the priests seemed to forget that they were supposed to be escorting Hibiki to the audience chamber. *So, these guys must not get along very well with the Empire*, Hibiki mused.

To calm the commotion, Hibiki spoke up. “So, it seems he isn’t here. That’s fine with me.”

“How reassuring,” the priest replied. Hibiki thought his tone carried an edge of hidden meaning, but he said nothing more.

Finally, they led her to the audience chamber.

“So, you’re the hero,” a voice called out.

*This looks exactly like I thought it would,* Hibiki thought absentmindedly as she faced the king. The grand room had a red carpet stretching across the floor, with two thrones on a raised platform. Seated there were a middle-aged man and a young woman.

“Yes, I’m Hibiki Otonashi. I apologize if I’m not following your customs. Is it all right if I address you as ‘King’?” Hibiki’s tone was polite but conveyed a sense of equality, clear to all who observed.

None of the courtiers reprimanded her; they were all keen to gauge the presence of the hero.

“Of course,” the king replied calmly. “As the hero summoned by the Goddess from another world, you may address me as ‘King.’ Indeed, you must be a hero. The magick surrounding you leaves no room for doubt. I’m Nornil, the king of this country. My full name is long, but you may remember me simply as Nornil.”

“Thank you for your consideration. Since the Goddess sent me here, does that mean I will be fighting the demon race in this country?” Hibiki inquired.

“Indeed. Our country is currently at war with the demon race. For now, the conflict consists of border skirmishes, but since we hold the defensive line, it will likely escalate. However, Hibiki-dono, first, you should take the time to learn about this world.”

*Eventually? So, there’s some leeway. That’s much better than having none at all,* Hibiki thought. Still, she couldn’t shake the feeling of being watched.

It wasn’t just curiosity aimed her way. The eyes around her were filled with worship or perhaps even reverence. Either way, it made her uncomfortable. She knew she was beautiful, and she knew she was a hero; what she didn’t know yet was that they also stared because they had never seen black hair or eyes like hers.

Wanting nothing more than to escape the situation, she decided on a course of action.

“I appreciate the offer. Since I don’t know anything about this world, I would appreciate it if you could teach me a little bit at a time... For now, I’d like to understand the extent of my abilities. Could someone spar with me?”



This request immediately increased the attention on her. The knights, in particular, seemed to respond favorably.

*Magick can wait, but I need to gauge my physical abilities, Hibiki thought. I doubt they have a katana, but considering my kendo background, using a sword might be the best option...*

Thus began Hibiki Otonashi's life as a hero.

## Knight (?)

The girl who introduced herself as a hero seemed to glow as if surrounded by fairies. Her confident expression, dignified stance, and the aura of authority she projected even when speaking to the king were mesmerizing. Her glossy, jet-black hair shone in the light.

Although she claimed to be unfamiliar with our customs, nothing she said or did came off as rude. She was unlike any woman I'd ever seen in the royal palace.

From the moment I saw her, I was captivated.

The king was probably considering how to utilize her on the battlefield while taking into account her gender. I doubted she needed such consideration.

Once she learned combat techniques and how to wield her magick, she would no doubt become stronger than any of us—and play a crucial role in taking down enemy commanders.

The first thing she asked of the king was to fight. She was looking toward us knights when she requested a sparring match. She had a practical and robust core, unlike the pompous nobles or overly intellectual magicians!

I was captivated... but it was more than that. This feeling far surpassed mere admiration; I'd never felt anything like it. Living alongside this woman, how brilliant would life become? The way she looked, the way she moved,

everything about her stirred my heart. Already it felt as though I'd admired her forever. Could it be that I'd fallen in love at first sight?

*I desire her.* For the first time, I'd found myself truly wanting a woman.

The surprises didn't end there. The presence of a hero chosen by the Goddess was truly overwhelming. When several of our top knights, selected by the captain, sparred with her, her movements were so quick they were almost impossible to follow, and her swordsmanship was even faster. Though her style was straightforward, her strength was undeniable, and she bested even large men in contests of strength.

Eventually, the captain himself faced her in a match. Everyone around was entranced by her. It was no wonder. This elegant, noble girl was effortlessly overpowering knights and now fighting on equal footing with the captain of the strongest knight order in the country.

What's more, the magick emanating from her was extraordinary. To possess such a level of swordsmanship and immense magical power—was this what it meant to be a hero?

She was in a league of her own.

A sharp, high-pitched sound echoed across the training ground.

Her sword had broken in half. Was this the captain's victory?

No! The captain's sword had been flung into the air. His hand, drenched in sweat, trembled slightly. And there she stood, cool and composed, gazing thoughtfully at her broken sword without a single bead of sweat on her brow.

*Impossible. She can already wield a sword like this? Is she a battle goddess or...?*

Her expression, although tinged with a hint of melancholy, was just as beautiful, and I knew I was far from the only young knight who was hypnotized by her.

A few seconds later, the captain's sword landed, plunging into the hard dirt of the training ground. Just as he was about to declare his defeat, she stopped him, discarding her own sword first.

“Thank you, Captain. Your practical swordsmanship is truly impressive. I’m humbled. I’d appreciate it if you would continue to guide me,” Hibiki said, extending her hand. The captain hesitated for just a moment, then shook it.

Cheers erupted from the surrounding knights. *Damn it, the captain... he should just die. No, wait, that was my inner voice.*

Hibiki handed her broken sword to the captain.

“This... I’m sorry I handled it so roughly even though it was borrowed.”

Even as she apologized, she was stunningly beautiful.

*I know I can’t reach her.*

Still, I wanted to spar with her at least once, but she was quickly surrounded by people and started moving toward the exit of the training grounds.

*Is she leaving already?*

As knights, we had to continue our training here. We could only see her off. As knights, we had to follow orders.

Suddenly, she looked at me.

Her dark eyes, filled with a gentle warmth, met mine, and she smiled.

*Oh, I’m done for.*

*I’ve decided. I will be with her. I will win her over!*

*I swear this by the name of the First Prince of Limia, Belda Norst Limia.*

※ ※ ※

Level 188. Hero.

This was the title Hibiki Otonashi now held. Descending upon the great nation of Limia, she was advised by the king to first learn about this new world. She visited various parts of the kingdom and occasionally neighboring countries. Whenever a significant conflict with demon forces arose, she was summoned back to participate in the battles.

Ordinarily, traveling from one country to another would take considerable time. However, the king provided Hibiki with magical artifacts and teleportation arrays that aided her return to cities, and she had unlimited access to the magick teleportation circles overseen by both the Adventurer's and Merchant Guilds in each city. This made her otherwise impossible schedule at least feasible.

At first, Hibiki was reluctant to fight the demons—they looked too much like humans, albeit with blue skin and horns. Yet, through countless battles, witnessing the deaths of her comrades and enemies, she began to accept the harsh reality of taking lives in war.

Monsters and demons, from Hibiki's original perspective, were entities equal to humans. Yet, she accepted the necessity of killing them because she reached the conclusion that some issues couldn't be resolved through ideology or belief alone. And this was a large part of why the kingdom sent her to other countries; it wasn't that they could afford the luxury of sightseeing, but rather that she needed this valuable perspective.

More than just giving her recognition, the comrades who fought beside her played a significant role. For Hibiki, their lives held far more weight than those of strangers. Through constant participation in battles and standing on the front lines, what became most ingrained in soldiers was not individual beliefs but the desperate desire to survive alongside their comrades.

Hibiki was now in the royal castle of Limia, having just survived a brutal battle. She was injured, for once, and was receiving treatment and resting. All her party members were also wounded and being seen to in another room. They were effectively in a state of total defeat.

Though they'd managed to return under their own power, the castle was in an uproar. It was no wonder—the battered hero and her party collapsed the moment they returned to the castle.

"Kyuuun," came a voice from the silver sash wrapped around her waist. It was her guardian beast, the silver wolf, who had also been injured and was recovering its strength within the sash.

“I’m fine. You should rest as well. Even if magick can heal wounds, it can’t heal your spirit.” Hibiki spoke to the wolf, but it was true for herself too; only rest could restore her stamina, magical power, and overall energy. Fortunately, none of her party members had sustained any injuries that would leave lasting damage. With enough recovery time, everyone would be able to return to action.

As she took care of her wolf companion, Hibiki pondered her situation.

