

ISEKAI TENSEI: RECRUITED TO ANOTHER WORLD

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Story by Kenichi
Illustrations by Nem



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Chapter Seven

Part One

“Right here’s just fine, Tenma,” Namitaro piped up.

Namitaro got out of the carriage just as we arrived at a river midway between Sagan and the capital. He jumped into the water and began to splash and swim around with incredible enthusiasm.

“Ahh, man! I haven’t been in a river in ages and it feels so good! Ho ho ho!” Clearly in high spirits, Namitaro jumped out of the water again and again, splashing everything and everyone around him.

“Namitaro! You’re getting us all wet!”

“Oh, sorry about that! It’s just been so long I almost forgot how to do it!” Seeming a bit calmer now, Namitaro slowly swam over to the shore near the carriage.

“Are you leaving now?”

“Guess so. This is the biggest river around these parts, right? So I should say my goodbyes now,” Namitaro said.

He held out his right fin. I took it in my hand and he vigorously shook it up and down.

“What, you’re leaving already, Namitaro? Things’ll be lonely around here...” Gramps said.

“It’s not like I’m sayin’ goodbye forever! We’ll see each other again. Ah, but you might be dead by then, Merlin...” Namitaro said with a laugh. Since he’d made himself at home in the pond behind Gramps’s mansion in the capital, and was practically a member of the family by now, Gramps was used to his jokes and wasn’t offended.

“Tenma, if anything happens you use that flute, okay? Well, sayonara!” And

with that, Namitaro began swimming downriver at full speed.

We watched in bewilderment as his figure grew smaller and smaller. Jin's carriage caught up to us a few moments later, but by that time, Namitaro was already long gone.

"Talk about cold. He couldn't wait to say goodbye to us?"

Jin and the others had gotten to know Namitaro quite well too, so they seemed a bit sad that he hadn't said goodbye to them.

"Well, since we're by the water, how about we take a little break here? Even if we're feeling fine, we should give the horses a rest," suggested Jin.

My horse was fine, of course, since Valley Wind was a golem controlled by Rocket and therefore wouldn't get tired. Rocket's mana would deplete, but I could always trade off with him, so it never posed a problem. We could even travel nonstop all the way to Sagan if we wanted. However, Jin had rented horses for their carriage, and despite having made improvements so it was easier to pull than a regular carriage, the horses would still get tired.

"That's true. Well, in that case, that looks to be the highest point over there. If we stay too close to the water, we might get attacked by some kind of weird monsters," Galatt said.

Under normal circumstances, we'd just rest by the river, but when you were near one that was as wide and deep as this, it wouldn't be unusual for large, carnivorous monsters like crocodile sharks to be lurking about. That was why it was necessary to put some distance between us and the water.

"All right, let's do it," I said. "As promised, I'll be in charge of food, so you're all in charge of standing watch while we're on break."

According to the agreement we'd made beforehand, I'd be in charge of all the cooking along with Gramps. In exchange, the Dawnswords, along with Blanca and Amur, would take care of keeping watch during breaks and at night.

At any rate, I decided to make something simple while I put Gramps in charge of the furnace. Well, when it came to cooking, it had to be something simple—otherwise, Gramps wouldn't be able to manage to do much.

“Let’s see here. This is kind of a weird time, so I’ll just make something light.”

I took some flour, eggs, chopped beef, onions, lettuce, and some other vegetables out of my magic bag along with oil, salt, and pepper. I was going to make crepes.

I arranged the grilled ingredients and chopped ingredients on plates by category, fried the dough into thin wrappers, and then it was ready. Each person would gather their favorite toppings, wrap them in the crepes, and eat. For Rocket and the others, I prepared a separate dish of roasted meat and veggies. I made lots of crepes, so if there were any left over, I was thinking about eating some for a midnight snack. However...

“I’d like another helping, Tenma!”

It actually seemed like I was running out. My biggest miscalculation was Amur’s appetite. She was scarfing down crepes one after another right next to me. Even though she was the smallest member of the entire party, she ate so much that I wondered where she was even putting it. Actually, in terms of who ate the most, it was Amur, Blanca, Galatt, and then Jin. Everyone else ate about the same amount except for Leena, who came in last place.

The beastfolk were in the top three positions with Jin putting up a good fight for the humans. Even so, he was pretty far behind Galatt, who was in third place.

“You guys sure eat a lot,” I muttered as I watched them.

They all froze at the same time—apparently, they’d heard me.

“You think? I feel like this is pretty normal,” Galatt said.

“Lots of beastfolk have big appetites,” commented Blanca.

“Do you not like it when girls eat a lot?” Amur asked.

When I asked them more about it, they told me that, when it came to food, beastfolk had a lot of customs similar to animals, like worrying about food scarcity. So, when food was placed in front of them, they tended to eat as much as they could. And since they were physically stronger than other classes, they burned more calories, which in turn meant that they needed more calories in

the first place.

“That’s why there aren’t many full-time farmers in our village. Most of the families are part-time farmers who are also hunters and adventurers.”

Amur had never done any farming. Blanca had some experience, but only a little.

“That sounds like Kukuri Village,” I said, effectively ending the conversation, and we all resumed eating together.

I replenished the toppings and the crepes a couple more times before we all finished eating. We were going to depart again now that we were done, but for some reason, I noticed I had some unexpected guests.

“Leena, Mennas, Amur... What are you all doing in here?”

All the girls from the Dawnswords, plus Amur who had been riding in the other carriage until now, were in my carriage.

“It’s too cramped over there,” Leena said.

“And it’s uncomfortable,” chimed in Mennas.

“Bath.” That was Amur.

Honestly, I could understand where they were coming from. Jin’s carriage wasn’t small or run-down, but it definitely wasn’t as spacious as mine. In fact, my carriage was so comfortable that the king himself had asked to buy it. But I used it far too much to sell it, and I didn’t have time to make a new one, so I had just handed over the blueprints and let him go to town. He’d paid me for the blueprints as a design fee of course, and we had also drawn up a contract which had stipulated that if he made more than one, he would pay me patent and design fees on those units as well.

“Okay, but what did Jin and the others say?” I asked.

Honestly, I didn’t mind if they rode in my carriage, but the problem was Jin. Unlike my carriage, someone always had to control the horses for that one, so losing three passengers all of a sudden put more of a burden on the remaining ones.

“Don’t worry, we already talked to him about it,” Leena said.

“They’ll have way more fun just traveling with guys,” Mennas insisted.

“I shut Blanca up.”

Leena said Jin had known about it already, but what about me and Gramps? And how exactly had Amur shut Blanca up?

“Blanca’s weaknesses are his wife and my mother,” Amur said. “If I bring up their names, he’ll do anything I want.”

Maybe I shouldn’t have asked in the first place...

Well, it seemed like they had gotten permission, so I let them into the carriage. Once Gramps heard why the three of them were here, he seemed to sympathize with Jin and the others.

“Tenma, sorry to bother you so soon, but can I use your bath? I’ve been curious what a bath inside of a carriage looks like.”

“Yeah, let’s try it!”

“Wanna join us, Tenma?”

“I don’t care if you take a bath, but there’s only room for one person at a time so you’ll need to take turns,” I said. “Plus, the bath, toilet, and changing room are all in one space, so make sure to get undressed in there. And be careful to lock the door behind you. I won’t be held responsible if you forget, so if you fail to protect yourself, I’ll send you back to Jin’s carriage and ban you from riding in mine again.”

I wanted to be extra firm to prevent Amur from going rogue. I didn’t expect I’d have to worry about Mennas and Leena because they’d followed those rules from the beginning, but Amur seemed displeased. I’d made the right decision to be firm from the get-go.

While they decided who’d bathe first, I began dinner. Well, I was just frying up some chicken and vegetables in a pan. Later that night, I’d warm it up and add some more ingredients.

“What’s that you’re making, Tenma?” Mennas asked. She’d apparently lost the battle to bathe first. Amur was behind her, so that meant Leena got to go first.

“I was thinking of making stew.”

“Stew?” they said in unison. Neither of them seemed familiar with it.

“I guess it’s like a thicker soup with meat, vegetables, and milk added to it,” I explained.

Mennas nodded, but Amur looked confused.

“If it’s eaten mostly in colder regions, it’s probably unusual in the south,” Mennas said, and Amur agreed. Apparently, it was warm all year round where Amur lived and it had never snowed, not even once. By the way, in the capital, sometimes they’d get close to a meter of snowfall during the winter. It had snowed often in Kukuri Village, but only about half as much as the capital.

“The nights have been a little cold lately, so I thought it would be a good time to make it. Just for reference, are there any vegetables you don’t like?” I asked.

Since they both shook their heads, I added a bunch of different kinds to the pot. However, Shiromaru and Solomon grimaced at the sight, which only made me add even more veggies.

By the time I finished making the white sauce, Leena and Mennas were done with their baths and it was Amur’s turn—but she quickly came back out, half naked.

Leena scrambled to throw a blanket over her, but I *did* catch a glimpse of her for a split second. It was incredibly awkward.

“There’s barely any water left because of them, and it’s lukewarm!” Amur cried.

“You’re making it sound like I’m heavy or something!”

“Leena, you’re making it sound like *I’m* heavy,” complained Mennas.

“I’m taller than you, Mennas.”

Mennas seemed a bit irritated by Leena’s comment, but I ignored the two of them and headed to the bath. I used Water magic and Fire magic to add hot water to the tub and turned around.

“How’s this?” I asked Amur.

She stuck her arm into the water to test it out. She nodded, and I quickly headed for the door. But just as I opened it, I felt hot water splash by my feet. Luckily, I had my back turned already so I didn't have to see anything awkward this time.

A few hours after our first break, it was finally getting dark, so we decided to make camp atop a small hill nearby.

Jin and the others were in charge of keeping watch, but Gramps put up a magic barrier around the carriage just in case. The barrier was so others wouldn't sense our presence and to let us know if any enemies were nearby. But barriers weren't foolproof, of course, so it was still necessary for Jin and the others to keep watch.

After dinner, we all chatted for a while and then I delivered Jin and the Dawnswords' dinner before returning to my carriage.

"Here's dinner, Jin. I'll put it in your carriage. I made several helpings for each of you," I said. "Sorry if it's not enough."

"Hey, thanks! We'll wake ya up if something happens during watch, so hurry up and get some rest, Tenma."

They divvied up the watch between the three groups, with the first being Jin and Amur, the next being Blanca and Mennas, and the final one being Galatt and Leena. They had split up into groups of men and women and then drew lots to see who'd go first, with each group taking a three-hour block. Blanca and Mennas had it the hardest—they'd have to go to sleep immediately after eating dinner.

Even though we were all adventurers, it was a bit strange to have men and women sleeping in the same quarters, so they decided that the women would sleep in Jin's carriage and the men would sleep outside next to it. As for my carriage, only me, Gramps, and my followers were sleeping inside it. I'd made that request because I didn't want us to have to get the women up every time the guard changed. This seemed to be a common thing among adventurers, so Jin and the others didn't complain. If there was some kind of trouble during the night, we'd still be woken up, so Gramps and I had to go to sleep early to be on the safe side.

“Hmm?”

I woke up in the middle of the night when I sensed some kind of presence. Shiromaru got up the same moment I did, followed by Rocket, Gramps, and Solomon. Whatever had crossed the magical barrier was incredibly strong.

I braced myself and was ready to fight at any moment, but just then, someone quietly knocked on the door.

“It’s Blanca. Tenma...you’re awake, aren’t you? Sorry, but can you come out?”

I went outside and saw Blanca standing there with a serious look on his face. Mennas had gone to wake the others and soon returned with a sleepy Amur and Jin behind her, both of them rubbing their eyes.

“So? What’s going on?” Jin asked Blanca. “If Tenma’s up, it must be something dangerous.” Although he looked sleepy, he had his sword at the ready.

“Yeah. I sensed some strong monsters the moment I stepped outside the barrier. I don’t know if they mean to attack us or not, but I knew that if we had to take them on in a fight, just the two of us wouldn’t be enough,” Blanca said.

Blanca told us that there was a group of monsters nearby, and although he and Mennas would be able to fight them, it wouldn’t be without significant injury. That was why he wanted me and Gramps standing by.

“We should get ready to fight right away. They’re heading here really quickly.”

While I listened to Blanca explain the situation, I used Detection in a wide range around us. The group of monsters was about five kilometers away and coming towards us. At this rate, they’d reach us in two to three minutes.

“Seriously?! Then we’d better hurry!” Galatt smacked his face with both hands.

Taking that as our signal, the rest of us also readied ourselves.

“If they do charge us, it’s best to fight outside the barrier. It’s possible they still haven’t noticed us, so if we show ourselves, they might change their course. Tenma, do you know how many and what kind of monsters they are?” Gramps asked me calmly amid everyone else’s panic.

I used Detection to get a count and then used Identify on the group. “There are more than five, but fewer than ten...and I think they’re unicorns.”

I’d never seen that kind of monster before. In my previous world, unicorns were mostly portrayed as some kind of sacred animal, but in this world, they were a monster like any other. However, since they were so high-ranking and there weren’t many of them around, it was said that finding one was more difficult than defeating it.

“Unicorns, eh? I’ve only seen ’em once or twice, back when I was in my heyday,” Gramps said. “Although they’re ferocious, they’re quite intelligent monsters. I doubt they’ll attack once they realize we’re here. If we show ’em that we’re willing to put up a fight outside the barrier, they’ll probably go elsewhere to avoid trouble. So don’t try to attack them unless absolutely necessary—otherwise, they’ll choose to fight rather than run away.”

We took his advice and went outside the barrier, positioning ourselves in the direction of the unicorns.

Shiromaru and Solomon were in the front. Behind them were the Dawnswords, with Blanca and Amur on either side of them. Gramps and I stood a distance away.

We put Shiromaru and Solomon in front because one of them was a large, carnivorous beast that would be a unicorn’s natural enemy,. The other was a monster who ranked higher than the unicorns, even though he was still a baby. Hopefully, this would keep the unicorns in check. If the monsters still didn’t back down, Gramps and I would get ready to attack with magic from the left and right. Then Jin and the others would attack head-on. Oh, and Rocket was inside of Valley Wind—that would be useful in case we needed to pursue them.