*According to the plan, I should be fighting a demon general in about three months. I thought that would be my first real challenge...*

And yet, *this* had been her first experience of defeat or close to it. Hibiki had been steadily earning respect and demonstrating her capabilities as a hero, and she’d been eager to face a more significant challenge. To put it bluntly, she had been looking forward to experiencing failure. This was a sentiment she hadn’t shared with her party members, but it was definitely one of the reasons she had come to this other world.

*Even Navarre’s speed wasn’t enough to overcome them...*

Navarre. She was a swordswoman with a combat style similar to Hibiki’s, relying primarily on speed. Driven by a deep hatred for the demon race, she fought solely for revenge. Initially, Navarre and Hibiki had often clashed, but now they shared the role of frontline fighters in their party. Navarre’s speed surpassed Hibiki’s, and she skillfully alternated between hit-and-run tactics and overwhelming flurries of attacks. She was about the same age and height as Hibiki, with ash-blond hair that was nearly white. This, next to Hibiki’s jet-black hair, made the pair of them stand out prominently on the battlefield.

*Belda’s defenses were breached...*

For a knight, Belda’s abilities were considered average. At first, he didn’t have the strength to join Hibiki’s party, but he’d secretly leveraged his royal status to force his way into the group. None of the party members knew he was royalty, or that he was first in line for the throne. Despite not being exceptionally skilled, he’d diligently honed his abilities and became increasingly valuable to the party.

His specialty was defense. He often intercepted attacks aimed at the rear guard and absorbed or deflected attacks that the speed-focused front-liners couldn't handle. Essentially, he acted as a middle guard who could also serve as a shield. Belda's quick parries, his focused defense, and his interception of projectiles and magick surpassed even Hibiki's.

*Woody's magick had no effect...*

Woody, a male mage hailed as a genius, specializing in high-powered offensive magick—an artillery mage. Most artillery mages lacked mobility, but Woody had made a pact with a wind spirit, augmenting his agility with his natural nimbleness. This earned him the nickname "Limia's Mobile Artillery," a title he was ambivalent about. His offensive magick was invaluable to Hibiki's party, which largely relied on physical attacks. Initially a court magician, he was asked by the king to accompany Hibiki. Despite his small stature and youthful appearance, he was twenty-five, the eldest in the party.

*I also put so much strain on Chiya-chan...*

Chiya, the party's much-valued healer, a shrine maiden. She possessed high magical power, specializing in healing and support magick, and like Woody, had a close relationship with spirits. Typically, unless a mage specialized in spirit magick, spirits tended to dislike them. Both Woody and Chiya were rare exceptions.

Chiya had a strong bond with a water spirit, and her maximum magical capacity was on par with Hibiki's. Chiya was an important figure from the Lorel Federation, one of the four great nations that remained after Elysion's fall. She was nearly sacrificed to some monsters in a buffer zone near the border before being rescued by Hibiki's group. Since then, she'd joined the party formally and had served as Hibiki's instructor in healing magick. Naturally, given the current state of the party, Chiya had exhausted almost all her magical power in healing and was now in a deep sleep.

Hibiki, Navarre, Belda, Woody, and Chiya. One human and four hyumans.

This was the hero party of Limia. Their levels, and their strength, had increased with each battle. This time, however, they'd met defeat.

A shiver ran through Hibiki's body, and she felt her lips curl up. From deep inside, a strange tremor, something like an odd aching, spread throughout her body.

Soon after her arrival, Hibiki Otonashi had chosen a sword combat style that focused on speed. In this world, she was strong enough to handle a great sword, but in consideration of her teammates, and wanting something easier to use, she'd ultimately chosen a "bastard sword." It was a rarely used weapon in Limia. She would have liked a katana, of course, but with none available, this worked all right.

She usually wielded the bastard sword one-handed, but switched to two when delivering powerful strikes. The sword felt incredibly comfortable, and Hibiki came to love it. Her kendo skills were less about the actual sword handling and more about the concepts of distance and seizing initiative. She was pleased to find that these skills remained useful, even with a Western-style sword.

Given her immense magical power, Hibiki initially considered using offensive magick. However, she soon found that maintaining focus for incantations during combat was difficult, making it impractical except for preemptive strikes. Concentrating on incantations while fighting with a sword would take time to master, so she decided against it for the time being.

Instead, she focused on techniques that allowed her to infuse her weapon with magick, simple and quick-use barriers, and self-healing spells. This approach led to a powerful and stable fighting style that was well suited for solo combat. In fact, Hibiki had never lost in a one-on-one fight. She'd always believed that *if* she were ever defeated, it would be because of underhanded tactics.

How wrong she'd been; today, her entire team had been crushed by a single being. There had been no intricate strategies or complex tactics involved, just sheer, straightforward power.

Hibiki's mind raced as she reflected on the battle.

As unexpected as it had been, it *had* brought Hibiki the defeat she'd longed for.

It had been a being driven by pure instinct, wielding overwhelming offensive power and absurd defensive capabilities.

Navarre had indeed overwhelmed the creature with her speed, striking like a tempest and always getting away before the retaliatory strike could land. However, despite her rapid assaults, she was defeated for one simple reason: her attacks had little effect. Navarre's sword, though slender and elegant compared to Hibiki's, was an enchanted weapon. Combined with her speed, its sharpness was considerable, but still insufficient.

During the battle, Navarre managed to gradually layer on damage while suppressing her fatigue from high-speed combat, finally severing one of the monster's legs. The party felt a surge of accomplishment, believing they'd were making progress. But in the next moment, it regenerated its leg and kept fighting as if nothing had happened.

Navarre, momentarily thrown off guard, was ensnared by black threads and immobilized, then struck by a powerful claw. Chiya desperately tried to nullify the threads' effects and heal her, but bringing her back into the fray was hopeless; the blow Navarre had taken was too severe.

With Navarre down, more attacks were directed at Hibiki, increasing Belda's burden. Although adept at parrying, Belda couldn't emerge unscathed every time. As his movements slowed, he eventually collapsed as well.

Since Chiya was focused on healing one member, Woody couldn't channel all his magick into offense. Whether or not his attack spells were effective, the unchanging response of their opponent meant fewer attacks were landing, further worsening their situation.

Despite Hibiki's efforts to maintain the frontline with barriers and self-healing, it was clear she couldn't handle the job alone. She had been using her guardian beast, the silver wolf, to intercept attacks that barriers couldn't block. When the silver wolf was hit and slowed, it soon succumbed to a flurry of claw strikes.

Chiya switched to healing Hibiki, but it wasn't enough. At the same time, Woody's support spells began to falter. And all the while their enemy continued to spew black threads toward the rear.



Healing and support ceased. Panic and a cold sweat covered Hibiki. Overwhelmed by raw offensive and defensive power, she felt herself being crushed. Her comrades had fallen, and she couldn't even check whether they were all still alive.

One of the monster's legs was nearly severed, and Hibiki didn't miss the opportunity. With a swift follow-up strike, she sliced it the rest of the way off. Finally, her relentless attacks had paid off.

The leg disintegrated into black particles and scattered. And then... it began regenerating, just as it had before.

"Haha... ha..."

Despair gripped Hibiki's heart. There was no way to win—this was completely hopeless. It wasn't even a contest. So why in the world was she laughing?

The magical power everyone had praised her for was almost entirely spent. She was more tired than she'd ever been, and her body felt like it weighed a ton.

Gathering all her remaining strength, she fortified her body, and her weapon began to glow red.

*Even if I can't win...*

The light in her eyes never faded.

"I'm not done yet! Come at me!"

Hibiki no longer had the strength to move closer to the enemy; all she could do was stand her ground and shout.

The creature let out an incomprehensible roar, lowering all eight legs to the ground to charge at her. In a second, it was slashing at her with one of its forelegs.

Hibiki stepped forward and delivered a diagonal upward slash.

Her strike hit the creature right above its fangs, slicing through one eerily glowing eye.

Under normal circumstances, Hibiki would have landed this as a counterattack. But this wasn't even intended as a counter. She struck with the certainty of a mutual blow at best.

"Urgh... gugh!"

She felt blood rushing up her throat as her internal organs were crushed.

Of course. She didn't dodge the horizontal slash aimed at her abdomen but stepped forward to take it head-on.

*Am I going to die?*

As this thought crossed her mind, Hibiki lifted her head one last time and saw...

...a quiet plain, as if the intense battle had never happened.

"Why..." she began, but blood was dripping from her open mouth, and she couldn't hold onto her fading consciousness anymore.

Darkness closed in.

Hibiki Otonashi, the hero, had experienced her first defeat. A crushing, absolute loss with no chance of victory. Her opponent had been neither a demon nor a beast—

It was a single black spider, despised as a disaster, that continued to devour the world.

Hibiki did not yet know its true nature. Nor did she realize that her final desperate strike to its eye had partially satisfied the spider's hunger, causing it to leave.

She sat up in bed and took a series of deep breaths to calm her racing mind.

"I *will* win. That's all there is to it. Thank you for this defeat... Wait for me!"

Her reputation might suffer due to this loss, but Hibiki couldn't care less. She would find out more about this creature and win. At that moment, she gained a clear objective.

In the world she came from, defeat and setbacks were no more attainable than the moon. But *this* world—this world had finally granted her desires.

The truth was Hibiki's party had repelled the black spider, even though they were only five people with levels barely reaching two hundred.

Only later did Hibiki find out that the encounter with the black spider hadn't diminished her reputation but had elevated it. Typically, when the black spider appeared, it required the Adventurer's Guild to muster high-rank adventurers, coordinate with the national mage corps, and execute a thorough long-range attack strategy to force a retreat.

The kingdom was astonished by this news, and Hibiki Otonashi's name rose in prominence.

The following day Makoto Misumi freed the black spider from its hunger.

# Tsukimichi

## Interlude 2

The Hero of Gritonia

**G**olden locks cascaded down her back. She wore a simple white cloth tied at the shoulder, something like a toga. Before him stood a girl more beautiful and charming than any being he had ever seen. Her clear green eyes held an aura of mystery, and their gaze made reality itself seem to blur, leaving only the joy of being noticed by her. She exuded a purity that seemed almost divine, making him feel unworthy even to dream of such beauty.

*Is this real or just a dream?* he wondered.

But it was no dream.

When the girl spoke to him, she declared herself a goddess. She said that her power was insufficient to contain the surge of evil overtaking her world. She pleaded for his help, admitting that she could no longer manage alone.

As badly as he wanted to help, he told her he was too weak. And it was true; he was neither particularly skilled in academics nor athletics. He was average at best, and often found himself the target of his peers' bullying. Of course, he didn't tell her all this.

The reason for his suffering was simple: he was too attractive. His delicate features and slightly frail appearance made him popular among girls, which incited nothing but jealousy and hostility from the other boys. As if the names they called him weren't enough, they often employed violence. Unfortunately, the girls' attentions were wasted on him—he was too afraid of them to ever approach one—but they just kept coming, and the boys just got angrier and angrier.

*What am I supposed to do?* he often wondered, becoming more reclusive as school became unbearable.

It was during this period of his life that the goddess showed up.

*“Don’t worry,” she told him. “You have great power within you. It will awaken fully in my world. I will bless and empower you. So, please, help me—”*

Had she come at another time, he would have refused. But at that moment, feeling more isolated and desperate than ever, he asked, “Really? Can I really do something?”

He thought of the bullying, and his parents’ disappointment in his truancy, and felt a glimmer of hope in her words.

Nothing in his life was going right.

*“Of course, it has to be you. Another girl has also decided to cross worlds with you. Please, become a hero and lend me your strength.”*

As the goddess pleaded with him, he couldn’t help feeling pity for her.

It wasn’t just her asking; there was a partner involved too. The fact that this partner was a woman piqued his interest, but it was unlikely to be someone he knew. Still, having someone from his home world would be reassuring.

At least, that’s what he thought.

“You said you’d give me power, but what exactly will it be?” he asked. This actually mattered a lot; starting at Level 1 in an RPG was tedious. Recently, he’d gotten into modding games, whether RPGs or simulations, to make them more interesting from the start.

This was not a decision that should be made lightly. After all, this was no game. The goddess hadn’t mentioned anything about returning home, and if he called her out on that later, she would probably just say that he’d never asked if it was possible.

*“I’ll give you a body capable of fighting beasts, magick power beyond that of the demons, a skill with enchanting eyes to captivate people, and silver shoes that will let you soar through the sky and heal your fatigue,”* the goddess explained, gazing at the boy.

He was overjoyed, almost ecstatic. These were incredible gifts. In a game, starting with such perks would undoubtedly break the balance. The advantages were clear and overwhelming. With this, he felt he could handle most situations. Ideally, he would have liked to extract even more special abilities, but he didn't want to risk angering her by being too greedy. He hesitated, pondering his response.

Still, even if things went wrong, it would only mean that this dream-like moment would remain just a dream, and his life in his room would go back to the way it was. With that in mind, he decided to act boldly. After all, a goddess showing up and inviting him to another world was surreal enough. Of course it seemed like a dream.

*"Very well. Though it may place some burden on you, I'll grant you immortality during the night. However, this power will only be effective during the night and only when the moon is out,"* the goddess added.

Another wish granted—and he hadn't even needed to say it aloud.

The boy was blissfully unaware of this, but the goddess was in a hurry.

*Invincible when fighting at night.* He accepted this ability with that mistaken interpretation.

"I understand, goddess. I'm not sure if I can do it, but I'll try my best to be a hero," he declared, his voice full of forced determination.

The goddess broke into the brightest smile she had shown all day. He was smiling too, but only inside—and it was a darker smile. In the world he was about to enter, he would be able to wield immense power and act freely without anyone complaining. If he could captivate people like this, he would no longer be subjected to bullying.

As he was enveloped in golden light, he did his very best to ignore the nagging feeling in his chest.

He should have stayed. That feeling meant something. His circumstances were different to the other two. He wasn't bored of his life in Japan, nor was he unable to refuse. The bullying at school and his desire to escape—that was all it took for him to decide to go to another world.

A choice that could never be undone—

—in the next moment, Tomoki Iwahashi found himself in another world.

“So, this is the goddess’s world,” he muttered. The place was oddly dusty, and a single woman was standing before him. Several people dressed in clerical robes were by her side.

“Are you the hero? Do you understand what I’m saying?” she asked.

“Ah, yes. I understand,” Tomoki replied awkwardly. It had been a while since he’d had a proper conversation.

The woman before him, though not as breathtaking as the goddess, was still strikingly beautiful—which only added to his nervousness. Already over six feet tall in his third year of middle school, Tomoki towered over her. She barely reached his shoulder, but her imposing presence made him strangely tense.

Her silver hair, styled in a sleek bob, gave her a calm and mature air. She had a slender figure, and her posture was impeccable. She exuded a sense of dignity and confidence that Tomoki already knew he would never forget.

*Is this what a career woman looks like?* he wondered absently.

“Good. So, hero, since this isn’t the best place to talk, would you please follow me?” she asked, giving him a cool smile.

Tomoki nodded and followed her out of the room. She hadn’t asked for his name yet, and he should have taken that as a bad sign.

The Empire’s central government had shifted its policy away from relying on the Goddess’s blessing, choosing instead to fend off the demons on their own. Faith in the Goddess had waned significantly, especially among the military’s upper echelons. The woman who had greeted him exemplified this trend.

To the Empire, a hero was not a savior but rather raw material to create their own champion—the ultimate weapon named “hero.”

Tomoki followed her through the halls of the castle, gazing with undisguised interest at everyone he passed.

He didn’t know that he had it worse than Limia’s hero. Though better than a wilderness where basic necessities were scarce, he had landed in a place where

the Empire viewed him as nothing more than a tool for war.

## Lily

The hero had arrived. In an attempt to calm my nerves, I took a walk after parting ways with him and found myself stopping in front of the Prayer Room.

The room was sterile, with cold stone floors and an altar at its center. It was meaningless to me, and yet somehow I hated it.

The Goddess... A deity worshiped and revered by every human in this world. She loved beauty above all and had declared humans the pinnacle of all races, granting them Her blessings and protection.

Yet for the past decade, not a single prayer had reached Her. No help or blessings had come. The absolute rule of this world, where beauty bestowed power, had collapsed without warning.

The Goddess adored beautiful things. Those who met Her standards received immense blessings, enhancing their abilities to the point where even children could overpower adults. This blessing was the foundation of human supremacy.

What a cruel joke.

Suddenly, the priests and I had received a message from the Goddess. It came just as the demon race had trampled over Elysion—the nation that worshipped Her most devoutly—reducing it to ruins.

Barely holding the line with Limia's cooperation, we managed to establish a defensive front to deter further demon invasions. Amid this dire situation, I found myself questioning the Goddess's true nature. Could She really be trusted? Should we continue to depend on Her?

It was only natural that my doubts grew. I kept them to myself; giving voice to questions like these would only get me branded a heretic. Despite everything, my people still held strong faith in the Goddess.