Also, even though I had kept the fact that I could use the abilities Detection and Identify a secret, Gramps had immediately asked me about the types and numbers of monsters and he’d believe my answers. He must’ve been really confident that I was just that capable of sensing those things on my own.

“Here they come.”

Blanca glared into the distance as the herd of unicorns came into view. They all appeared to be adults, and although Valley Wind was twice the size of any

one of them, they were quite large in comparison to normal horses. The one in front was particularly huge, and the horn on its forehead was longer and thicker than the others. It was probably the leader of the group.

Although we were on top of a small hill, the unicorns didn't seem to have noticed us yet. Just as they came within a kilometer of us...

"Aroooooo!" Shiromaru tipped his head towards the sky and began to howl with all his might. It seemed like the very air itself trembled in response, and Leena and Amur both covered their ears from the sound.

"Ugh, that's so loud, Shiromaru!" Amur complained casually to Shiromaru, but no one could hear her.

Shiromaru's distant howl made the unicorns aware of our presence, and their leader let out a loud nicker in response, which stopped the herd in their tracks. Then, a staredown ensued. Normally unicorns were said to be Rank A monsters or higher, but the leader seemed like it was a Rank S monster, maybe even higher. And if it was in charge of the other seven, this could even be a more troublesome fight than when I took down that earth dragon.



However, even if they were more trouble than earth dragons, I knew we wouldn't lose. We outnumbered and outmatched them in terms of ability. However, if they decided to just charge at us at full speed, it was possible we'd get swept up in the commotion and someone could get injured.

"Tenma, when the unicorns are about half the distance they are from us now, once the leader passes that boulder up there, we attack with our magic. Prioritize the number of moves over the power of the blows, and make sure to spread them apart," Gramps said. "Don't let Jin and the others get caught up in the middle. Be careful and aim to defeat each one. If possible, I want to defeat the leader first, but don't push yourself too hard."

Once everyone heard Gramps's orders, the tension in the air immediately increased. The unicorns seemed to sense our nervousness and became more alert. They began to slowly move forward without taking their eyes off us.

They closed the distance between us by one hundred meters, then two hundred meters...and just as we were about to attack, the leader suddenly let out a loud whinny. All of them turned at once and ran away.

"Horse meat go bye-bye..."

We were too stunned at the sudden development to react to Amur's murmurs. We all remained at the ready until the herd of unicorns disappeared completely.

"It looks like they just left..." Blanca said.

I confirmed Blanca's comment with Detection. "Yeah, they're out of my range of sight. I guess we should keep our guard up, but from the looks of it, I don't think they'll be coming back."

Jin and the others seemed to be relaxing already—they were all yawning and stretching.

"Seriously, why would a herd of unicorns just show up in a place like this?" Galatt wondered aloud.

"Who the hell knows?" snapped Jin. "Just be grateful you saw a super rare monster! I'm going back to bed! Those stupid unicorns woke me up from a

dream! Should've just turned 'em into materials we could sell!"

Jin then headed towards his bedroll, seemingly in a slightly bad mood. I guess he was woken up at a frustrating point in his sleep by the unicorns' approach.

"Blanca, can you eat unicorns?" Amur asked. As usual, she was only thinking about food. She'd been muttering "horse meat, horse meat" to herself over and over again—probably because she was hungry.

"Hm? Yeah, I've heard it's pretty good. But their horns, oil, and...packages are more valuable than the meat. They're said to be highly effective ingredients in medicine," Blanca explained.

"What do you mean by packages?"

"I guess you could call them...a symbol of their manhood."

"I see... Owww!"

Amur had been staring at my crotch, so I took a loaf of bread out of my bag and threw it at her. It struck her right in the face and fell to the ground, but since it was wrapped in cloth, it was still perfectly edible.

"I get the horns, but is the oil really that expensive?"

"Speaking of that..."

Even though I had asked Blanca that, for some reason, Leena butted in with a smile on her face.

"Their horns are said to be very effective at reducing fevers, detoxification, and can be used in a tonic when you drink it. Not only that, but when it comes to detoxification, they say it works on almost anything," explained Leena. "The oil, on the other hand, acts like stomach medicine when ingested and serves as a remedy when applied to wounds. And when you dry it in the sun, crush it, and then char it, the oil becomes an aphrodisiac. Since unicorns are extremely rare, the moment it hits the market all the high-ranking nobles rush to buy it and—Owww!"

Perhaps irritated by Leena's smugness, Mennas lightly poked her in the side.

I decided to return to my carriage before I got caught up in any more excitement tonight, but when I opened the door, I saw there was already

someone in my bed. I rolled them over and saw Amur sleeping there with breadcrumbs around her mouth.

I didn't want to touch her again and give her some excuse to find me guilty later, so I left and got Blanca to remove her. As he took Amur away, I thought I heard a small scoffing noise, but since she was supposed to be sleeping, I decided to ignore her. I wanted to go right to bed, but unfortunately, the crumbs were all over. I had to stay up longer than I'd hoped in order to clean my bed up before finally turning in for the night.

"It feels like I haven't been here in ages..." I murmured to myself.

A day and a half had passed since our encounter with the unicorns and we'd made it safely to Sagan. We hadn't seen any other strong monsters after the unicorns. In fact, the journey had been so smooth that we actually had more free time than expected. We'd actually taken a little detour and gathered some medicinal herbs for a change of pace. Now, we had so many herbs that we could practically open a shop.

"Yeah, but at this rate, it seems like it'll take forever," Jin said as he stared at the line ahead of us. Under normal circumstances, adventurers who were Rank C or above were allowed entry through the special entrance, but unfortunately, there were some in our party who didn't meet that requirement.

"Sorry..."

"I'm sorry, I wasn't thinking!"

Amur and Gramps were the ones apologizing. Since Gramps hadn't worked as an adventurer for quite a few years, he'd let his guild membership lapse, and until he completed the necessary paperwork, he would only qualify as an average citizen. In Amur's case, being fourteen, she wasn't yet old enough to register for a full guild membership.

So we had no choice but to obey the rules and go to the end of the line. I told the Dawnswords they could go on ahead, but they insisted on waiting with us since we'd come all this way together in the first place.

"I-I'm not blaming you! Please lift your head!"

Although Jin tried to get Gramps to stop bowing his head, the other three

members of Dawnswords piled on and started teasing him from behind.

“Whoa, you actually made Master Merlin bow to you?!”

“Look how far we’ve come...”

“Tenma! Please convince Master Merlin that Mennas, Galatt, and I have nothing to do with this, and it’s all Jin’s fault!” Leena insisted.

“Come onnn!” Jin yelled in protest.

Seeing the four of them like this made Gramps burst out laughing, and soon Blanca and Amur joined in as well.

“All right, that’s enough joking around. People are staring,” I said.

With that, the people staring at us averted their eyes. Obviously Jin and the others didn’t like the attention either, and they quickly calmed down.

Now that everyone was quiet, I decided to use some of the medicinal herbs we’d gathered to make some tea. Well, all I did was lightly roast several different kinds of herbs I’d dried and then boiled them in water—I’m not sure if you could call that tea or not.

“Here ya go. Too bad we don’t have any snacks to go with it, but it’s better than nothing. This should have a mild sedative effect, which is perfect for Jin.”

I handed cups of tea out to everyone so we could all take a break. After we’d waited in line for about an hour, we finally entered Sagan without incident.

We all went to the guild together, but for some reason, the people who were walking towards us would get out of our way and scoot towards the edges of the road. There were two main types of people who gave us the right of way. The first were those who looked at us like we were some kind of unusual sight. The others were those who seemed like they didn’t want anything to do with us and averted their eyes as they hurried past. Most of the people in the first group were ordinary citizens and the latter mostly dressed like adventurers.

Once we arrived at the guild, Jin and the others filled out the paperwork to return their rental carriage. They had rented it from the guild in the capital, but could return it here with no problem. Since many adventurers frequently traveled back and forth between Sagan and the capital, the guilds had an

agreement with each other. If one guild ever had a carriage shortage, they'd just post a quest to go retrieve carriages from the other city. It was a popular quest since it was quite lucrative. However, a certain degree of trust from the guild was required, along with strength and experience, so there weren't many adventurers who were eligible to take it on.

"We're gonna go sell the herbs," I told everyone.

While Gramps went to fill out the paperwork to reinstate his guild membership, Blanca, Amur, and I headed over to the sales counter. We'd decided that we would split the herbs three ways—me and Gramps taking one share, the Dawnswords another, and Blanca and Amur would take the final share.

Gramps and I were taking the most effective medicinal herbs. However, they were also the most valuable, so we'd have to check the selling price of each and balance our portion with the other groups' shares.

"Here's the total purchase estimate with a breakdown by item." The guild staff member handed us a piece of paper. The purchase total would be 30,000G. Most of that came from the medicinal herbs with the highest efficacy, which were valued at about 20,000G.

I decided to talk it over with everyone else first. "Thanks. I'll discuss it with the others and decide how much to sell," I said and left the sales counter.

Gramps and the Dawnswords had finished at roughly the same time and came over to me.

"I'm all done. They agreed to reinstate my old rank without much of a penalty," Gramps said. "Apparently, Alex pulled some strings. Under normal circumstances, they'd make me start all over again!"

"We're done too. Hey, Tenma. How much'll they give us for the herbs?"

I handed them the piece of paper and we went to a nearby empty table to sit down and discuss it. We only took about five minutes.

"In exchange for keeping all the herbs, I'll pay you all their appraised value," I suggested. "You can split it up equally among yourselves and I'll just take the appraisal fee out of what I owe you. That good?"

Come to think of it, I was currently richer than most nobles, so it was no wonder they readily agreed to my proposal. The medicinal herbs that I took were worth more than 30,000G on the market, and if I were to make medicine with them and sell it, I'd definitely make more than 30,000G. So even if I paid Jin and the others for the opportunity, I wasn't going to be losing out no matter what.

Once we reached an agreement, I paid the appraisal fee at the counter and our deal was fulfilled on the spot.

"Well, let's take another quest together if we get a chance!" Jin said.

"Just no more dragons!" Galatt warned.

Mennas pouted and said, "And make sure to actually invite us next time!"

"And make us more desserts!" Leena added.

So with that, the Dawnswords said goodbye and returned to their inn. Any normal adventurer would have a hard time securing a long-term rental at an inn, but since they'd earned so much money and had such a reputation here in Sagan, it wasn't a problem.

"Yeah, see ya later!"

"They really helped us out. We should have drinks together sometime," Gramps said.

But now, the problem was Blanca and Amur.

"I had no idea all the inns would be full..."

"Yeah, I'm shocked."

After Jin and the others left, we took the two beastfolk around to the inns in town, but they were all full. This was most likely because the tournament in the capital had concluded. Many people had ended up in Sagan: those who participated but didn't place well, those who lost their bets and were completely exhausted, those who spent too much money at the auctions, and so forth... That naturally happened since this was the closest major city to the capital and had a dungeon of its own.

Because of all this, every one of Sagan's inns was filled to capacity. To make

matters worse, adventurers who couldn't find a place to stay ended up sleeping in the town square or even in the dungeon.

According to the townspeople we ran into, this was a common thing that happened in Sagan every year after the tournament, but this was the first time there were *this* many people here. Of course it was a blessing for innkeepers and others who did business with adventurers, but for everyone else, it was a complete disaster. After all, some adventurers were no better than criminals and believed that if they had power—money—they could do whatever they wanted and get away with it. Their victims were mostly those without power or people in tenuous positions.

That was why people kept glaring at us, even though we hadn't done anything wrong.

"Well, looks like we aren't gonna find anywhere for you to stay. But don't worry, I know a place. And if there aren't any vacancies there, then I'll negotiate with them for you to stay at my place," I said.

"Thanks, I owe ya one," Blanca said as he bowed his head.

"Living together! Living togetherrr, arrrghhh!" Amur started to flip out, but Blanca immediately shoved her head down too. It was so sudden that it seemed she accidentally bit her tongue on the way down—she covered her mouth with tears in her eyes.

I cast Recovery magic on her mouth, but the moment I got close to her, she made a move to kiss me. Blanca had to restrain her while I protected my own lips.

"It's right over there..." I said.

"If he ain't here, then I'm tellin' you I'll rent the damn place!" someone yelled.

We were just about to the apartment building when I heard an angry voice come from around the corner. I had a bad feeling about this, so I hurried over and saw Amy's mother and grandmother, Arie and Karina, being accosted by several men.

"As we've already told you, the renter of that room has paid in advance. It's already booked! Now please go somewhere else!"

“Shut up, ya old hag!” said one of the men as he reached for a sword at his hip.

“Shiromaru! Protect them!” I opened my bag and gave Shiromaru orders as I took out my wooden sword and charged towards the men.

“Grrrrrr!” Shiromaru returned to his original size. He stood in a protective stance in front of the women and growled menacingly at the men.

“Eek!” While the men shrank back, I circled around them and thrust my wooden sword towards one of their necks.

“That’s enough. I’m the one renting this room!” I said.

“Y-You bastard! Don’t think you can get away with doin’ somethin’ like this in the middle of town!”

“I think you’ve misunderstood. I’m protecting two of Sagan’s upstanding citizens from a bunch of thugs. Now, if you wanna try to turn me into the guards instead, go right ahead. I’ll be eager to see how that works out for you,” I said to the idiot. I made my voice sound as deep and scary as I could while I threatened him. “I’ll let you go this time. But if you ever try something this stupid again...you’ll regret it.”

By the time I finished speaking, Blanca had approached the men with an incredibly intimidating look on his face. The men trembled and quickly scurried away.

“I think they thought you were gonna kill them instead of me,” I said.

“Well, in that case, they’re true idiots. You’ll never find a nicer guy than me,” Blanca said.

“Blanca, have you ever *looked* at your own face in the mirror? I got one. Wanna see?” Amur joked in response to Blanca’s casual comment.

I saw Blanca’s eyebrow twitch, but he realized he’d walked right into that one, so he didn’t bonk her on the head this time. He’d made himself look intimidating on purpose when he approached the thugs, though. His normal face wouldn’t make a crying kid cry harder and pee his pants, but his face moments ago would have.