Now, after all this time, we got a new prophecy: *“I grant you a hero. Defeat the demons.”* What a joke, I thought. What are we supposed to do with a hero summoned from an almost abandoned altar?

The Goddess declared, *“This person is a hero. Treat him well.”*

Gritonia Empire’s military had been conducting experiments to fight the demons without the Goddess’s blessing. These included enhancing human bodies, extracting and transplanting superior combat techniques, and merging humans with magical artifacts.

These experiments were nothing to be proud of. No matter the justification, they were inhumane. But so what? It was all to defeat the demons. If anyone criticized it, I’d tell them to try repelling the demons humanely.

Even compared to the numerous masterpieces we had created, the hero stood out above all.

His body was beyond the realm of ordinary human enhancement, possessing magical power equivalent to that of high-ranking demons. He was compatible with every one of the magical artifacts owned by the Empire.

All these extraordinary results had been achieved with his untouched human body—I’d seen it for myself, as the one who’d escorted him.

The hero of the Empire, Tomoki Iwahashi, appeared to be a gentle and delicate young man—refined, as you would expect of someone chosen by the Goddess.

His eyes seemed to possess a mysterious skill. Researchers speculated that it was a type of enchantment-focused magick gaze. Thankfully, we had managed to temporarily nullify its effects, at least for the royal family.

I disliked everything about him. His delicate features, his enchanted eyes, the arrogance in his speech, the way he looked at my knights like he owned them, and the way he was so excited about everything, like a kid at a festival. Most of all, I disliked that he was a gift from the Goddess.

But so be it.

*If you really are the hero, the Empire will make you the strongest. We'll give you gold, titles, women, or men—whatever you desire.*

*As long as you can destroy the demons.*

*I'll offer you any treasure, the throne of this empire, even my own body... if you can avenge my mother. My poor mother, who continued to believe in and devote herself to that Goddess, even as She ignored every prayer.*

*Tomoki Iwahashi, yes, Tomoki, be joyful. You will carve your name into history as a hero. And make me happy by staining the frozen plains with the blood of the demons.*

*Goddess, you who whimsically toy with us—I will use the toy you have given us splendidly.*

*I swear on my imperial bloodline, I will.*

※ ※ ※

Level 389, Hero.

By the time the hero of Limia and his party had begun to make their mark on the battlefield, the Empire, which was transforming into a land of silver and white, had already started to push back against the demons' defensive lines. The key player in this effort was none other than Tomoki Iwahashi, the highest-leveled hero in the Empire.

The Empire boasted a hyuman with an impressive level of 920. However, on the insistence of the second princess, Lily, that Tomoki be deployed swiftly, he became the primary combatant on the front lines. The empire actively utilized him in battles, and Tomoki, in turn, fought whenever requested, honing his skills and power.

Tomoki registered with the Adventurer's Guild on his second night in the new world, starting with a measured level of ninety-eight.

From the beginning, his leveling pace was far from normal. Within months, he had reached heights that most adventurers could only dream of achieving in a lifetime.

Tomoki was told early on that his aspirational target was Sophia—known as the Dragon Slayer, with a level of 920. This drove him to fight with enthusiasm. Supported in everything he needed by Lily and the Empire, he grew faster and faster.

Of course, the Empire guarded their secret weapon well, so Tomoki spent most of his time inside the castle or on the battlefield. Even during triumphant returns to the capital, he was instructed to wear full armor and an ostentatious helmet—which made his armored figure a well-known sight, but not so much the person inside the armor.

“The hero from Limia is Level 138, huh? Can she even help me?” Tomoki asked Lily, who had shared information about the other hero, Hibiki. His question was genuine, not mocking. After all, Hibiki’s level was only about a third of his own. Naturally, Tomoki felt uncertain about the prospect of fighting alongside someone with such a disparity in power.

“She’s only been summoned recently. We don’t know what will happen from here, Tomoki-sama,” Lily responded with a respectful smile. When Tomoki first met her, he thought she was stern and cold. Over time, her demeanor toward him had softened. Now, he would describe her as a kind young lady—the type of woman Tomoki admired. Unaware of the measures Lily had taken, he believed her change in behavior was due to the influence of his magical eyes, which delighted him.

Tomoki had told no one about his enchantment-enhanced gaze or his immortality, reluctant to reveal abilities that might negatively impact him or those he considered his trump cards.

“Yeah, that’s true. I started at Level 98 too. She should level up quickly,” Tomoki mused.

The Empire was in the planning stages of a strategy to conquer one of the demon strongholds. However, the plan was on a scale that required the support of other nations, including Limia. Thus, they were waiting for the hero of Limia to reach a certain level of competence.

To this end, the Empire had dispatched agents to the Kingdom of Limia to constantly gather the latest information on Hibiki, their hero. Thanks to these

efforts, the imperial capital, far from Limia, was well-informed about the kingdom's developments.

"But Tomoki-sama, why the sudden interest in the hero of Limia? Do you... know her?" Lily asked.

"No, I don't. I've heard the name, but I don't know the person. She's eighteen, right? I don't know anyone three years older than me."

"Then why? I heard she's a beautiful woman... Did you want her?" Lily asked teasingly, moving behind Tomoki and wrapping her arms around him.

"What, are you jealous? Don't worry, Lily. I'm more than happy with you and everyone else," Tomoki replied with a grin.

"Really? If there's ever anyone you want, just let me know," Lily whispered sweetly in his ear. "It's only natural for a conqueror to seek women. I wouldn't hold it against you."

Tomoki nodded contentedly. "Yeah, I'll tell you when that time comes."

"Of course."

"So, what about today's battle?"

"Well, it seems the northwestern line has been breached. If we're going to intervene, that would be the place."

"I see. What should we do then?"

"First, let's have lunch. That's why I came to get you, after all."

"Right, let's go to the Round Table then."

"All right, Tomoki-sama," Lily replied.

With a few maids accompanying them, they left the room.

*"I, Lily Front Gritonia, have decided to serve Hero Tomoki-sama and offer him my utmost support. Therefore, I wish to remain beside Tomoki-sama, ensuring I can support him fully."*

*In a chamber of the royal palace, an essential facility attached to the castle, the Empire's high officials had gathered. Lily's sudden announcement caused a*

stir among the royalty and influential nobles. However, the room fell silent with her next words.

“Consequently, I hereby renounce my claim to the throne and wish to delegate my administrative duties to others. I ask for your cooperation in ensuring Hero Tomoki-sama is well provided for.”

Those who protested her drastic statement were mainly from the factions of Lily’s brothers and sisters involved in the succession struggle. Although they protested publicly, deep down Lily voluntarily stepping down from the political stage was the best news her rivals could have hoped for.

What intrigued everyone was the matter of Lily’s vested interests. As a fierce contender for the throne, she had amassed significant influence and resources. Everyone in the room, nobles and siblings alike, fell silent, waiting to hear what she would say.

“Regarding the various enterprises I manage, I intend to distribute most of them among you. However, I would like to retain control over certain aspects that may be crucial in supporting the hero. Specifically, this pertains to military affairs. All technological advancements will be shared with the Imperial Army. This will ensure no concentration of power in my hands. Preparations for the transfer of other responsibilities are already underway.”

A murmur of approval rippled through the room. Under Lily’s astute leadership, several successful ventures had grown. Even those not involved in military matters held significant value, and receiving a portion of these was an enticing prospect.

This silenced the nobles and her siblings, playing right into her plans.

Next was her father, the emperor, who naturally questioned why Lily would suddenly renounce her claim to the throne. Even with the arrival of the hero, it would have made more sense to leverage the newcomer’s power to expand her influence. Considering her past actions, this should’ve been the most plausible path. Since Tomoki’s summoning, Lily had prioritized supporting him above all else. Given her current position as the second princess, she was the closest to the hero. It would’ve been possible for her to support him without withdrawing from the succession battle.

*“The next emperor should be the one who embodies your will, father. However, I wish to honor my mother’s legacy. She was a devout follower of the Goddess and believed in Her until the end. So, I apologize, father, but I wish to uphold my mother’s faith and be by the side of the hero sent by the Goddess.”*

*If it was possible, the room grew even more silent.*

*Everyone knew how deeply Lily loved her mother, from her siblings to her father to the high-ranking nobles. Some were even moved to tears by her declaration.*

*“Please forgive my selfishness. I vow to annihilate the demons alongside the hero and reclaim the beautiful land of Elysion.”*

*Still retaining control over the enterprises crucial for supporting the hero, Lily officially withdrew from the political arena that day. While many suspected ulterior motives, she devoted herself wholeheartedly to supporting the hero, dispelling their doubts with her actions.*

And now...