“Welcome home, Tenma!” called Arie. “And I’m sorry for all this trouble right when you got here! Thank you for intervening.”

“No problem. I’m just glad you and Karina are fine,” I said. “It’s good to be back. This is my grandpa, and these two are adventurer friends of mine I met in the capital.”

“The name is Merlin. I’ve heard you’ve taken good care of my grandson!”

Arie looked surprised when Gramps greeted her.

“I’m Blanca, a tiger beastfolk. I met Tenma at the tournament and accompanied him back here.”

“I’m Amur. Tenma took something precious from me at the tournament, so now we’re lovers.”

“What?!” Arie and Karina exclaimed in unison. They both immediately looked at me.

I shook my head. “Amur likes to joke around, so she often says weird stuff like that. Go ahead and ignore her.”

“Hmph!” Amur didn’t seem to approve of my attitude, but I knew if I didn’t shut it down right away, some very troublesome people would rush here from the capital. I couldn’t be vague about it.

“So, are there a lot of guys like that coming around here lately?” I asked.

“There are,” Arie began. “We’ve been talking to some innkeeper friends of ours and they agreed there have been more adventurers causing trouble around here than usual. They’re especially causing trouble with adventurers who have been in Sagan for a long time.”

“Public safety has gotten pretty bad. The guards have increased their patrols, but there’s just too much trouble out there for them to keep up. It’s gotten to the point where not only is it too dangerous to go out at night, but some people even avoid going out alone during the daytime!” Karina then informed me.

“Hmm... In that case, I think it might be partly my fault that there are so many of those idiots around here.”

I explained to the two of them what I meant by that. I made a whole lot of

people lose money gambling since I'd won both the individual and team competitions at the tournament in the capital, caused such a commotion, and cooperated with cracking down on criminals here. As a result, those people, and those like them who were trying to do bad things, seemed to have moved on to Sagan instead.

"Still, it's not your fault, Tenma. It's the criminals' fault for gambling to the point where they destroyed their own lives. They deserve to be punished. If they're too afraid to face the consequences, they should've acted right in the first place! And you have no obligation to catch criminals. That's the government's job."

What Arie had said made me feel a lot better. I was about to respond, but out of the corner of my eye, I noticed that Blanca looked like he wanted to say something.

"By the way, is it possible for this many people to stay in my room?" I asked instead. "These two weren't originally planning on coming to Sagan, so they didn't rent a room in advance. Everywhere else is booked up."

"Let's see... So there would be Tenma, Master Merlin, Blanca, Amur, Rocket, Shiromaru, and Solomon all in one room?" Arie asked.

"I think that'd be a little difficult..." Karina began. "After all, that room was only made to hold two or three people. Four would be pushing it, but then adding three of your followers to the mix? There'd be no place to sleep! If it's just for one night you could manage, but if a nonrelative stays with you for too long, we might get fined by the city. So I think it would be tough..."

She was beating around the bush, but it didn't seem like Blanca and Amur would be allowed to stay with us. In this case, "relatives" referred to family members or slaves (who were considered property) of the tenant. I guess there was some kind of hotel business law against it.

I'd figured this would happen though, so I went ahead and took the next step. "Then can I rent the space outside next to my room? I'll put my carriage there and use it as another room. I'll pay you the same as if I were renting another one, of course."

Arie and Karina had a little chat among themselves about my proposal. "In

that case, we agree. You'll have to submit the documents to the inn association though, and they'll write you a contract."

I'd learned about the method I proposed back in the capital. There were several parking lots where nobles and merchants would park their carriages and sometimes the coachmen and guards would sleep in them, which gave me this idea. That was the method I'd considered as a last resort when I first came to Sagan too.

However, according to Arie, if a guest at an inn wanted to do something like that, they had to submit a permit application to the association. Since some guests came via horse-drawn carriage, it wasn't difficult to get a permit, but if you went ahead and parked without one, you could get a warning. In the worst-case scenario, there might even be a fine.

Arie handed me a form. "Could you fill out this area of the document, describe how you plan to use the space, and then sign in the last column?"

I went ahead and filled it out, signing "Tenma Otori" in the last column that she'd indicated.

"'Otori'... Tenma, did you always have a last name?" Karina gave me a puzzled look.

"Oh, I won the tournament in the capital so I received a last name as my reward," I told her, which she immediately understood.

After that, I transferred the room so it was in Blanca's name, and the problem of where he and Amur would stay was now solved.

Karina went to submit the paperwork to the association. Meanwhile, Arie gave Blanca the room key and he went to put down their things. Gramps and I then cleared the space where we'd put the carriage.

"By the way, where are Amy, Rocky, and Birdie?" I asked.

"Amy's at school with Rocky and Birdie. She doesn't go every day, but lately, she seems to study harder than she did before."

As we chatted, Amur suddenly jumped on my back. Since she was light, it wasn't a big deal when she did that, but she *was* hugging me pretty tightly. I

could barely breathe.

“Who’s Amy?” she asked in an accusatory tone.

I asked Blanca to get her off me. I explained to her that Amy was Arie’s granddaughter and Karina’s daughter and that she was my apprentice who I was teaching to be a Tamer. Amur seemed satisfied with that explanation.

After that, I gave my old room a quick clean and was about to leave, so Blanca and Amur could use it, when Amur suddenly tried to carry her luggage back to the carriage. To her surprise, Blanca quickly grabbed her by the scruff of the neck, lifted her up, and carried her outside.

“What? I don’t get it...”

Blanca managed to persuade her to calm down, both with words and by physically reprimanding her. Arie quietly watched them and smiled.

Karina came back just as I finished sorting my things and told me that the documents had been submitted successfully. The association had just said that I should avoid causing problems. Apparently, they’d received various complaints about adventurers lately, just as Karina and Arie had informed me.

Suddenly, I heard Amy’s cheerful voice. “Master! Welcome back!”

Behind her were Rocky and Birdie, who’d grown a considerable amount in the time I was away. However, they still couldn’t fly for very long, so they’d flap their wings a bit, then run, then fly a little more, and run again.

“Wuff!” The moment Shiromaru spotted the rockbirds, he barked at them, and they both landed on his back.



“I’m home, Amy. I brought this for you as a souvenir. This is yours, and you can split the rest with everyone else. Oh, and this is for Rocky and Birdie.”

I handed her the souvenirs I’d bought for her at the capital, along with magic stones and cores for Rocky and Birdie. They were small ones, but since there were a lot of them it would probably last them several months.

“Thank you! Hey, where are Jeanne and Aura? And who are those people?” Amy looked at Blanca and Amur curiously.

“Jeanne and Aura are back in the capital. They’re looking after my grandpa’s mansion and Aura’s older sister works in the capital, so there’s nothing to worry about. Also, these are adventurers I met in the capital. Meet Blanca and Amur. They were headed home in the same direction as me, so they decided to stay in Sagan for a little while.”

“Oh, fun!” she replied. “I’m glad Aura was able to see her sister. It’s nice to meet you, Amur and Blanca. I’m Amy. And these are my followers, Rocky and Birdie!”

“Wow! I can’t believe she’s not scared to look at Blanca’s face!” Amur exclaimed, shocked that a child like Amy wasn’t frightened of the beastfolk. As usual, she got bonked on the head for it.

“I’m planning on dungeon diving tomorrow, so I’m going to eat an early dinner and go to bed. Is everyone all right with having some free time before dinner?” I asked.

Gramps and the others nodded, so we went ahead with that plan.

But since no one else had ever been to Sagan before, they all ended up tagging along with me anyway.

“I guess this is what happens in a new place...” I murmured.

Since we were walking around as a ragtag group, we attracted quite a lot of stares from passersby. It made me a little embarrassed.

First, I decided to take a peek inside a store that sold medicine. After that, I shopped a bit for food, and then, finally, I took a look at some weapons.

“There sure are a lot more defensive items sold here than the capital. Maybe

because of the dungeon?” I wondered aloud.

The weapons and armor that were sold varied in each city. For example, since there were so many visitors to the capital, weapons sold better since armor restricted movement. And since there was a high population of nobles there, weapons often had flashy decorations to make them stand out more. But here in Sagan, goods focused on function over fashion, and many blacksmiths made armor instead of weapons.

The royal capital was filled with ostentatious people and the area was surrounded by vast grasslands, so there was plenty of space to use all kinds of weapons. But here in Sagan, weapons were really only needed in the dungeon, which limited the types you could use. And since many people thought it was more important to protect themselves from attacks launched from blind spots, armor was given more precedence than weapons.

“Find anything good?” I asked Amur.

“No! The one you made for me is way better!” she answered, twirling around to show off her armor again.

“I couldn’t find anything either,” Blanca agreed.

“I’ll take you to my friend’s place next time. But we should have just about everything we need for the dungeon, don’t you think?”

I’d replenished my stock of medicine, bought vegetables to eat in the dungeon, and some tools to sharpen and repair our weapons if necessary. Oh, and Amur bought tonight’s dinner. She had gotten way more food at the food stalls than she could eat and wound up with leftovers. Our dinner ended up being pretty tasty as a result.

“Piece of cake, just like I thought,” Blanca muttered as he knocked down a goblin that leaped towards him.

“That’s right!” Amur swung her short spear, sending the goblin that attacked her straight into the other one.

I finished both goblins off and threw their bodies into my bag. Gramps was positioned behind us, watching out for attacks from the back. Rocket and the

others didn't have anything to do, so they were resting in my dimension bag.

"How about we go farther down, then?" Gramps asked.

"Good idea."

Right now, we were fighting effortlessly on the tenth floor. Since this was Blanca and Amur's first dungeon, I thought we'd start on easy floors to get them warmed up and used to it. But now, it was clear they'd have no problem and we could move to lower floors.

"I think we should have dinner first, though. There's a good place to take a break around here," I said, heading towards the nearest dead end.

"There's no way out?" Blanca asked when he saw the place I chose, but Gramps didn't answer him, so he just shrugged and didn't say anything further.

"No worries. First, I'll build a wall with Earth magic and make air holes. Then, we'll have a safe place to rest," I explained.

"Oh!" Blanca replied.

"Yeah, this'll be safe. No monsters on this floor are strong enough to knock down the wall."

"Back when I was traveling around as an adventurer, I used to cast the same kind of spells!" Gramps said.

Blanca and Amur seemed impressed as Gramps got a nostalgic look in his eyes.

"But you remember, Blanca, that monsters aren't the only thing you have to worry about in dungeons!" he warned.

"Yeah, in a sense, the thing you have to worry about most are fellow dungeon divers," I said.

"Precisely!" Gramps agreed.

"I'll take revenge on any thieves that come our way! I'll strip 'em of all their possessions in return, and they won't have anything to say about it!" Amur declared.

The number one cause of death in the easier levels of the dungeon was said

to be pillaging by fellow dungeon divers. The second was illness or infection due to injury (mostly poison), and monsters were in third place. That was why it was considered very dangerous to come across strangers around these levels in a dungeon.

And if you defend yourself against them as Amur suggested, you could report it to the guild. If the guild investigated and approved your claim of acting in self-defense, you could claim all your opponent's belongings as your own. They investigated these reports because there were always those who would make false claims. Some people say that crimes like those will always happen, so this system was meant to act as a deterrent.

"I doubt we'll get ambushed when we have Rocket, Shiromaru, and myself around. But of course you can never be too careful."

"Wuff?" Shiromaru poked his head out of the bag with a piece of meat in his mouth. He tilted his head to the side as if to say, "You called?"

I was a little concerned, but Rocket had actually listened and explained it all to Shiromaru.

"Tenma, I'm hungry!" Amur grabbed her stomach and then tugged on my sleeve. I decided not to tell her I could actually hear her stomach grumbling.

I built two simple stoves in the middle of the room, put charcoal inside, lit them, and put a grate on top. Now all I had to do was grill up the meat and vegetables.

"I have rice balls and bread too, so cook up whatever you'd like," I said.

The four of us, along with two followers, sat around the two stoves. I couldn't help but laugh at the sight of Shiromaru and Solomon sitting there with their eyes wide as they drooled with anticipation.

"Once we finish our break, let's go deeper. You're used to the dungeon now, right?" I asked.

"Yeah. The goblins were a piece of cake. There weren't that many of them, though. Is it always like this, Tenma?" Blanca asked.

We'd probably defeated thirty goblins by now. As Blanca guessed, this was a

lower number than usual, but there was a reason for it.

“The guild has been buying up materials from goblins lately, so that’s why there aren’t many around.”

According to the information we received before we started our dungeon dive, the guild had only recently begun purchasing goblins. And for some reason, the Sagan city government was their client. This appeared to be part of their strategy to manage the troublesome adventurer problem. The guild had agreed to purchase goblins (which they never had before) as a measure to address the surplus of adventurers causing trouble. They would buy the goblins at a modest price, which would provide some wages in an attempt to quell any potential riots.

Although it added up to little more than pocket money, having some gold allowed people to afford food and drink, and would hopefully encourage them to move on to other towns.

However, they were only paying 50G per goblin with a bonus of 50G if you sold ten at a time. That didn’t even add up to 1,000G, which would buy you just one magic core. Still, if you had a certain level of strength and experience, it was possible to safely hunt goblins alone, so you could kill a lot of them in one day.

“They also mentioned using the goblins as fertilizer or doing experiments with them.”

If goblins could be used as fertilizer, that might increase demand for them in the future. In a few centuries, they could even become an endangered species.

After we rested for about an hour, we started moving towards the lower levels. We avoided combat as much as possible until we reached the fifteenth floor, but we still encountered several monsters that blocked our way. However, we dealt with them pretty easily. It was more like we were swatting away flies with the sleeves of our armor.

We passed several fellow adventurers along the way, but they were all nice, so we didn’t have any problems.

“All right, we’ve reached our objective: the fifteenth floor. This one is filled with insect-type monsters. If you’re not careful, you could end up completely

surrounded before you know it,” I told them.

“That’s the scariest thing about insects,” Blanca said.

“It’s best to just ignore them!” Amur said.

According to those two, their hometown had a lot of forests and they were used to dealing with insect-type monsters. We decided to hunt in this area for now (although Amur wasn’t crazy about the idea) while being careful of our surroundings.

Since insect-type monsters’ shells were often lightweight and durable, they could be sold at a high price depending on their condition. We all carefully put away the monsters we defeated. Well, in my case, I just tossed them into my magic bag as soon as they went down. However, Blanca and Amur seemed to struggle with the meticulous work, and in the end, they found it too much trouble. They asked if I could put their loot in my bag for them as well.

Combining loot like that could often lead to unnecessary trouble, so I decided to just lend them my spare magic bag. I didn’t think they’d cause trouble of course, but since money was involved, it was important to set boundaries.

Encountering high-value monsters in this area was pretty rare. Personally, I would’ve preferred to catch the white caterpillar that could be found on the floor below this one, but we’d already decided to stop here today. I decided to keep quiet and focused on killing bugs.

“Isn’t there anything good around here? Wait...” The moment I used Detection, I noticed several pings on the ceiling just up ahead. I sneaked closer and looked up to see gold and silver spiders clinging to the ceiling.

Class: Golden Silk Spider

Class: Silver Silk Spider

Well, those definitely sounded like expensive monsters to me. There were four silver silk spiders and one gold one.

“I’ve never seen these guys before, so I’d like to capture them alive if I can...” I said.

They resembled gigantic orb-weaving spiders and each one was about fifty centimeters in length. Their faces were somewhat charming.

“I think I had some kind of useful tool... Oh, right!”

I remembered that I’d bought a tool yesterday that emitted smoke to repel insects. It was a ball that smelled like one of those mosquito coils from my other world, about five centimeters in size. It was harmless to humans, but if you used it while you were camping or whatever, it would keep the bugs away. Once the bugs came into contact with the smoke, they’d be paralyzed. I decided to try using it.

“Rocket, stay on the other side of those spiders. If this doesn’t work and they start to escape, turn into your Emperor form and catch ’em for me.”

As per my instructions, Rocket bounced over to the other side of the spiders. I lit the smoke bomb and tossed it right underneath the spiders. A huge cloud of smoke immediately billowed out and enveloped them. They tried to escape but were quickly swallowed up by the smoke and fell to the ground, powerless.

“All right! It worked!” I rushed over to the spiders. They still didn’t move when I came closer, so I wasn’t sure if my plan worked. But I cast Recovery magic and Debuff Resistance, just in case, and put each spider into a bug cage I’d made from Earth magic.

“What’s that smoke coming from?”

The smoke had apparently spread to other passages, so Gramps and the others rushed over in a hurry. Fires in dungeons were dangerous because they could cause a lot of damage if they weren’t immediately extinguished.

“Oh, I used smoke bombs to repel the insects. There wasn’t a fire,” I explained.

“I see,” said Blanca. “I thought there was a fire and panicked!”

“You startled me so much I accidentally squished my bug!” Amur complained.

“I’m glad it wasn’t a fire, but if you’re going to use smoke bombs, you should

always warn your party first,” Gramps cautioned me.

“I’m sorry.”

I guess I should’ve gotten their permission first before using the smoke bomb. No one was mad, but as Amur said, they were so startled and panicked that some of their insect spoils had gotten ruined. So, I apologized for being careless and everyone forgave me.

“So? Why’d you have to use a smoke bomb?” Gramps asked. “Surely there’s no enemy down here you couldn’t kill outright, Tenma.”

“I found some monsters I’d never seen before and I wanted to capture them alive without damaging them, so I tried using the smoke bomb. Also, I wanted to see what using one was like.”

I showed everyone the spiders I caught. Unfortunately two of the spiders had died, but the rest were recovering.

“Hrm, those are rare spiders indeed. Even I haven’t seen any like them,” Gramps said.

“They have tougher shells than I expected. They’re too small to make a full suit of armor out of, but I’m sure they could be used for defensive gear,” I said.

“Tenma, are you going to make your debut as a kabukimono?” Amur asked.

The spider shells were very beautiful and tough so they’d be suitable for armor, but of course I had no intention of wearing something so flashy. My current leather armor was top-notch and sturdier than mediocre metal armor. So, there was no reason for me to make my debut in “kabukimono” armor as Amur had suggested.

“What does that mean?” Gramps asked.

This was the first time I’d heard the word too. “I’ve never heard of it either. What is that?” I asked.

“According to Grampy Kei, it’s someone who likes to stand out and be flashy.”

“It also seems to mean someone who marches to the beat of their own drum and isn’t influenced by others,” added Blanca. “But Grampy Kei was the first person to use that word back home, so maybe it’s a word from another

language? I'm not sure."

Now that I'd heard Blanca's explanation, it became clear that my hunch was right—this "Grampy Kei" person was like me. However, I didn't know if he was just a foreigner or a reincarnated compatriot from my era or in the past. But somehow, I suddenly felt a sense of kinship with Grampy Kei and his great-granddaughter Amur.

"Well, I definitely don't want to be flashy or stand out. I like my current armor because it's easy to use and it suits my style anyway."

"I'd like to see Tenma dressed in gold and silver, but it would be difficult to use as an adventurer," Blanca agreed.

Amur pouted. "Disappointed!"

I wasn't sure what was so disappointing about it, but if I wore something that conspicuous, it would make me an easy target. I'd never even seen an adventurer who wore gold or silver armor. On the other hand, nobles and knights often wear flashy things to bring attention to themselves.

"Well, why don't we call it a day here? I'm curious about these spiders Tenma caught," Gramps suggested.

We started to get ready to go home. Since we'd already confirmed the location of the warp point in advance, we quickly returned to the surface.

"Let's sell this stuff off at the guild, have some food, and go home. It'll be dark soon," I said.

"That's fine, but what about the spiders?" Gramps asked.

"Too many people would see them at the guild and might attract too much attention. We don't have time, so I'm going to ask a friend."

"Yeah, but if anyone tried something, you could take revenge on 'em and empty their pockets! I know you would!"

What Amur said was quite bold, but I couldn't argue with her since I had, in fact, earned a lot of pocket money that way. It seemed Gramps and Blanca had done the same because they looked away a little when she said that. It was a pretty efficient way to earn money, after all.

“I know what you’re trying to say. Who are you going to ask?” Gramps asked.

“I’ll talk to Agris first, and if he doesn’t know anything, the Tamers Guild. And if they don’t know anything, Jin and the others. If that still doesn’t work, I’ll write to the king.”

I said I’d ask a friend, but to be honest, I wasn’t a very social person, so I could only think of Agris, Jin and the others, Amy and her family, and Master Gantz. And every single one of those people had approached me to be friends first.

“Poor Tenma...” Amur gently placed a hand on my shoulder, perhaps because I could only name a few people here, and comforted me. For some reason, Gramps and Blanca were looking on tenderly, which I found quite rude. “Name one of your friends you spoke to first, Tenma.”

“Jeanne, Aura, Tida, Luna, Kelly, Albert, Leon, Cain... Oh, and the king and the others when they came to Kukuri Village!”

I didn’t have many friends, but hey! I *had* taken the initiative quite a few times after all!

“Jeanne and Aura were injured so you had to help them, right? Tida and Luna were in trouble, and so were Alex and the rest. As for the idiot noble trio of Albert, Cain, and Leon, they were following you—you didn’t approach them. And Kelly owns the shop you went into to buy things, so isn’t it natural that a customer would approach a shopkeeper first?” Gramps said.

“Yeah... Poor Tenma...” Amur repeated.

“That’s not good, Tenma,” Blanca said as he shook his head.

Gramps refuted my claims about everyone I brought up, and to make matters worse, Amur pitied me even more. Blanca seemed genuinely aghast.

“That’s enough,” I said. “You know, my motto is ‘narrow and deep rather than wide and shallow.’”

“Have you ever considered wide and deep, Tenma?” Gramps asked.

“Hmm, since Tenma seems to have more female acquaintances, does ‘narrow and deep’ include *intimate relationships* too?” joked Blanca.

“Tenma, I’m rooting for you because you’re my number one!” Amur said.

These three seemed determined to tease me no matter what. I knew that arguing with them would only make it worse, so I decided to ignore them and headed back to the guild alone.

“Tenma, wait!” Amur called.

“It’s unusual to see him getting so worked up,” Gramps mused.

“Maybe I went too far.”

I knew they were chasing after me, but I continued to ignore them until I got inside the guild.

Part Two

“So that’s why Tenma’s in such a bad mood?” Mennas asked.

“Normally he’s so mature, so it’s unusual to see him like that,” Leena said.

“He was so cranky when he came inside the guild that I wondered what happened! Pfft!” Jin said.

“I understand how he feels, but that’s... Bwa ha ha!” Galatt burst out laughing.

They were all talking about what’d happened when we entered the guild. As for the last two, I was going to ask them out later and get some payback.

We were now at a tavern near the guild. Jin and the others had been just finishing up some negotiations at the guild when we’d showed up and they’d been about to go out for dinner. But when they’d spotted us, they invited us along with them. Even though we didn’t make their party that much bigger, judging by the looks of our table, you’d think that there were thirty people eating with us tonight.

Jin saw how shocked I was at the amount of food on the table. “The grub here’s cheap. Every time I wanna get a belly full of food, this is the place to be!” he said as he reached for another plate.

That wasn’t actually what surprised me. Shiromaru and Solomon could easily house this amount of food too. Oh right—I actually wasn’t allowed to let my followers out in the tavern, so as we ate, they were having dinner inside my bag. At first, Shiromaru and Solomon had whined like crazy to be let out, but once I gave them enough meat, they had quieted down. Lately, all they would eat was meat and wouldn’t touch their vegetables. I was running low on meat these days, to be honest, so I’d need to go orc hunting in the dungeons soon.

“No, what I’m trying to say is won’t ordering all that food at once make it get too cold to be good?”

Jin gave me a confused look. “Oh, don’t worry about that. Look.” He pointed to Amur and Blanca sitting next to each other. The two tigers were gobbling

down plate after plate.

“Hmm?” they both said in unison.

“Nothing.”

I wasn't sure what else to say when they both stared back at me. Jin was right—there really was no reason to worry. In fact, I wasn't sure if there'd be enough food for me at this rate.

I secured my own portion before the two of them scarfed it down and decided to take my time eating.

And in the end, even though we had enough food for thirty people, it hadn't been enough for everyone because of Amur and Blanca.

“So Jin and the others didn't know either...” I said.

“Must be a pretty rare spider,” Gramps agreed.

After we'd said goodbye to Jin and the others, Gramps and I returned to the apartment and got out of the carriage. We set it up in the empty lot and went inside to examine the three spiders. Amur and Blanca had gotten here a short time ago and had taken baths, but they were gone now. Blanca had wanted to stay longer, but since Amur had started going rogue and demanding to climb into my bed, he had to carry her out by the scruff of her neck.

“Jin's party has gone deeper in the Sagan dungeon than any other adventurer here, so I thought he'd have at least seen them before,” I said. “I'll ask Agris tomorrow, and if he doesn't know, I'll have to ask the king.”

“That's right,” Gramps said.

At the very least, I knew the monsters' official names since I had used Identify on them, but I hadn't told anyone I could use that ability. So, for now, we were just calling them golden and silver spiders.

I thought maybe it was about time I should come clean about my abilities to people who I could trust. Well, I couldn't tell them about *all* my abilities, but at the very least, I could tell them about the magic I could use. It was especially painful for me to keep secrets from Gramps for so long.

“By the way... Tenma, do you think you could use Tame on these spiders?” he asked.

“Maybe, but they haven’t completely let down their guards yet. I don’t think I could make the connection with them necessary to Tame them quite yet,” I answered.

I gave the spiders meat scraps for food, but they still wouldn’t eat straight from my hand. I would set meat in front of them, and after a while, they’d go ahead and eat it.

“First of all, I have to get them to trust me. I’m thinking of letting them loose inside my bag and keeping them there. Maybe if I put food inside with them, they won’t eat each other.”

“Looks like we’ll just have to be patient.”

“Yeah.”

I chose one of the smaller spare dimension bags I had and released the spiders inside it. I filled the bag with meat, along with vegetables for hydration, so they would be good on food for a few days.

“Well, good night.”

I turned off the lights and was about to go to sleep, but my three followers were apparently feeling neglected since they hadn’t seen much action today. They all crawled into my bed, which ended up pretty cramped as a result.

“You’re not going dungeon diving today, Tenma? I guess Master Merlin isn’t either... And neither is Amur...”

The next morning after an early breakfast, Blanca asked us about our plans.

After I’d told him what I was going to do today, Gramps had said, “There’s no point in going dungeon diving without Tenma.” It looked like he planned to take it easy. Amur wanted to come with me and hurried to my side as soon as I told Blanca my plans.

“What should I do, then? Dungeon diving won’t be any fun alone,” complained Blanca. “Oh, I know! Introduce me to that blacksmith friend of

yours you were talking about, Tenma! I want to see some weapons I can't find in the capital."

"Hmm, in that case, I should come with you. He taught me a lot of what I know about making swords and armor, but he can be kind of cantankerous. He does know his stuff though."

"I'd like that!" Blanca said.

"All right, let's go. Gramps, make sure to lock up if you decide to go out," I said.

"Got it. Make sure not to cause too much trouble now, you hear?" Gramps warned.

He saw us off and then the three of us—plus Rocket and team—left the apartment. Although it was still morning, some roadside vendors who had finished their prep early had started to sell their goods.

"If you see any stalls that catch your interest, let me know. There might be some hidden treasures."

They both nodded and then we started walking towards the master's shop. However, Amur stopped every couple of minutes to peruse the stalls, so it wound up taking much longer than I'd expected to get there.

"Is Master Gantz here?"

"Yeah, I'm here. Who is it?" called a voice from elsewhere in the shop. "Wait, is that you, Tenma? You're back! We heard all about your accomplishments. You really made a killing in the capital, huh?"

When I'd called into the shop, Master Gantz had emerged from the back and burst out laughing when he saw me.

"I'm sure you really went wild there, so I should probably take a look at your equipment. Put it up here and let me see." Master Gantz was eager to check out my equipment before I even had the chance to introduce him to Blanca. It would be too much of a hassle to defy the boss, so I obediently took out my gear. But since it was well taken care of, and pretty much brand new, I figured there wouldn't be a problem.

“Hey, you got some new equipment! And it’s pretty good too. Did Kelly make this?” he asked.

“Do you know Kelly?” Amur asked.