Tomoki and Lily found themselves in the place they called the “Round Table.” It was in fact a garden within the castle, filled with lush greenery that soothed the eyes. At its center was, well, a round table. The garden, once cherished by Lily’s mother, had become a place of relaxation for the hero. Opening this previously restricted area had surprised the nobles, but it reinforced Tomoki’s high standing, as it reflected Lily’s deep trust in him.

Tomoki was now seen as an excellent warrior, sometimes blunt but disinterested in politics. Thanks to Lily’s efforts to limit his interactions with the nobles, much about him remained a mystery. Though their preconceptions and values were somewhat rigid, they never doubted Tomoki’s loyalty to the Empire, believing he would never betray a princess who devoted herself to him.

“Tomoki-sama! Everything is ready. If you’ll follow me this way,” called Guinevere, inviting him to sit beside her with a shy yet enthusiastic expression.

“You’re late, big brother!” came a young voice.

“I made time for this meeting despite my research. Please don’t keep me waiting... I know you’re busy,” added another voice, more mature and slightly

irritated.

These three voices belonged to Tomoki's companions, whom one might call his knights of the Round Table.

The first voice came from Guinevere who was a member of the Royal Guard, the highest-ranking knights tasked with protecting the royal family. Originally serving Lily and her close friend, Guinevere was now pledged to protect Tomoki just as she did the princess. As a female knight who specialized in defense, she was known as an impenetrable wall, with magical tools enhancing her defensive capabilities. She'd earned the nickname Glont, after a Greater Dragon that lived in the world's largest desert which was famous for its unparalleled defense. The unique Job title of Royal Guard Glont belonged solely to her.

The next voice, calling him "big brother," belonged to Mora, a twelve-year-old girl. Her profession at the Adventurer's Guild was a Dragon Summoner, a rare class that allowed her to use a special technique called Dragon Summoning. In her home village, her family had served as shrine maidens and priests, but after the village was destroyed by demons, Lily had taken her in and introduced her to Tomoki.

Finally, the one who complained was Yukinatsu. Originally from the Lorel Federation, one of the four great nations in the southeast of the continent, she'd sought a freer and more fulfilling environment. The moment Yukinatsu had met Tomoki, she was captivated by his unique ideas and had chosen to follow him. She was a researcher deeply interested in the fusion of weapons and magick, and she focused on creating replicas of powerful artifacts and divine instruments.

In particular, her innovative approach to the fusion of weapons and magick was seen as dangerous, which got her expelled from the Federation. Her profession was Force Player, a rare occupation among alchemists; she was skilled in the creation and control of golems, a different branch from those focused on pharmaceuticals.

These three were Tomoki's companions. Lily didn't participate in direct combat but served in a support role.

All had gladly accepted Tomoki's suggestion to dine together in the Round Table garden; since opportunities to be with him outside of battle were limited, times like these were precious.

Lily's secret countermeasures against the magical eyes were limited to the royal family and didn't extend to Guinevere, Mora, and Yukinatsu. As much as they believed their affection for Tomoki to be genuine, it was all thanks to the strong charm exerted by his gaze.

As Lily was about to take her seat, one of the attendants approached her. "Lily-sama, Albert-sama is asking if you can review the documents for the meeting."

"Oh dear, my brother has such bad timing, right at lunchtime. I'm sorry, Tomoki-sama. I must step away for a bit. I will certainly see you off before you head to the battlefield."

"Ah, I see. If it's a summons from Lord Albert, there's no helping it. I'll be here, having lunch and resting. I'll make sure to call you when I head out to battle."

He didn't hold it against Lily; Tomoki was used to these kinds of interruptions and knew how important they were. He also knew that Lily had managed a considerable amount of work before dedicating herself to supporting him.

"All right, then. Guinevere, I leave it to you."

"At your service," Guinevere replied instantly, her loyalty to the princess unwavering.

Satisfied, Lily nodded and, guided by the attendant, left the Round Table.

## Lily

"How are things going?" I asked.



“So far, everything’s going smoothly. The hero’s compatibility with magical items is nothing short of miraculous,” the attendant reported. “His physical power is also astonishing. He’s able to wield the Divine Lance without even being mounted!”

Of course, such feats were to be expected from Tomoki Iwahashi—who, empowered by the Goddess, had a natural affinity for all magical artifacts. He’d also been given open access to the imperial treasury, allowing him to choose from the finest weapons and armor in the Empire.

The first item he’d picked was not a weapon or armor but a ring for storing and carrying items. He’d then meticulously examined various weapons, selecting a few until the ring’s capacity was filled. Lastly, he’d chosen armor and began adjustments in the training grounds.

He’d chosen a suit of composite armor that was mostly made of rubber. It had fit snugly to his body and was reinforced with metal protectors for enhanced defense. This armor, extremely powerful but requiring special aptitude, had long remained unused. Its use was immediately approved for him. Since the suit adhered closely to the body, he wore it only during combat.

Tomoki also requested to be equipped with several magical items that created highly effective barriers against both magical and physical attacks. His keen sense of self-preservation was commendable. Consequently, he was given a variety of these items, including the Clay Aegis, a masterpiece barrier device recently implemented in the Wastelands.

The hero was progressing well. The effects of the divine artifact, the Silver Shoes, were remarkable. Even after a long day of training, Tomoki’s fatigue dissipated at an incredible rate. He hadn’t yet experienced a day where his stamina or magical power hadn’t fully recovered by the next day.

“How’s his physical condition? What about the effects of the medication compared to other humans?”

“No issues there either. The side effects are minimal; they only reduce lifespan slightly. The same applies to everyone else,” the attendant assured me.

“Good,” I said, nodding.

Tomoki's meals were laced with elixirs that accelerated growth and enhanced physical and magical abilities. To compare the effects, these elixirs were also secretly added to the meals of all his companions apart from Lily. Consent was not sought from any of the others either.

Progress was essential. Immediate side effects could render him useless in combat, which was unacceptable.

Since I'd renounced my claim to the throne, the most annoying chores had all fallen to my siblings. Finally, I could focus entirely on my own work. The throne was of no concern to me.

After all, the Empire would eventually be seized—

—by Tomoki Iwahashi.

I whispered to him the principles of a conqueror, the logic of a tyrant who disregards governance. It seemed he'd led a miserable life before arriving in this world. I'd heard several stories of the childish bullying he had once endured.

Basically, he was elated by the sudden acquisition of immense power.

*How convenient. How misguided.*

And so, I played the role of the woman he desired and captivated him. I was already halfway there.

After the soirée, he hadn't rejected my advances. Buoyed by this confidence, he'd begun to use more masculine pronouns and had started making advances on Guinevere and Yukinatsu too.

*It doesn't matter.*

*He can make a harem or whatever else he wants. I'm even thinking of helping him with that.*

*The more he's entangled by people and things that tie him to power and the throne, the better.*

*If I soothe the wounds left by the bullying with sweet poison, he'll never dream of going against me. He'll start believing he wants to be emperor.*

*Of course, this can only happen once we've secured a decisive victory over the demons. It has to be that way.*

*When the time comes, the "enamored and captivated" me will wholeheartedly support Tomoki's rise to power.*

*The other nations aren't worth worrying about.*

*The hero, a foolish and immature tyrant-in-the-making sent by the Goddess, has given me a brilliant idea.*

*It's about time to intensify the research for the future.*

*The alchemical research has progressed enough. The elderly alchemist has served well.*

"So, what shall we develop next? Perhaps the hero's ma-gi-gi-cal pow-er...?" he stammered.

"No need for that anymore," I assured him. "Thank you for your service."

My white sleeve was stained with a dark red substance. When it came to creating potions, it was more convenient to teach the steps to people with little knowledge and have them work in parts.

I was the one who served Tomoki Iwahashi. Because of that, I couldn't leave any evidence that I was developing something harmful to his body. Nor could I leave anyone who knew about it.

I led a small elite team of researchers, eliminating them one by one after they completed their work. *Perfect.*

*Why?* the middle-aged man's face seemed to ask, twisted in confusion as he collapsed, now motionless.

I handed the dagger to the attendant at the door. There was no light of will in her eyes—naturally, since I had taken it from her.

"Take this dagger and set the mansion on fire. Make sure everything in this room turns to ashes. You'll join your beloved in the flames... Do it properly," I whispered slowly into her ear, then placed the dagger in her hand.