“Hm? Who’s this girl? And who’s the big fella over there?” Master Gantz finally noticed Amur and Blanca once Amur spoke up.

“Kelly and Tenma made this too!” Amur did a twirl, showing off her armor in front of the boss.

“That too, eh? Her skills have really improved. Although I can still see spots where she could do better.”

Master Gantz lifted up my leather armor and started lightly tapping on it like he was checking for something, although I didn’t know what.

“First off, it’s about that armor of Tenma’s. If we’re talking leather armor, this is one of the most top-notch sets I’ve seen. But if it were up to me, I wouldn’t be fixated on just calling it leather armor. I’d sandwich some processed earth dragon scales between the exterior and the lining. Even just inserting a single layer of thinly processed scales between them can significantly increase strength without changing the weight much,” he explained. “Well, for something Tenma would use, it would be more like inserting not just one but at least two to three layers. Since you probably wouldn’t mind a bit of extra weight, and if mobility’s an issue, you can make adjustments in specific areas. For example, you could add two layers on the chest and back and one layer on the abdomen.”

Master Gantz put down my armor and turned towards Amur, walking around her to examine her equipment. “I don’t have much to say about this, but I also think we should reinforce the abdomen area here. And if you made a jacket and pants out of wyvern skin, that should raise the defense some too.”

Honestly, I felt a little depressed hearing that since I had been involved in making her armor. I must’ve compromised too much in the process.

“But I won’t modify the armor. That’d be rude towards Kelly. If you want me to do that, you’d have to ask her first. Also, just because there’s room for improvement doesn’t mean it’s bad. And this weapon is wonderful. The

materials are good, and the technology is second to none.”

Amur’s adamantium sword got a passing grade. However, the boss wasn’t sure what to call the large spear, so he just went ahead and did as I did and called it as such.

“This large spear is pretty unique,” he began. “While I’ve seen similar ones, they were usually a size that could be hung from the waist, but most of all, they weren’t meant to be a primary weapon. However, depending on the user, this one could indeed become a sufficient main weapon. It’s quite challenging to handle, though.”

The master muttered something about wanting to make one himself, but I quickly decided to put the spear away. If I didn’t, we might never get to Blanca’s conversation.

In the end, Master Gantz agreed to make Blanca a weapon at a low cost. In fact, he offered to make a spear at an affordable price before Blanca even placed an order. Seeing the large spear from Kelly’s workshop had apparently ignited his competitive spirit. Blanca originally intended to order a spear anyway, so he immediately agreed to the master’s conditions and they began discussing it right away. From there on, Amur and I were left out of the conversation.

“Well then, we’ll be going.”

Neither of them responded, but Amur and I didn’t mind. We decided to head for the guild to see if Agris and the others were there.

“Date! Date!”

I initially suggested we take a carriage, but Amur rejected the idea and we ended up walking to the guild. Despite my firm refusal when Amur attempted to link arms with me, I found myself forced into buying snacks and window shopping at stalls along the way. We could easily be taken as a couple on a date by onlookers, which seemed to put Amur in a fantastic mood. However, Shiromaru and Solomon were enticed by the various aromas from the stalls, and when they peeked out of the bag, she pushed them back in. However, she promptly dumped a large amount of food she had bought at the stalls into the bag, and there was no protest from the two animals.

“I think I’ve seen this spider before... Hang on a minute.”

As soon as we arrived at the guild, I found Agris busy with something in a corner of the first floor. I showed him the spider I captured in the dungeon and he quickly leaped out of his seat and scurried away. I ended up helping out with the remaining work in Agris’s place while he was gone. Amur didn’t want to get involved, so she wandered over to the quest bulletin board.

“What’s all of these papers, Ted?” I asked.

“They’re all applications to join the Tamers guild!”

Apparently, after the tournament, there was a huge influx of people who wanted to join the Tamers guild. When I had first met the group, there had been a grand total of zero applicants, but since the tournament, they’d received over a hundred applicants in just a few days. They had to close applications to join several times, but people were still applying. Clearly some people who wanted to join didn’t have the aptitude to become Tamers, but they wanted to try anyway because they’d seen me do so well in the tournament. There were also those who wanted to become members just to get closer to me. The applicants had been asked to submit something like a resume before they would get an interview so those people could be weeded out.

“It’s fine if an applicant is a commoner, but what if they’re a noble? Won’t that be pretty troublesome?” I asked.

“Oh, you don’t have to worry about that. Although Agris is the representative, the deputy representative is Marquis Sammons, and Archduke Audry is in charge. We were told to inform either of them if any troubles arise,” Ted replied.

I’d never heard of this before, but I figured it probably had something to do with the king’s favor. Marquis Sammons was involved since he was a Tamer himself, and since he was a high-ranking noble, it wouldn’t be unusual for him to assume the position of deputy representative, even if he wouldn’t be able to participate in the Tamers guild much because of his official duties. As for the archduke, his presence probably served as a warning. Knowing his relationship with the royal family and myself, it was probably a message as if to say, “Don’t

get any strange ideas or you'll pay for it."

And so I continued helping with the paperwork that I had nothing to do with in Agris's place.

"Still, there are hardly any decent candidates here. What's this one say? 'No Taming experience, but the guild should let me in anyway.' Is he an idiot?"

That particular applicant was in his midforties and the second son of a certain noble. He obviously applied because he was targeting me—in the "Other Notes" section of the application, he wrote things like "I have an attractive daughter who's ready for marriage" and other such nonsense. Of course, I promptly threw that application into the box marked with an X. Ted checked the document too, just in case, but after he read it, he crumpled it up and threw it in the trash.

At this point, only ten applicants had progressed to the interview stage. The guidelines were quite strict due to the archduke's orders. The only ones allowed to pass onto the interview stage were those with Taming experience or those who had some kind of experience that signaled they had the ability. They would then be subject to a tough interview, because, unbeknownst to the applicants, Marquis Sammons would be their interviewer.

"You're rejecting them left and right, Tenma. Are you sure you're reading them thoroughly?" Ted asked with concern.

"I'm reading them. The ones from high-ranking nobles are clearly only applying because they want me to marry their daughters. They're the same as the one I threw away earlier."

I quickly went through the applications by checking names, self-introductions, and the "Other Notes" sections. I gave all the applications from non-nobles to Ted.

"I found it, Tenma!" At last, Agris returned with an old book from the reference room. "I only read it once so I couldn't remember it exactly, but I seemed to recall it being mentioned in this book. Let's see... Here it is!"

According to the book, both the golden silk spider and silver silk spider were Rank C monsters. However, this evaluation only considered their strength. Due

to their rarity, they could rival Rank S monsters. Their main attacks were biting and using their spider silk. Although their poison was weak, it could still induce paralysis. The silk was the same color as the spiders, and it would lose its stickiness if soaked in acidic water for a while. You could be rendered immobile if you got stuck in these spiders' webs, and other monsters could attack while you were caught, which could lead to your death. But if you were able to remove the stickiness from their silk, it was glossier, more breathable, and hundreds of times stronger than normal silk thread. Around a hundred nests had been found over the past few decades, but only about ten reports of individual spiders. None had ever been captured alive, and only one dead spider had ever been brought in.

The book had been written by an old Tamer and contained information about various rare monsters he'd encountered from all over the world. It also contained entries on earth dragons, unicorns, and bicornes. It seemed like this was a very valuable book, even nowadays.

"They're rarer than I expected," I commented. "Considering that book looks pretty old, how many decades ago do you think they were talking about?"

"I read this book over thirty years ago, and it was worn out then too. I don't have any detailed information about the author so I can't give you an exact timeline, but judging from the names of places and villages in the book, I'd guess it was around the time I was born, if not earlier." Agris told me some of the villages mentioned in the book were no longer around. Some of them had been when he was a child, and others had since been renamed.

"Worst case, it could be over one hundred years ago. Jin and the others mentioned they'd never seen spider webs in that area before, so the numbers might've dwindled more than in the past," I said.

"Or maybe the spiders stopped building nests so that they wouldn't be found as easily."

After Agris and I discussed the situation, we decided to report the information about the spiders only to the guildmaster. Since the adventurers guild in Sagan had a relationship with the Tamers guild, Agris thought they might have a more favorable response, but we weren't sure how the guildmaster would react. He

might decide it was better to disclose the information right away rather than keep it hidden. Either way, it was better to tell someone than try to decide on my own.

Amur came over to me with a guild quest form. “Look at this, Tenma.”

It was a request from several craftsmen for transporting and delivering some wood that was currently outside of town. The reward depended on how many cords of wood you transported. Since dungeon tasks were more popular with adventurers right now, they were having a hard time getting someone to complete this quest.

“What about it?”

“Well, if we use your magic bag, we can make a huge profit!” Amur said.

It was true that it would be an easy way to make money, but it would be a bit challenging for Amur.

“No, what’s the real motive here?”

“A date in the outskirts of town with Tenma!” Amur confessed without a hint of remorse.

Although it did sound like a lucrative quest, there was really no need for me to take it, since I already had plenty of money.

“Why don’t you go? You’re a well-known figure here in Sagan now, so it’s not a bad thing for you to take on such quests,” suggested Agris. “It would be beneficial for Sagan and the guild. Plus, it’s a good idea to get some craftsmen on your side, especially since you tend to get caught up in various troubles. Craftsmen have a lot of connections. The more allies on your side, the better.”

“I guess that’s true. It’ll be a good way to kill time.”

I decided to accept the quest with Agris’s encouragement. Although I saw Ted grinning behind him, I decided to ignore it. Now that I decided to take it on, I needed to get a move on. Doing this would take about five or six hours including travel time. If we dallied any longer, it would be nighttime when we finished.

“We’re gonna have to hurry,” I told Amur.

“Okay!”

We quickly accepted the quest at the counter and rushed to the designated location near the west gate of the town. Our task was to transport lumber from there to a storage area near the east gate. But doing so meant we would have to cross the narrow streets of the slums near the west gate, which would be impossible to do with unprocessed lumber. So, we had three possible routes outlined in the quest form. We could transport the wood to either the north or south gate and then go down the main street from there, or travel via the main street to the east gate while carrying it along the walls.

“I think we should go through the west gate and head straight for the east one. We can even ride Valley Wind outside the fence to get there faster,” I said.

“Yeah, I think you’re right! Valley Wind would be better.”

It took us about an hour to reach the west gate from the guild. We arrived earlier than expected, but that was because Amur and I had raced there.

I approached a few craftsmen standing around a cranky-looking dwarf who seemed to be the clients’ representative. “I’m the one who accepted the quest. Is this where I’m supposed to get the wood?”

“That’s right, but... Why did a famous person like you take this quest?” the dwarf asked. He seemed to recognize me.

When I told him I did it just to kill time, he burst into laughter.

“That’s pretty good! Well, if a famous guy like you wants to accept our quest for fun, we’ll have no qualms about it! But, you know...” The dwarf trailed off for a moment. “There’s a lot of wood. Are you sure you can handle it? It’s hard labor, you know.”

According to him, several adventurers had attempted to take on this quest before, but since most of them were beginners, over half of them had to quit early.

“Well, I knew it would be a quest for someone strong,” I said.

I looked at the pile in front of us. The quest description just said it was transporting wood, but there were stacks of pillars and planks here that seemed

to have come from demolished buildings. And it wasn't just one or two houses. There were probably about twenty to thirty buildings worth of wood here.

"Why is there so much?" Amur asked.

The dwarf pointed to the west gate. "We had to demolish some illegal structures and buildings that were so old they were at risk of collapsing just inside the west gate. After the buildings were torn down, it was up to us to remove the wood, but we couldn't carry it through the narrow roads in the slums, so we carried it out here instead. Not too many useful folks have shown up, so we're pretty behind schedule," he explained. "Anyway, are you taking this quest or not?"

The other craftsmen were paying attention now, curious to see how I would answer.

"This is a piece of cake for Tenma!" Amur confidently answered on my behalf, earning cheers from the craftsmen.

"Oooh!"

"Well then, go on and get started right away. You can decide how you want to haul the wood. Once you reach the east gate, someone will be waiting there to weigh the load and sign it off on your quest sheet. It's roughly 2,000G per hundred kilograms, but that could change depending on what you carry. Well, we're counting on you!"

"Before we start, I have a question," I said. "I can move a lot of large things at once, but no one will complain if I do it all myself, right? Is there a fixed quota per person on the quest?"

I wanted to make sure that there were no rules about the amount that one person could carry, and they assured me there weren't. One of the quest conditions was that each load carried from here to the east gate counted as completing the quest, so they didn't care how the load was divvied up.

"All right, then. In that case, I won't hold back. Come on out, Rocket!"

Rocket had been resting in my bag, so I took him out and set him down. I had him put the wood in the empty dimension bag. He had to stuff it all the way in the back to make enough room to carry everything that was there, which was

why I wanted his help. He used his built-in magic and dimension bags and was able to store the wood inside of himself. After that, he went back into my bag and filled it to the brim with wood. As Rocket did this, I used the Guardian Giganto hands to sort the pieces while Amur supported me from nearby.

After we'd repeated this process several times, we'd filled up several of my empty dimension bags.

"Well then, I'll be going now! Please remember how many bags I used. I'll have them count them over there too, so you can check when I'm done," I said, surprising the craftsmen.

I surprised them even more when I summoned Valley Wind from my magic bag and activated it. They watched Rocket jump inside, and then I mounted it myself. When I checked the remaining wood from atop Valley Wind, I saw that we'd managed to load up about half the wood that had been there originally. With one more trip, we'd have all the wood cleaned up.

"Let's go!" Amur hopped up and sat on Valley Wind behind me, putting her arms around my waist.

"I figured that was why," I commented.

Now it made sense why Amur wanted to use Valley Wind. I only just now realized it, but not even I would think of leaving her here alone, so we continued riding Valley Wind together. We could travel either north or south, and I decided to go through the southern gate. The outer perimeter of Sagan was about one hundred kilometers long, so that meant that the distance from the western gate to the eastern gate should've been fifty kilometers. If I let Valley Wind go at a normal speed, we'd be there in about fifty minutes. The only unforeseen consequence might be...

"I feel sick... *Urp...*"

Human endurance. It was impossible for someone to ride on a horse going more than sixty kilometers per hour for a long time. Now, if this were a normal car traveling on a well-paved road, that would be one thing. But riding on a horse-shaped golem on uneven terrain? That was quite another. Amur couldn't handle it, and it took her about thirty minutes for her to reach her limit. So, for now, I put her inside the dimension bag with Shiromaru and the others so she

could recover.

Therefore, I arrived at the eastern gate about twenty minutes later than planned. The craftsmen waiting there were surprised by how fast we got there, but they were even more surprised by the amount of wood we brought.

They gave me the certificate of completion for the quest, and I decided to repeat it even though we might be tight on time.

“Please take the route through the north gate next time...” Amur begged. I agreed, thinking it would be more interesting to take a different route than going the same way twice. She clung to me again from behind. Her condition seemed to have improved slightly after resting in the bag, but she still looked quite pale.

“I’ll go slower than I did before, but let me know if you start feeling sick again,” I said.

“Okay.”

“Woof!”

“Squee!”

One person and two followers had responded to me. Shiromaru and Solomon, who had acted as Amur’s pillows inside of the bag, seemed a bit stressed, so I let them out for some exercise.

“All right, let’s go!”

“Yeah!”

“Shiromaru, Solomon. Don’t go too far!”

“Oh! Shiromaru caught a rabbit!” Amur pointed out.

Shiromaru was delighted to be able to run around freely. He chased after a horned rabbit and caught it. Solomon seemed to have found some prey too, but he wasn’t good at finishing the job yet, so he didn’t catch a single thing.

“Squee!”

“Woof!”

“Squee, squee, squee!”

Solomon had snatched away the horned rabbit that Shiromaru had caught, but then Shiromaru protested, as if to say, “It’s your fault for not catching any prey!” and snatched it back. Solomon whined back as if to say, “That’s not fair! I’m mad!”

The cycle of Solomon spotting prey, failing to catch it, and having Shiromaru intervene and successfully catch it instead continued about ten more times.

“Squee, squee!”

At last, Solomon caught something. He was so happy about his success that he proudly flew over and brought it to me. However, there was one thing wrong here.

“Gross!”

“Ewww!”

Amur and I both exclaimed when we saw Solomon’s prey. It was horribly mangled, like it had been hit by a car or something.

Solomon had attempted to catch prey by grabbing them with his mouth and had failed every time. He was likely imitating Shiromaru, who naturally hunted that way since he was a wolf. This method wasn’t ideal for Solomon, however. He realized this too and came up with a conclusion: “If I can’t catch the prey because it’s too fast, I should immobilize it and *then* catch it!”

In order to carry out his plan, Solomon had rammed into his prey to stop it in its tracks and then caught it with his mouth. That method itself wasn’t honestly wrong—if anything, he just underestimated his own strength.

“I’m happy that you were able to catch something, Solomon, but doing it this way will make the meat taste bad.”

“Squee...” Solomon seemed quite shocked to hear that.

The real reason the meat would taste bad was that the horned rabbit Solomon had killed was bleeding out from its eye sockets, mouth, ears, and nose. Not only that, but its eyeballs had popped out, and its internal organs were coming out of its mouth. Its stomach was also ruptured. Eating meat from such a rabbit would not be a pleasant experience.

Once I explained that to Solomon, he seemed very dejected. From then on, he just signaled Shiromaru whenever he found something he wanted to catch. His appetite had won out over his pride. Later on, Rocket actually ate the mangled rabbit that Solomon caught—he enjoyed it just fine.

“Tenma, let’s take a break. My butt hurts,” Amur complained. She was asking me to stop Valley Wind.

“Shiromaru, Solomon, we’re taking a break,” I called out. “Come on back.”

I stopped a short distance away and sat down on top of a nearby rock. Amur sat down next to me. The sun was quite low in the sky, but since there was still more than an hour left before it set, there was no harm in taking a little break. I decided to gut the rabbits Shiromaru and Solomon had killed while we were resting, but since the rabbits were already dead, not very much blood came out. I figured if we ate them while they were still fresh they wouldn’t taste too bad or bloody, so I’d toss them into my magic bag when I was done.

Amur and my followers ate some food we’d bought from the vendor while I worked.

“Don’t eat too much, Amur. I don’t want you to feel sick once we get moving again,” I warned. “We’ll get going in a little bit.”

“All right.” Amur listened to my advice and handed her skewer to Rocket. I wasn’t sure how many skewers she’d already consumed. Shiromaru and Solomon didn’t complain that she’d handed it to Rocket, but they still stared at me with pleading eyes. I didn’t have the heart to say no, so I took out a skewer for each of them. They immediately lined up in front of me—they were only obedient at times like these.

“Well, should we get going now? We’ll probably reach the west gate in about thirty minutes,” I said.

Amur’s complexion had visibly improved since taking our break. She clung onto my back as usual, and I decided to just leave her be unless she did something weird. Since Shiromaru and the others had eaten, they wanted to take a break, and so they were curled up inside of my bag. I looked around before we set off, and I noticed the sky had grown quite dark. I thought it might be a good idea to hurry.

Although Amur protested, I made Valley Wind go a little faster than before. She must've gotten used to riding the horse now because although it seemed like she was in pain, she didn't get sick.

We were just about to reach our destination when I saw a sudden flash in the sky in the distance. It was followed by a loud boom. The noise shook my entire body, and then I noticed a plume of black smoke billowing up towards the sky.

"Amur, I need you to get off—I'm going to go at full speed! Shiromaru, you and Amur follow me!"

"Okay. Come on, Shiromaru!"

"Woof!"

"Solomon, you go on up ahead and scout the area," I ordered. "If there are people that didn't escape in time, help them out! But don't do anything reckless! If you think it's too dangerous, you put your own safety first and get away from there. You're more important to me, Solomon!"

"Squee!"

Amur jumped off of Valley Wind and started equipping her armor. Solomon flew ahead as instructed, and once I saw that Amur was safely off, I urged Valley Wind to travel at full speed. With every step, his hooves carved out clods of earth and grass and flung them behind him.

"Graaar!"

I heard Shiromaru howl from behind me, but I didn't have time to check what was going on. I just kept racing towards the smoke. I had about three minutes to go until I would reach it, and there were several more flashes of light in the meantime. On the way there, I used both Detection and Identify, and I was shocked when I determined the source of the chaos.

Solomon boldly attacked it, but honestly, that was a pretty unwise decision. At the very least, his fighting bought time for the workmen waiting there with the lumber so they could escape into the gate. I didn't smell blood anywhere, so it seemed like no one had been seriously injured.

"Solomon, get back! You're no match for that!" I called out.

“Squee! Squee!”

It was definitely too much for Solomon because he began crying as soon as I showed up. He quickly tried to dive backward towards me, but the enemy wouldn't let that moment of vulnerability go unchecked.

“Squeeeeeee!”

The moment Solomon turned around, the enemy's attack struck him and he fell towards the ground.

“Solomon! Damn it... Heal!”

I somehow managed to save Solomon before he hit the ground and immediately cast recovery magic on him before evacuating him into my bag. He had suffered a pretty bad injury, but once I had him in there, he let me know he was safe.

My relief didn't last long though, because this time, Valley Wind suddenly reared up on its hind legs and threw me off.

“What the...” At almost the exact moment it threw me off, the next flash enveloped Valley Wind. The aftershocks of the blast sent me rolling across the ground, and once I stopped, I looked up to see Valley Wind collapse onto the ground.

“Rocket!”

I rushed over to Valley Wind, but there was no light in its eyes. Both its back legs were broken as well. Just when I thought his outlook was hopeless, the hatch on Valley Wind's back flew open and Rocket crawled out. He looked a little beat-up, but he wasn't in as bad of shape as Solomon had been. I quickly scooped him up and leaped backward just as a bolt of lightning landed on the spot I'd been only seconds earlier. Although I'd managed to dodge the blow, I couldn't escape its aftershocks, so I quickly reached into my bag and tossed out the iron spear that was inside of it.

I wanted to use the spear as a lightning rod, and throwing it had diverted the lightning's path away from me. I used that time to quickly cast recovery magic on Rocket and evacuate him into my bag.

“Damn... First an earth dragon, then a unicorn, and now a bicorn? I can’t tell if I’m really lucky or if I’ve got the worst luck ever!”

The creature that appeared before me was a horse-shaped monster called a bicorn. Its jet-black body was large enough to rival that of Valley Wind’s, and two horns protruded from its head like a deer’s antlers.



I'd tossed the spear over in the bicorn's direction, but since it was so huge, it easily dodged it. Then, as if on cue, it began charging towards me. I took my sword out and aimed for its front legs, but the bicorn easily dodged that attack as well.

Up until now, I'd been able to defeat giant monsters because of my speed, but this bicorn was huge, tough, and fast. This was the first time I'd ever faced a monster of its caliber. Not only that, but since it could use Lightning magic, I had to always be running around to dodge its attacks. I'd never really thought about it when using it myself, but I suddenly realized that there was no type of magic more dangerous when wielded by an enemy. Sometimes, the bicorn would attack with its body or horns enveloped in lightning, so I had to be on guard to avoid getting electrocuted. So far I hadn't been attacked directly, but I was slowly taking damage from the magic's aftereffects. Meanwhile, my slash attacks weren't inflicting much damage upon the bicorn's body. Its skin was tough, and each time I attacked it, lightning would envelop its body, instantly raising its defense. If I wasn't careful, I would *definitely* get electrocuted.

"Owww!"

Something else I learned when it attacked me was that its horns were as sharp as a knife's edge. My skin split open from just a mere graze, and electricity burned the open wound. I had several welts on my arm thanks to those attacks. I couldn't sit around and just let myself get attacked though—instead, I aimed for the cuts I'd already made on the bicorn's body and kept attacking those spots to deepen them.

Less than ten minutes had passed since my ordeal against the bicorn had begun, but I already felt exhausted. I continued to fight while taking the brunt of the lightning's aftershocks, but I had no idea it would be this tiring.

We slashed at each other without any one side having the decisive upper hand. Just as I considered launching a high-powered magical attack and turning a blind eye towards any damage I'd do to my surroundings, a brown mass suddenly appeared and charged straight towards the bicorn's side.

"Gotcha!"

"Grrraar!"

The mass was Amur and Shiromaru, covered in mud. For some reason, both of them seemed to be in a rotten mood and they threw themselves at the bicorn, ignoring the lightning. Amur rode on Shiromaru's back, thrusting her spear at the bicorn in perfect timing with Shiromaru's body blows. Amur, dressed as a tiger riding on the back of a wolf, looked like the embodiment of a beast princess.

"Gyurooo!" the bicorn cried out.

"Eat this!"

While the bicorn was distracted by Amur, I cast aside my sword and pulled out a halberd from my bag. I swung it around and aimed for the bicorn's head. The blade narrowly missed its target, but I did succeed in slicing off one of its horns at the base.

Lightning arched through the air, and the cloak of electricity surrounding the bicorn's body disappeared.

"Let's finish it!"

I dropped the halberd, pulled my new great spear from my bag, and stabbed the wound on the bicorn's neck.

"Gyuro! Gyurororo! Gyubo!"

The spear cut through the wound, its trachea, its jugular, and sliced through its mane. For a moment, the bicorn opened its mouth to bite me, but when the spear had severed its jugular, it stopped moving. The beast growled, spat up blood, and then collapsed. It twitched slightly after falling to the ground, but it wouldn't be too long before it stopped moving completely.

"Amur, Shiromaru, you save— Oof!"

The moment I turned around to thank them for saving me, Shiromaru tackled me and I tumbled to the ground.

"What are you— Whoa! Stop that!"

Shiromaru started licking my face all over before I could complain further. For some reason, the inside of his mouth was filled with dirt, so I now had a muddy, slimy mess all over my face. The rough granules of his tongue scratched my skin

until my cheeks began to bleed slightly. However, Shiromaru looked very satisfied when he saw my muddy face.

I was just about to get seriously angry with him when his body suddenly lifted high into the air. Confused, he flailed his limbs, but he was unable to escape.

“That’s enough, Rocket. You can let him go.”

Rocket had crawled out of my bag and restrained Shiromaru. The slime spat him out and then transformed part of his body into a whip. It then seemed like Rocket began to...lecture him?

Rocket’s lectures were quite strict. Every time Shiromaru started to talk back, Rocket would crack his whip against the ground to silence him. Seeing a huge wolf hang his head with his tail between his legs in front of a tiny slime was pretty strange. Well, I guess it *was* actually an everyday occurrence in my life...

“Whiiiiine...” After Shiromaru had been released from Rocket’s lecture, he came over to me. He made a pathetic noise and rolled over onto his back, showing me his belly. I’d never seen him look so pitiful, and honestly, I was pretty taken aback.

However, my reaction made Shiromaru and Rocket think that I hadn’t forgiven him, which only made Shiromaru whine even *more* pitifully, so Rocket began to plead for me to forgive him.

“It’s partly your fault that Shiromaru acted like that,” Amur said. According to her, his behavior stemmed from what had happened when I was riding Valley Wind at full speed. Since Valley Wind had been leaving massive amounts of dirt and grass in its wake, Shiromaru and Amur had been attacked by the clods as they’d trailed behind us. Amur had quickly covered her face with the Bandit King armor so she’d been safe, but since Shiromaru had been facing me, he’d struggled for a while since the dirt hit his eyes, nose, and mouth. That was the reason his mouth was still so dirty.

“Oh, I see. Shiromaru, Rocket already gave you a lecture so I’ll forgive you this time, but if this ever happens again, you’ll have to live on nothing but vegetables for a month. And no treats either. You’ll be grounded to the bag for that month too. Understood?” I asked.

“Woof...? Ah-oooh!” At first, Shiromaru didn’t seem to understand, but once it hit him, he truly panicked.

Meanwhile, Solomon had been peeking at us from the bag. He must’ve thought the same punishment might await him too, because he turned pale and began to tremble.

“Hey, you got me dirty too! How are you gonna take responsibility for that?” Amur stuck both arms in the air and demanded I help her too as I used Water magic to rinse off my face and Shiromaru.

“Oh, right. Sorry about that. I’ll make you something yummy later,” I offered.

“No.”

“I’ll clean your armor too.”