*That'll do.*

Once I confirmed the attendant had begun gathering the room's documents, I took off my bloodstained clothes and burned them. I was left in my undergarments, but it didn't matter. I would teleport to my room in the castle, unseen by anyone.

*I should go back to Tomoki soon, I thought. There's a battle in the northwestern region today.*

But before that...

"Now, it's time to develop that wonderful weapon the hero told me about."

Back in my room, I quickly changed and then reviewed the documents for the next phase.

This weapon would grant equal power to children, the elderly, and those not blessed with beauty. The amount of magical power wouldn't matter.

A truly wonderful and egalitarian weapon. Simply holding it would bestow power.

By the time other nations hurriedly brought inferior versions to the battlefield, the war would already be over.

Demons, the Goddess, and the faith others held in Her.

I would destroy it all.

"A gun... that's what it was called. I need to hurry and make one."



It had been a while since the Rembrandt family's curse incident in Tsige, an event that had unfolded soon after our arrival, was resolved. Despite being classified as S Rank due to the guild's considerations, the request was inherently difficult. Plus, there had been adventurers scheming behind the scenes to ensure it wouldn't be accomplished.

However, we had the item we needed even before venturing into the Wastelands, and we took care of the issue within two days. The only significant interference we'd encountered had been an assassination attempt at the end.

By tackling such a troublesome request, we managed to make a name for ourselves in this city. This recognition made our activities in Tsige much easier. The reregistration of Tomoe and Mio as adventurers undoubtedly played a role as well, solidifying our foothold in Tsige.

And so...

Today, for the first time in a while, we spent the day in the Demiplane instead of Tsige.

While listening to the reports compiled in the morning, I caught up on the Demiplane's current situation with Ema and Tomoe. Sure, it was a little tedious, but I enjoyed the time spent discussing these matters. Just as we were having lunch, an orc burst into the room.

"I see. All right, we'll handle it," Ema said after receiving the report, then dismissed the orc with a sigh.

Until a moment ago, we'd been chatting happily over our meal. I wondered if something bad had happened.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"It's... nothing serious, Young Master," Ema replied.

"You *look* pretty serious for it to be nothing. Speak up. I'm here, the Young Master's here, even Mio's here," Tomoe urged her.

Tomoe was right.

Though her phrasing might have been a bit disrespectful to Mio, it was true that with all of us here, we could probably handle most issues in the Demiplane.

"Well... this is a little embarrassing, but there was a minor issue during combat training," Ema confessed.

"Ema, that doesn't sound *minor*. Training involves the Young Master and us," Tomoe said, her expression serious.

"Yes, well, the issue came up during the training sessions with you all. To put it bluntly, the warriors are getting demoralized because they keep losing to you, Young Master." Ema smiled wryly.

"That's ridiculous," Tomoe said, unable to hide her disappointment as she looked at Ema. "They call themselves warriors, and that's how unskilled they are?"

*Losing confidence, huh?*

Tomoe was clearly frustrated, but I could understand how the warriors felt. I would have been disheartened too, if I'd failed to perform as expected.

"They just keep getting defeated again and again," Ema went on. "Even when they outnumber you, they still can't win."

"Hmm... Have we been too harsh on them?" Tomoe asked.

"No! I wouldn't say that," Ema replied quickly.

"Then maybe we shouldn't train with them for a while," Mio interjected. "If it's demoralizing for both sides, it's a waste of time."

I was pretty sure her suggestion didn't come from a place of genuine concern. Mio had a general dislike for training; of course she would rather we drop it.

"Mio, if we stop training with them, they'll feel abandoned," Tomoe countered. "Think it through a bit more."

"Even if you say that... I can't think of anything. Besides, wondering about tonight's dinner is much more enjoyable," Mio replied.

"We just finished lunch, Mio," Tomoe said, exasperated.

"Hehehe, at least think of it as exercise after a meal, Tomoe," Mio retorted, her tone turning playful yet sharp.

The tension between the two escalated, but Ema and I didn't pay much attention. This kind of exchange was typical for my attendants.

I turned to Ema. "Ema, I'd like to see how they are for myself. Since it's break time, could you show me?"

"Ah, sure," she replied.

"Okay," I told Tomoe and Mio, "Ema and I are going to go check on the warriors. Try not to fight too much while we're gone."

"All right, Young Master. If you're checking on the orcs, I'll go check on the lizardfolk," Tomoe said. "Their situation is similar to the highland orcs. If their morale is low, I'll give them a pep talk."

"Tomoe, I'm not done with you yet!" Mio protested.

"Mio, why don't you go with Young Master?" Tomoe suggested.

"Would you like to join us, Mio?" I asked.

Her face lit up instantly. "Yes, I'd love to!" And to think that just a moment ago, she and Tomoe had been hissing at each other like cats. *Well, that's just how they are.*

All right, if Tomoe was checking on the lizardfolk, it would be best to come up with a strategy today and regroup later.

"Let's meet again in two hours and share reports," I decided.

“Got it. I don’t think you need to worry about the lizardfolk, though,” Tomoe said.

The three of us left Tomoe, with Ema leading the way. Soon we were passing orcs and dwarves working diligently on construction, even though it was still lunchtime. We exited through the still-simple gates into the plains, heading toward the farming area.

Ema was leading the way, as I had mentioned. It was impressive how much land had been cleared since I’d last checked.

After a while, we reached a vast area of fields divided by ridges into neat sections. I’d heard reports of rice-like plants being found, but they grew on dry land, not in paddies.

As a Japanese person, I longed to see sprawling rice paddies. The mere possibility of seeing them here in the Demiplane someday made me a bit excited. But for now, all I could see were fields divided by separate plots, giving off more of a farm vibe.

“Aside from the crops you introduced, Young Master, we’ve also planted the vegetables we originally had seeds for. So far, everything’s progressing smoothly—perhaps even too smoothly,” Ema explained.

“Too smoothly, huh?” I recalled that crops in the Demiplane grew exceptionally fast. I would have to look into this more.

“I can’t wait to taste them, Young Master,” Mio said, gazing at the fields with a hungry look.

Recently, she had come to appreciate the value of cooking her food, which was a great relief. Quantity still seemed to trump quality for her, but she was getting there.

“Young Master, over there...” Ema pointed into the distance.

I followed her gaze to see several orcs resting. They wore straw hats and tank tops, their bodies noticeably larger than those of humans. They looked like pro wrestlers who’d taken up farming.



The orcs hadn't noticed us yet, and I realized Ema was probably pointing them out so we could listen in on their conversation. I expanded my senses to eavesdrop.

"Phew. Farming is great. All the effort you put in shows results," one of them said.

"Haha! Exactly. And it's one of the only things you can do that really clears your mind," another replied.

"Yeah. Actually, I've been thinking about giving up my weapon and focusing solely on farming," the first orc continued.

"That's a valid option. Unlike the Wastelands, we can sustain ourselves through agriculture alone here," a third orc added.

"True. The lizardfolk are excellent hunters, so we can barter without any issues."

"Ema mentioned that we'll have even more types of crops in the future. We'll need specialists in those," the second orc said.

"Really, with farming going so well, it makes you rethink your life. Young Master's incredibly strong."

"Same with Tomoe-sama and Mio-sama. We used to be able to hold our own against strong enemies when fighting in groups, but now..."

"Every time we're totally crushed, it makes you question what we've been doing up to now."

"Sometimes it feels like the only thing we can be proud of here is our farming skills."

"At least we can still close the distance when fighting Tomoe-sama and Mio-sama."

"But the Young Master... we can't even get close before he takes us all down. As soon as we're hit by his attacks, we can't even move."

"Only people who are incredibly tough, or skilled enough to block his attacks with weapons, can take his onslaught..."

“These days, I feel like my job during training with him is to get knocked into the air.”

*It's like I'm a missile destroyer, I thought. Maybe I should hold back a bit more...*

“Haha... I wonder how the other races are faring,” one of the orcs said.

“Yeah, we have no idea. We never get to see them.”

*Aaand... this has turned into a gripe session.*

Up until now, our training had primarily consisted of “racial training” for each specific race and “instructional training” where they trained with us. It seemed their perspective had narrowed as a result.

From what I could gather, they were losing confidence unnecessarily. In reality, other races often praised the orcs as versatile and challenging opponents.

Their high-powered magick, stemming from their advanced magical language, combined with their physical prowess, made them formidable. Ema and the others weren't too discouraged by their training results with us because they recognized this.

So, there was no need for them to be so depressed. I believed in their current abilities and their potential for growth.