“No.”

“Oh, I know! I’ll split half the spoils from the bicorn with you. And we can have horse meat hot pot tonight.”

“Are you playing stupid on purpose?” she asked.

“What are you talking about?”

“There’s only one way to make it up to a girl when you’ve hurt her! You have to ki—”

I cut her off. “Heal! Aqua Heal! Antidote! Cure! There, all done.”

I had cast a bunch of Recovery magic on her before she could say the dreaded word, then did it once more, just in case. Her wounds had just been scratches to begin with and had disappeared with the first round of healing, but one could never be too careful, after all.

“Tch...”

She turned her face away and clicked her tongue at me. Back in my old world, it was said if you scarred a woman, you had to marry her. I wondered how many times I would’ve had to get married at this rate if that were a thing in this world. Bigamy was legal in this kingdom too, but the whole idea seemed weird to me.

Amur was now muttering something under her breath, but I ignored her and went to collect the collapsed Valley Wind. Its whole body was covered in soot, and its back legs were almost completely melted. Major repairs would have to be made no matter what.

After I finished collecting the parts and fragments of Valley Wind's body, the bicorn suddenly rose behind me.

"You've got to be kidding me!!!" I cried out. "Oh. It's just you, Rocket."

I immediately reached for my spear, but I realized it was just Rocket lifting up the bicorn's body. He apologized for startling me but didn't stop what he was doing. I watched for a bit and realized he was gutting the bicorn.

Apparently, the bicorn wasn't completely dead yet because its eyes and mouth were still moving weakly. Rocket had noticed that and decided to gut the bicorn before it affected its quality. Bicorn blood wasn't all that valuable. Its valuable parts were the same as a unicorn's, but a bicorn's characteristic two horns weren't medicinal like unicorns' were. However, they could be used as weapons and were said to be even tougher than mythrils.

After its blood had been drained, Rocket carried the bicorn over to me. It easily went inside my magic bag, which meant it was definitely dead now. And, thanks to Rocket, it was completely blood-free.

We could've just gone home, but since the materials had caught fire, I couldn't just leave them there. I thought it would be rude to just leave, so I used Water magic to make my hand into a fire hose and extinguish the flames.

"Let's go! We have to chase it away!"

Just as I'd put out the fire, a team of five adventurers emerged from the western gate. But since I'd already defeated the bicorn and the fire was now only smoldering, everything had been resolved. On top of that, these adventurers were clearly newbies and wouldn't have stood a chance against the bicorn anyway. They most likely would've been killed instantly.

I called out to the armed craftsmen who were waiting nearby. "I already took care of it. I just need to clean up the burnt mess now."

The boss had just shown up and didn't believe me until I produced the bicorn

from my bag, but after I did that, they finally put away their weapons. The craftsmen were smiling, but the adventurers weren't. Instead, they were practically in tears. They must've been happy because they began to hug one another and weep. When I looked more closely, I realized the five of them were dwarves. Maybe they were related to the craftsmen?

I told the boss that I'd come here to defeat the bicorn and put out the fire, so I'd be heading to the guild to notify them. The boss apologized to me profusely. Just as I thought, the adventurers were relatives of the craftsmen. They were originally going to help move the wood, but unfortunately for them, they'd been dragged along to try and defeat the bicorn instead. I realized they were just trying to get as much help as possible, but it would have had a tragic outcome. They looked even weaker than the craftsmen, after all.

"Tenma!" The moment I entered the guild, Gramps came running over to me. The Dawnswords were behind him, along with Agris and the others. They were all armed.

"I didn't know you'd be here, Gramps."

"I was relaxing in the carriage when I had a bad feeling, so I came to the guild. Was I worried for nothing?"

"I'll fill you in later," I said. "Right now, I have to talk to the guildmaster."

Adventurers had been called to the guild, presumably to expel the bicorn, and looked ready to mobilize at any moment. However, it was pointless since I'd already defeated it. Plus, whenever you defeated a high-ranking monster near a city, you had to notify their guild, so I had to go see the guildmaster regardless.

The guildmaster was in the middle of a meeting with some craftsmen when I came in. At first, the guildmaster didn't realize it was me and tried to shoo me away, but one of the craftsmen spotted me and began panicking.

"Huh? You're done...? No way!"

After that, I told them I'd defeated the bicorn and they all exclaimed loudly with surprise as I took its horns out of my bag as proof. The adventurers reacted to the commotion as well, and before long, the guild was in complete chaos.

"Well, that's that. I gotta go. I'm still not done dismantling the bicorn for

parts. Excuse me,” I said.

“O-Okay. Nice work out there. By the way, about those materials...”

“I don’t have any intention of selling them right now. They’re precious materials, and I’m planning on using all of them.”

The guildmaster was stunned when I said I wouldn’t sell the bicorn. You didn’t come across a monster of that caliber every day, and having bicorn parts in stock would be good publicity for the guild and something to brag about. I’m sure they would pay a pretty penny for the parts too. The guild would gain a reputation for dealing with high-ranking monsters and the adventurer who slew them would get a boatload of cash and the fame and glory to boot.

But that assumed it was an *ordinary* adventurer we were talking about. I was a self-sufficient adventurer, and I couldn’t think of any greater treasure than the bicorn. I could make equipment and medicine from it, and I could eat it too.

Honestly, I was even more excited now than I was when I slew the earth dragon. That monster mostly just produced parts for armor, but the bicorn produced more of a variety this time around, which was exciting.

“Well, should we go home?” I asked Gramps and Amur, then headed back to the carriage. The Dawnswords, Agris, and the others trailed behind me. “I’m sure Jin and the others are tagging along because they want to try that horse meat. What about you, Agris?”

“Hey, is that any way to talk about your old pals?” Jin asked.

“We thought butchering the bicorn would be difficult, so we thought we’d help...” Mennas said.

“I wanna eat horse meat. That’s why I’m coming to help,” Galatt said.

“Same for me. I want to see the bicorn too. Jin, you and Galatt can stay behind. Mennas and I can take care of it,” Leena said.

“Fine by me. Come on, Mennas, Leena,” I said.

Leena was acting like she didn’t need Jin and Galatt at all. I played along and Mennas nodded, and then the two of them stepped away from the others.

Jin and Galatt panicked. “We’re only joking! Please let us come along and help

so we can eat the meat!” they both said and bowed their heads.

Mennas and Leena looked fed up with them. People passing by pointed their fingers and stared at the two men. And ever since that day, a strange rumor began to circulate through Sagan that the Dawnswords were actually an umbrella organization under Tenma.

“I was interested in the meat too... Of course I want to see the bicorn, but it’s not every day you get to taste one too!” Agris said honestly.

He suggested that his followers, the grappler apes, would help us butcher the bicorn. In truth, the apes would probably be more helpful than Jin and the others. I wasn’t sure how good his followers were in a battle, but I knew that Agris’s knowledge would come in handy. He probably knew as much, if not more, about monsters as Gramps did.

“I’d appreciate the help, Agris,” I said. “All right, let’s get going, then. We’ll just cause trouble if we loiter around here. Jin and Galatt, you can come too.”

“Thanks!” they both said.

Honestly, I wondered where the intimidating aura they’d both had when we first met had gone. I guess that just went to show how we were good friends now. Plus, it wasn’t like their reputations had anything to do with me in the first place.

Well, now I had the butchering party ready to go, although two members were kind of unnecessary.

“Butchering the bicorn will be a piece of cake now.”

We borrowed the area in the back of the guild that was available for butchering and began the process. The ones doing the actual butchering were me, Jin, Galatt, and Blanca. Agris gave us instructions, and Gramps used Water and Wind magic to keep our surroundings clean. The girls and the grappler apes carried the cut body parts over to a separate area to sort them.

“I’d never heard of using Recovery magic like that before...” Gramps said.

The method in question was casting it on a corpse. By doing that, the smaller scratches on the bicorn’s body had been completely erased. Even if the bicorn

was dead, applying magic to the body's cells while *they* were still alive activated them and healed the bicorn's wounds. However, casting magic on a giant monster like a bicorn consumed a lot of mana, so it was difficult for the average sorcerer to pull off. Therefore, not many people could do it. Agris was the one who taught me, and Gramps looked visibly disappointed that he had never heard of it.

"Ooh-ooh!"

"Ooh-ahh!"

"Ahh-ahh!"

Some time later, we started to hear cries coming from the grappler apes. Gramps had been doing something with Water magic, and the apes had apparently come to tell me that they'd finished washing the bicorn's organs.

"Thanks. Go ahead and wash your hands and take a break. Oh, and you can have this," I said.

"Ooh-ooh, ahh-ahh!" They squealed in unison when I handed them some meat skewers. The apes bowed their heads and took the skewers before scampering off. Agris sure had trained them well because they were incredibly polite. I stared at them enviously, wishing that certain followers of mine would learn a thing or two from them.

I said as much to Agris, and he replied, "Oh, they're just acting like that because they're in front of you, Tenma." The apes knew that I was the master of Shiromaru, Solomon, and Rocket, and also that I'd defeated an earth dragon and wyvern variant. They wanted to be careful not to anger me. It seemed like they were some pretty sharp apes.

Speaking of the apes, they were currently sitting down with my followers as they ate the meat skewers. Shiromaru and Solomon openly drooled as they stared at the food, but of course they didn't dare take anything from the apes. I took pity on them and gave them—and Rocket—some skewers as well.

Jin came over and handed me various items as I sat with my followers. "Tenma, we're done skinning the bicorn now. Will you hold this? Here's its magic core, and oh, and you can have its penis and balls too. The layer of fat

from beneath its skin is in that bucket over there.”

“We’ve finished sorting out the organs.”

Next, Mennas and the others carried over some buckets, each containing some organs. The apes had cleaned the small and large intestines, and those were in a separate bucket, already prepared to be grilled immediately. It must’ve been a message from them to tell me to cook them first. I nodded and Mennas gave me a satisfied smile, a thumbs-up, and walked away.

Now that it was all done, I checked each item and put them into my magic bag while Jin and the others set about chopping up the meat.

As I watched them, I realized I hadn’t mentioned something important. “Oh, I forgot to mention—make sure to remove the bones cleanly. Don’t worry so much about the smaller ones, but make sure the large ones are intact.”

“What’re you going to use them for?” Gramps asked, speaking for everyone.

“Well, I was thinking of using them to repair Valley Wind. It’s mostly broken, so it’ll need major repairs. I might as well use this opportunity to make some improvements.”

I told Gramps my plans to remodel Valley Wind, and he listened with great interest. Right now, I was thinking of using the bicorn bones and its magic core to strengthen the interior and make it lighter and maybe use dragon scales on the exterior to toughen up the outside.

“That sounds interesting! If only I had the materials, I’d love to make a Valley Wind for myself!”

It would be difficult to make a golem like Valley Wind using random parts that were easily available. Not only that, but Rocket was the one controlling it, so it would be pointless to build an empty vessel.

However, I was going to try and build something with high enough functionality that it could be used without Rocket. I was picturing something like the scorpion golems I’d given to Jeanne and Aura or the ones I had given to the royal family. It might take a bit of time, but Valley Wind was also a valuable member of my family. I was going to do it no matter what it took.

“Tenma, we’re about halfway done with the butchering process. Shall we take a break?” Agris asked.

I turned around and saw that about half the bicorn’s meat had been chopped up into blocks.

“Good idea. It’s almost dinnertime, so let’s grill some up and eat.”

“Finally!” Jin, Galatt, and Amur all said in unison.

Shiromaru and the others didn’t say anything, but I could tell they were overjoyed.

I mainly grilled up the red parts of the meat including the short ribs, spare ribs, and offal. I cooked it all on a grill plate. I really wanted to grill them on a grated grill, but I would’ve had to go outside the city limits or inside the dungeon in order to do that because of the smoke. For the seasonings, I used salt and then marinade made with fish sauce, sugar, and alcohol that I poured over the meat before cooking it.

“Mm-hmm, delicious!” Jin said.

“This grilled to medium rare? It’s perfect!” Galatt said.

“Another helping!” Amur said.

Since those three were eating their meat medium rare, they were going through the meat faster than the others.

Leena noticed. “You three eat on this side,” she said.

If those three sat somewhere else, the rest of us could take our time. She also placed vegetables in front of them to help slow them down further.

“The offal is delicious, but you can’t eat too much of it. Probably because it’s too fatty,” Gramps remarked.

“True,” Agris agreed.

Gramps and Agris chatted while they ate. Not even the sage could keep up with the young folks. Even so, he was able to eat about as much as the average person in the end.

“Hrm, when you bite into the bone it feels like you’re eating meat too. I like

that,” commented Blanca as he chewed on a spare rib.

“That’s right. I think these guys would enjoy the bones more than me, though,” Mennas said.

“True. Here, Shiromaru.” Blanca tossed a bone with meat on it towards Shiromaru, and Mennas gave Solomon the bone he’d been eating from too. Although I’d told them to try to keep the bones, with spare ribs, it was better to grill them up whole and eat them since those bones were thin and difficult to use. Therefore, Shiromaru and Solomon could enjoy them now.

“Ooh-ooh!”

“Ooh-ahh!”

“Ahh-ahh!”

The apes were eating their favorite parts too, but sometimes they shoved the grilled meat into their mouths when it was still too hot. When they did, they’d burn their tongues and scream.

And so, together, we put away several kilograms worth of meat. Bicorn meat really was delicious—lean, but flavorful.

The only problem was that it smelled *too* good. The aroma wafted all the way out into the main part of the guild building, and the workers ended up getting angry at us.

“The food stalls are gonna make a lot of money off those guys today,” I muttered, and everyone agreed. At this rate, we’d be chased out of the guild, so Gramps and I put up a magical barrier around us. It made our area a bit smoky, but the aroma wouldn’t get out now.

Once I was all done grilling, I could use Wind magic to move the scent outside. I just had to make sure that I was careful not to give us carbon monoxide poisoning before then...

I told everyone how important it was to have proper ventilation while using fire. They listened to me and stopped eating for a moment, but then Amur said, “Yummy!” and started gobbling up everyone else’s shares.

Seeing this, Jin and Galatt tried to compete with her by stuffing *their* mouths

full, which ended up starting a savage fight over the meat. In the end, they caused so much of a commotion that the guild workers ordered us to leave. And we weren't even done butchering the bicorn yet...