*Hmm...*

It seemed they found it hard to discuss their losses and training experiences with the other races. I had assumed there would be more active exchange of information.

Ema must have noticed my contemplative look. “Did you hear that?” she asked.

“Yeah, sounds like they're having a bit of a tough time,” I replied.

“Indeed. I believe keeping their concerns to themselves isn't helping,” Ema continued.

“Young Master, what's that red vegetable?” Mio cut in. “It looks so juicy!”

*Mio... sometimes, I wonder about you.* But I glanced in the direction she pointed.

*Ah, tomatoes. Mio hasn't tried them before.* I remembered eating chilled, sliced tomatoes with cheese and oil, a dish featured on TV as a great snack with alcohol, but it was also excellent as a salad. It had been fantastic.

"Ema, can we let Mio go?"

"Of course, go ahead."

"Mio, since we're here, why don't you talk to the orcs and taste some of the vegetables that can be eaten raw? I'd love to hear your thoughts later."

"Really?! Thank you, Young Master! I'll be right back!" Mio dashed over to a small female orc working with the tomatoes.

*Good grief.*

*At this rate, even if they tell her it's not okay to eat raw, she'll probably just taste it anyway.*

*Ah, she ate it.*

She looked so happy savoring that tomato, it made me feel happy just watching her.

So very Mio.

I glanced over to see Ema also watching Mio, smiling to see her looking so content. It was heartwarming, I'll be honest.

But we were in the middle of a conversation.



“Well then. Ema, back to what we were talking about earlier, I agree with you. It seems there’s less inter-racial information exchange about training than I thought.”

“Yeah. Each of us has our own methods and training passed down from our ancestors, and it’s often confidential information,” Ema explained. “So, of course, when we’re talking with other races, we tend to stick with topics that are more common... and less sensitive.”

“Is it not possible to share these secrets?” I asked.

“It would be tough to do it right now,” Ema replied after a moment’s thought.

I understood, but it was disheartening to think that warriors were turning to farming due to a loss of confidence. While peace and the lack of combat opportunities were factors, it was still a concerning sign.

“So, Young Master, do you have any ideas?” Ema asked me.

“Yes, I do,” I said. “I’d like to start incorporating joint training sessions between different races. I want everyone to understand each other better.”

“Joint training...”

“Yeah. Let’s ask Tomoe to get the lizardfolk, the arachs, and the dwarves involved. I want them to see each other’s tactics and be inspired. Besides...”

“Besides?”

“It’ll give them a better grasp of their current abilities than training with us.”

“I can’t guarantee everyone will agree, but I’ll pass along your suggestion,” Ema promised.

She seemed to accept the idea that each race had their own secrets regarding combat techniques.

“Undisclosed techniques, huh.” I was still thinking about what Ema had said. “Personally, I think it would be interesting to see orcs using lizardfolk tactics or vice versa. But if everyone prefers sticking to their current methods to get closer to our level, that’s fine too.”

Ema gave me a startled look.

*Maybe that came off as arrogant?*

It was the truth. I didn't think the orcs or other races were at a stage where they needed to hide their techniques. I believed they all had immense potential. By sharing everything they had, they could develop new strategies and techniques, and continuously improve. Once they found something truly unique, they could keep it secret. But for now, they were still in the polishing phase. I saw the same potential in them as I did in first-year students in a club.

"Oh, it's about time Tomoe got back. Let's call Mio and head back," I suggested.

"Right, of course," Ema replied promptly, though she seemed deep in thought.

Ema was very smart, and I was confident she understood what I was saying. It would be helpful if she could communicate this to the orcs right away. Depending on Tomoe's report, if the lizardfolk were in a similar situation, we might need to get those joint training sessions happening soon.

※ ※ ※

"Hmm," Tomoe mused. "Perhaps we were too harsh on both the orcs and lizardfolk. They haven't even reached a tenth of their potential."

I wanted to say that maybe her expectations might be too high, but I held my tongue. From what I'd heard, the lizardfolk were experiencing a similar crisis of confidence as the orcs. The tribe's leader had assured Tomoe that the issue would be resolved swiftly, but I doubted it would be that simple.

"I talked to a few of the arachs individually too, and they didn't seem to be affected," Mio added.

"That's because they're each doing different activities like pharmaceuticals and alchemy, and only participate in training once in a while," I explained. The arachs had highly individual capabilities and their small numbers made group training impractical, so their situation was different from the other races.

"Young Master, it seems that the lack of inter-racial interaction is contributing to their isolation and concerns," Tomoe observed.

“I agree, Tomoe. Encouraging interaction is the quickest solution. Starting tomorrow, we’ll—”

“Yep, leave it to me,” Tomoe said quickly. “In fact, I have more ideas besides joint training.”

“No training that results in casualties,” I cautioned.

“Of course.”

“Wow...” Mio murmured.

That conversation had taken place last night, leaving Ema with a pale face. Today, early in the morning, we gathered the orcs and lizardfolk together. Ema wasn’t there, as she had to give a report at the experimental station for crop research. She promised to fill me in on that in the evening.

The structure of the experimental station reminded me of something from a history lesson about ancient South American ruins. I doubted Ema knew much about those, so it was impressive if she came up with it herself. Despite her unassuming appearance, Ema was incredibly knowledgeable.

Tomoe’s voice pulled me out of my thoughts. “All right, I know I’ve asked all of you to meet here on short notice.”

Behind the assembled orcs and lizardfolk was a makeshift circular stage we’d built with their help. They seemed to understand the purpose of the gathering, as Tomoe’s explanation was met with little resistance.

The goal was clear: use the stage for one-on-one duels.

“Now... you and you, step onto the stage,” Tomoe instructed, pointing to one orc and one of the lizardfolk. Notwithstanding potential differences in compatibility and fighting styles, they’d been deemed the strongest warriors from their respective races. This should have excluded any unfair advantages like secret techniques.

As the two warriors faced off, you could almost taste the spectators’ anticipation in the air.

Seemingly oblivious to the growing tension, Tomoe calmly signaled the start of the duel.

The orc wielded a halberd, while the lizardman held a sword and shield.

After exchanging respectful bows, they assumed stances.

From their chosen weapons, it was clear that they specialized in different ranges. The lizardman tried to close the distance, while the orc swung his halberd to keep him at bay. They clashed fiercely, each trying to fight in their preferred range.

The battle intensified quickly. The lizardman unleashed a breath attack, which the orc countered with offensive magick. The orc's powerful halberd strike shattered part of the stage, but the lizardman used the altered terrain to his advantage, launching a skillful counterattack.

Any stray breath attacks or magick spells that flew off the stage were neutralized by Tomoe and Mio, ensuring the safety of the watching orcs and lizardfolk as they cheered passionately for their representatives.

In contrast, the three of us remained silent. Tomoe had told us to, although I wasn't sure why. I trusted she had a reason, and since this was her initiative, I left it in her hands.

Eventually, the battle concluded.

"That's enough! The winner is the highland orc, Agares!" Tomoe announced.

Agares's last move had been a desperate, all-out attack, which barely secured his win. He raised his halberd triumphantly before collapsing forward.

The orcs celebrated their representative's win, while the lizardfolk looked on in understandable frustration.

Tomoe gathered them once more and addressed them, her expression stern.

"The winner is the highland orc... but to be clear, both of you were far from satisfactory. You're too weak."

"!!!"

*Tomoe does not mince words.*

"I'm extremely disappointed. Why is it that you're all only at this level of skill? You there, what do you think the reason is?" she asked, pointing to one of the



orcs.

When the orc didn't respond right away, Tomoe pointed to one of the lizardfolk, who was looking downcast. "You, what do you think?"

Straightening his back and looking tense, the chosen lizardman replied, "Well, Tomoe-sama, Young Master, and Mio-sama, you may not find it impressive, but I thought the fight just now was remarkable."

"That's not an answer," Tomoe said sharply. "Are you saying that because your opponents weren't us, this level of strength is enough? Is that what you mean?"

"N-No, that's not what I meant..."

"Listen! If that's your mindset, you might as well put down your weapons! If you want to just be civilians protected by others, just say it. I'll let you do that. But anyone who picks up a weapon here must be a warrior willing to defend the Demiplane. And a warrior needs to have strength we can rely on!"

The orcs and lizardfolk recoiled at Tomoe's words. I could tell she'd hurt their pride.

"Understand this! You have nothing to lose right now! You are *not* at a level where you can afford to gauge your opponent's strength! Cast aside your fragile pride and reveal everything to each other!"

"...?!"

"Then, learn from each other, implement what works, and strive for greater heights! Sharpen each other, grow together. That's what we expect. At this point, you're nothing but a group of weaklings who don't even reach a tenth of the strength the Young Master is looking for!"

"..."

Faced with Tomoe's relentless scolding, the warriors were more demoralized than motivated. This wasn't going well. I needed to intervene.

"Tomoe, that was a bit too much. They've put in their best effort," I began.

"But I plan to give them a wake-up call." Tomoe wasn't stopping. "From now on, once a week, we'll hold an all-participation individual battle. During these

sessions, we'll assess each of your abilities and rank you accordingly."

This caused a stir among the crowd.

"Ranking?"

"Ranking us, huh?"

"But we each have different strengths depending on our species..."

There were quite a few voices of concern among the gathered warriors. Just like the orcs we'd overheard in the fields the other day, some of these individuals might indeed have been better suited to roles other than warriors. Tomoe was probably hoping this ranking system would help determine who had the resolve to continue on the path of a warrior.

"For now, participation is mandatory, but eventually, it'll be voluntary," Tomoe went on. "The schedule and frequency of these events might change, but the implementation of the ranking system itself is set in stone. This ranking will help everyone in the Demiplane, aside from myself, Mio, and the Young Master, understand where they stand. It will be a clear indicator of one's strength and a source of honor for the warriors. Of course, we'll separate mages and warriors into different categories. These will be clearly defined rankings, and if they don't work for you as motivation, then maybe the path of a warrior isn't for you!"

She went on to detail the preliminary and main league systems she had devised. It was impressive how thoroughly she'd planned this out.

"Understand this: today was a status check, but from now on, I want you to strive for better and better rankings. We'll reduce training sessions with us and increase training and mock battles with other races. Remember, the Demiplane has no need for complacent warriors!"

With her message delivered, Tomoe turned on her heel and left. I gave Mio a nod, signaling her to follow Tomoe back.

Once the two were out of sight, I looked at the dejected orcs and lizardfolk. The tribe leaders and warrior captains, in particular, seemed to be taking this hard, their faces a mix of determination and frustration.

“I agree with a lot of what Tomoe said,” I told them. “To be honest, I don’t think any of you are at a level where you need to keep your skills secret. We’re going to increase the frequency of joint training sessions, so please use this opportunity to sharpen each other’s abilities.”

*Ranking, huh. Maybe we could call it the Demiplane Rankings?*

If the top ranks could earn a reputation as absolute monsters, that would be ideal.

※ ※ ※

The Demiplane Rankings turned out to be a huge success.

My spontaneous suggestion became the official name, and the format was set as follows:

- Preliminary League matches were held continually with participants earning points.
- Main League matches involved top-ranked participants from the preliminary leagues competing on weekends.

It was a simple yet effective setup, which made it all the more interesting. Unlike traditional martial arts tournaments where consecutive matches often left participants physically spent, the Demiplane had the advantage of healing magick. After each battle, participants were healed completely, ensuring they were always in peak condition.

The top eight from the preliminary league advanced to the main league, with the entire process taking about three months. Tomoe’s future plan included introducing seasons to the Demiplane, where spring, summer, fall, and winter champions would eventually compete in an annual grand championship called the Gozenshiai<sup>1</sup> to determine the year’s overall victor.

During the initial stages of the preliminaries, a few individuals realized their unsuitability for the warrior’s path and chose to become farmers or researchers. I hoped they found roles that suited them better.

A few matches into the league, participation shifted from mandatory to voluntary. However, the enthusiasm surrounding the Demiplane Rankings only increased. The main league became a popular weekend event, with many looking forward to watching the matches.

Before long, the elder dwarves submitted a proposal to construct a proper arena for the matches, leading to a flurry of input from Tomoe, Mio, and representatives from the various races. The initial chaos of differing demands eventually settled into the construction of a classic amphitheater reminiscent of the one from ancient Rome.

The new arena had ample seating capacity, ensuring no one was left standing even on the busiest days.

Indeed, the best seats were highly sought after, but I resigned myself to this fact. With the growing popularity of the Demiplane Rankings, inter-racial joint training and exchanges flourished—just as we'd intended.

The rankings now included the elder dwarves and the arach, bringing the total number of participants to nearly eighty. As a result, the confidence crisis among the orcs and lizardfolk vanished. The elder dwarves, with their superior weaponry, and the arach, with their unparalleled individual abilities, kept everyone busy strategizing and improving themselves.

The rankings might continue to grow, but with it, the respect for those at the top would only increase. Even those who didn't participate showed admiration for the top-ranked warriors, cheering for and idolizing them. The status and treatment of individuals within their respective groups had significantly changed.

The top twenty ranked warriors were displayed for everyone in the Demiplane to see, while positions beyond that were only disclosed to the individuals upon request. If participation numbers grew, I would consider expanding the public rankings to thirty or fifty.

Alongside the competitions, a wide variety of stalls sprang up around the arena, catering to the spectators. Initially, it was just a way for farmer orcs and hunter lizardfolk to earn some pocket money, but it turned into a significant income stream.

Mio was particularly delighted by this development. She would often engage in discussions with stall owners about seasoning and new menu ideas, sometimes spending entire days at the food stalls instead of watching the matches. She seemed intent on replicating the flavors she enjoyed in Tsige, striving to bring her favorite tastes to the Demiplane. Soon, influenced by Tsige's cuisine, the food stalls started offering a variety of fast foods that became quite popular.

The Demiplane Rankings grew even more intense and thrilling as the tournament advanced to the final rounds. I found myself attending every match, captivated by the spectacle.

As it stood, by the time we hosted the Gozenshiai, there might be enough demand to introduce team battles as well. It's something I'd never anticipated, but it was clear that the Demiplane Rankings had become a beloved form of entertainment for everyone in the Demiplane. The deafening cheers from the amphitheater on weekends were a testament to its success.

This outcome exceeded all my expectations. The original goal of improving the skills of the orcs and lizardfolk and restoring their confidence had been achieved, so there was nothing to complain about.

Tomoe, the mastermind of the Demiplane Rankings, had turned her attention to recruiting promising participants and training them to become skilled sword fighters. The katana—a weapon with some unique quirks that were still in the process of being perfected—made this a risky venture.

Tomoe seemed determined. Reports had surfaced that certain individuals, perhaps influenced by her, had started to branch out in unconventional ways. For example, a particular lizardman had taken an interest in unarmed combat techniques. In some sense, this was a reflection of the cross-cultural stimulation the rankings had fostered, though it did seem a bit off-trail.

In a world where weapons and magick dominate, pursuing a martial art that relied on neither was revolutionary indeed. This lizardman might be on the verge of something groundbreaking.

It'd become clear to me now that while the stated goal had been to promote inter-racial improvement, Tomoe's real ambition had been to host a grand

sword tournament in the Demiplane. In fact, recently, she'd been less focused on the rankings themselves and more on katana production and the training of warriors to wield them.

Just the other day, during a training session, I'd heard her shouting, "Don't think you can fight in front of the Young Master with such feeble strength!!!"

Nevertheless, the Demiplane Rankings had sparked an enthusiasm akin to soccer in South America, American football in the US, or baseball in Showa-era Japan. Even children were captivated, which I honestly hadn't expected.

What had begun as a mere problem-solving tool had evolved into a real professional sport. Of course, Tomoe, Mio, and I were delighted to see the Demiplane thriving in this way.

As I stood there, listening to the cheers echoing through the amphitheater, smelling the food from the stalls, and feeling a faint smile tugging at my lips, I realized that this had become a part of daily life.

The Demiplane, in all its bustling energy, continued to run smoothly.

## Back Matter

### Author: Azumi Kei

Kei Azumi, hailing from Aichi Prefecture, began serializing *Tsuki ga Michibiku Isekai Douchuu* (*Tsukimichi: Moonlit Fantasy*) online in 2012. The series quickly gained popularity and won the Readers' Award at the 5th AlphaPolis Fantasy Novel Grand Prize. In May 2013, after the series underwent revisions, Azumi made his publishing debut with *Tsuki ga Michibiku Isekai Douchuu*.

[←1]

The word Gozenshiai (午前試合) refers to a sports match or competition held in the morning. The term is composed of two words: gozen (午前) meaning “morning,” and shiai (試合) meaning “combat,” “competition” or “match.”



# Thank you all

Thank you for reaching the end of Tsukimichi Moonlit Fantasy Volume 2! We hope you've enjoyed Makoto's continued adventures in this magical world. Your support means the world to us!

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