It was too dark to do it outside right now, so we decided to finish up beyond the city limits tomorrow morning. I made sure none of them could say no either. Since I'd let them eat the bicorn meat, they had to return the favor by finishing up the job. I wouldn't let anyone dine and dash before the butchering was done.

"All right, let's all meet at the southern gate tomorrow morning. And if you don't come, I'll send Shiromaru after you. You won't be able to escape," I said.

"Awoo!" Shiromaru howled menacingly at Jin and the others. Between the Dawnswords and Agris, he knew who was more likely to break a promise.

"We're not gonna try to escape!" Jin and Galatt promised in unison, making everyone burst into laughter. That was a good time to disperse, so we said our goodbyes. Although it wasn't much of a goodbye when half of us were all headed to the same place anyway.

Part Three

“All right. Everyone’s here, so shall we continue where we left off yesterday?”

“Yeah! Let’s do it!” Amy replied enthusiastically.

When we had returned to the apartment yesterday, I had given her some of the meat. Since she’d seemed interested in the bicorn, she came along to finish butchering it with us today.

Amy didn’t have any previous experience with butchering, so I wasn’t really counting on her help, but she was doing her best with the cleanup. According to Gramps, since Amy was my apprentice, it was my job to provide her with these sorts of experiences. Amy’s followers, Rocky and Birdie, had come along as well.

“We’ll now start the butchering process,” I announced. “Just like yesterday, Agris will give general instructions, Gramps will periodically use Wind magic and Water magic to clean the area of debris, and he’ll deal with any idiots who come around too. I’ll be tanning the hide, so Jin, you and the others keep butchering based on Agris’s instructions. Ladies, the odd jobs are yours. First, I’ll need you to make some stoves. I have a bunch of other things I want you to do too, but I can tell you that when the time comes. As for the followers, you’re in charge of keeping away any monsters or other idiots drawn in by the smell. Rocket, you can lead that group.”

And so we continued where we left off the day before. First, we set up the place where Jin and the others would butcher the bicorn. I used magic to harden the earth and then set a wooden plank on top of it. I made two little platforms like this: the first for butchering and the second for tanning the hide.

“Everyone get back, I’m going to disinfect the platforms.”

I burned the platform with Fire magic, then disinfected the plank with boiling water. Finally, I used Cure and Antidote for good measure. Now, we could *really* get down to work.

“Hmm, now to tan the hide. First, I’ll need to remove the leftover fat.”

Although Jin and the others had removed the fat when they had skinned the

bicorn, some still remained on the hide. I used a knife to carefully scrape it off. Once that was finished, I washed the hide and cleaned any dirty spots on its surface. Finally, I was done with the basic preparation. Then...

“Rocket! You’re up.”

Now, it was Rocket’s turn. A skin is turned into leather by using alum, tannin, and the like on skin that’s been salted. I didn’t know where to get alum, though. There was tannin in teas, but I didn’t know how to use it in the tanning process. There was another method of tanning done by chewing the skin, and that method might’ve worked with a small piece, but it would be impossible with something this huge.

I was in a pickle, so I asked for Rocket’s help. Tanning removed protein and fat from the skin to make it softer, so my idea was that Rocket could dissolve the fat I couldn’t remove and soften it in the process. The soap I’d made from Rocket’s bodily fluids had a moisturizing effect on hair and skin, so that gave me the idea to have Rocket do it rather than rely on my vague knowledge of the process.

Rocket absorbed the bicorn’s skin into his body and then returned to Shiromaru and the others. As he bounced away, I wondered if it would’ve been better to ask Master Gantz first, but Rocket looked so confident I decided to leave it up to him.

Now that I was done with that, I went to check on everyone else’s progress. Amy was busy stacking stones to build a stove, and it looked like she was about halfway done. Each of the four girls was building their own stove at the same time. With this many people eating at once, we could never have too many stoves. In fact, four might not even be enough.

It looked like Jin, Galatt, and Blanca were almost done butchering the bicorn. They were the only ones working on it, but since they had the most physical strength out of everyone, they worked just as quickly as yesterday.

Gramps sat in a chair he’d made and used magic when necessary. Since we had a lot of people here today, there wasn’t much for him to do. He looked like the person with the most time on his hands.

At first glance, Rocket and the others seemed like they were just playing

around, but they were actually keeping the rubberneckers I'd mentioned before in line, so they were doing their jobs. Occasionally, people would try to circle around and get closer, but Shiromaru would bark and growl at anyone who got too close.

"Tenma! We'll be done in a bit, so go ahead and prepare the grilled meat!"

The moment Jin yelled that, Shiromaru and the other gluttons all rushed over at once. However, Rocket noticed that there still were people trying to approach us, so he ordered Shiromaru and the others to return to their posts.

I cast a sidelong glance at them and began to place the wire mesh on top of the ovens that Amy and the others had made. I'd bought it on my way home yesterday, along with several extras, with the intention of using them a bunch in the future. The pieces were a little big compared to the size of the stoves, but I didn't think it would be a problem. I went ahead and finished setting it all up and started the fires. I asked Mennas and the others to tend the fires until they were stable, and then I headed over to Shiromaru and the others.

"Rocket, that's enough here. I'll send out golems to replace you all."

I dispatched several golems and made an earthen wall to encircle us with the stoves in the center. The structure had a radius of about fifty meters and was about a meter tall. It would be easy for someone to climb over it, but a golem would knock them out the minute they tried. And even if they somehow made it through the golems, they'd have to get through us next—and we were literally starving beasts.

Actually, it was quite normal for adventurers to erect barriers like this—they were a clear signal to all that anyone crossing the line would be declaring themselves an enemy to us. And since everyone knew that unspoken rule, there was no way they would try to enter.

And so our second barbecuing event began. One group was assigned to each stove: Jin, Galatt, and Blanca, aka the men with the biggest appetites; the four girls; Agris and his followers; and then Gramps, myself, and my followers.

Besides the bicorn, today, I would be grilling up the remaining beef from my bag (not from the white buffalo, but from the cows when I had first met Tida and Luna). I also would be grilling pork (meat from orcs and wild boars) and a

variety of vegetables. Eating just meat would be unbalanced from a nutrition standpoint and we'd get tired of it anyway. Plus, it would be a waste...

"Use salt or that sauce you used yesterday to season it. Cheers!" Jin said.

"Cheers!"

And so the barbecue feast started. However, there was a considerable imbalance in how the portions dwindled. Jin's group was the first to finish its meat, followed by Amur leading the women's group. Mine was third, and Agris's group came in last. However, the vegetables disappeared at an inversely proportional rate with Agris's group eating the fastest, then mine, then Amur's group, with Jin's group coming last.

"I forgot to mention, but you can only eat as much bicorn meat as you're served," I said. "If you still want more meat, go ahead and have the beef or pork."

Jin and Amur started complaining, but they quieted down pretty quick when I said, "You don't need any more meat, then?"

Everyone else casually looked on and then focused on eating the remaining bicorn meat.

They say that people are very quiet when they eat crab, but apparently barbecued meat makes them noisy. So noisy that a crowd of onlookers formed around us and grew so large that the golems couldn't even move. These people seemed to think they could eat if they paid, so the golems had to stop them. Most were adventurers who knew the rules, so they lectured those who were restrained by the golems.

It caused a bit of a commotion, but our barbecue managed to end peacefully and we disbanded. But just like the day before, most of us were just headed back to the same place in a group.

I was about to take my fifth detour, having popped into every general store and weapon shop I saw, but I noticed Gramps was getting sick of it.

"Well, I'm gonna take another detour," I said.

“Again, Tenma? I’ll go on home, then,” Gramps said.

“I’m coming with you,” Amur said.

“So am I!” Amy chimed in.

“Guess we’ll say goodbye here,” the Dawnswords and Blanca said.

It seemed like the Dawnswords and Blanca were headed home too, so only Amur and Amy would come with me this time.

I was after mythrill, and I’d been shopping around for it for a while now. It was a rare commodity, but I needed a lot to repair Valley Wind. I wanted to get at least a ton, but realistically, I’d settle for half that. Valley Wind’s body had been mostly made up of magic iron, and that’s why he’d succumbed to the bicorn’s Lightning magic. This time, I wanted to make him mostly out of mythrill to increase his resistance to magic.

“I still only have less than a hundred kilograms, so I’ve got a long way to go. Maybe I should ask Master Gantz?”

They say there’s no time like the present, so I decided to go visit.

“We’re here!”

We arrived at the master’s workshop. I had expected Amur to come along with me, but I was surprised that Amy had tagged along too. “You could’ve gone on home, you know.”

“Yeah!” Amur said sharply.

“Since we finished earlier than expected, I don’t have anything else to do. I’d be bored if I went home now,” Amy said. “Is it okay if I come with you?”

There was no reason to refuse her and once Amur saw how sad Amy seemed at the prospect of going home, she didn’t say another word.

“Is Master Gantz in?” I asked.

“Tenma! What can I help ya with?”

When we walked into the workshop, the master was writing something on the ground, but he erased it with his foot when he noticed me. I wondered if it

was some kind of top secret plan or something.

“I need some mythril. Do you know where I can get some?”

“I got some. How much do ya need? You’ll have to pay for it, of course,” he said with a grin as he opened a bag and stuck his hand in. It was probably a magic bag where he kept materials.

“Umm, I need about a ton,” I said.

“Are you joking around with me?” After that, he gave me a lecture, but he forgave me once he found out why I needed it. Apparently, as a fellow craftsman, he understood the desire for mythril. I guess everyone had experienced wanting to make something but ultimately coming up short for materials at one time or another.

“Well, I can sell you twenty kilograms,” he told me. “I’ll ask around in the neighborhood, but don’t get your hopes up. You can leave the money on the table.”

The master took some mythril ingots out of his bag, placed them on the table, and left the workshop. Apparently, he was going to ask around right now. Meanwhile, I placed 10,000,000G (market price—500,000G per kilogram for twenty kilograms) and then an additional 2,000,000G on top of that on the table. I still had a ton of savings, so spending this much money wasn’t going to hurt me.

Master Gantz returned about an hour later, casually moved the money to the side of the table, and placed the additional mythril down.

“I’m back, Tenma. I managed to get a hundred kilograms,” he said. “They’ll take market price for it. You wanna pay for it now? I can take it over to them.”

Some of the master’s acquaintances had workshops in inconvenient places or were difficult to deal with, so it was probably best if I let him or his apprentices take care of it. I decided to leave the money with him. He also rejected the extra money I’d put down. He said, “I can’t be the only one making you pay extra.”

I said goodbye to the master and left his workshop. I also saw the craftsmen who were about to finish up their work and go home too. Since we’d come this

far, I decided to do some shopping on my own before going home, so we stopped by a few more stores together.

“Now, what should we have for dinner tonight? We had meat yesterday and today, so maybe I’ll make something vegetable-based.”

Solomon let out a cry of protest, but Shiromaru remained calm. Amy was surprised, but she understood when I told her about yesterday’s incident. However, the one most surprised by Shiromaru’s behavior was Solomon. His comrade, who was always the first one to protest, was the quiet one today. In the end, only Solomon made a fuss, so I went ahead with the plan for tonight’s dinner being mainly vegetables.

After I finished shopping, I went straight home and said goodbye to Amy outside. I gave her some bicorn meat as a present; she’d probably share it with her family for dinner tonight. I asked if it would be tough for her to eat it two days in a row, but she didn’t seem to be particularly concerned.

However, the next day, her family became incredibly concerned when they learned just how much of a delicacy bicorn meat was.

“Rocket, Shiromaru. Deal with any enemies that show up. Solomon, you’re going to help me.”

“Woof!”

“Squee!”

My followers and I were diving on the thirty-second floor of the dungeon today. It had been a long time since we’d gone hunting without any of the others. Gramps had promised to meet with Agris today, and Blanca was visiting Master Gantz. Amur had wanted to come with me, but Blanca had stopped her. Apparently, they had run out of weapons since they’d used them up at the tournament, so Master Gantz was replenishing their supply today.

Solomon and I were collecting items while Rocket and Shiromaru guarded us. Solomon couldn’t fight (or fly around) much down here in the dungeons, so we paired up. I could’ve let Rocket collect things on his own, but then there

wouldn't be anything for Solomon to do, so that was why we had broken up the work that way. Solomon's specific job was to gather the rocks I broke.

We'd been doing this since morning, but I hadn't found much mythril. I'd only found about a kilogram's worth. Normally that would be a lot, but not for my purposes.

"Looks like we're gonna have to go lower," I said. "We didn't get very many special monster materials either."

Whether it was while I was mining or during breaks, very few monsters had the courage to attack Shiromaru head-on. The only exceptions were bug-type monsters who just so happened upon us by accident, and none of those stood a chance against either Rocket or Shiromaru. Either way, we had gathered a fair number of magic cores, so I supposed it hadn't been a complete wash.

"All right! Let's go down a floor and aim for an empty area without anyone else nearby!"

After that, we proceeded down a level, but I wasn't able to find much mythril there either. And the places where I had expected to find some had already been dug up.

"It doesn't seem like I'll find any mythril here, although I did find a bunch of magic iron."

I hadn't even gathered two kilograms worth of mythril, but I *had* amassed fifty kilograms of magic iron. We'd been dungeon diving for more than half the day, so fifty kilograms was a lot. It wouldn't fetch anywhere near as much as mythril at the market, but it was in higher demand than mythril. That was because mythril products were expensive and often difficult for experienced adventurers to even afford, but weapons made of magic iron were sold at prices that would even fit a novice adventurer's budget.

"But since magic iron is so versatile, I'll just keep it in my bag instead of selling it."

I wasn't hard up for cash at the moment, so I thought it would be fine to hold on to things that I didn't need to sell immediately. I had a bunch of magic bags, including the one I received from the gods, and I could just make more if I

needed to.

“I guess we should get back so— Huh?” I was about to get ready to leave when I saw something coming towards us. However, Shiromaru didn’t seem to be wary of it, which I found strange. I used Identify and realized it was someone we all knew.

“Shiromaru, go greet them,” I said, planning to play a little trick on them.

“Woof!” Shiromaru replied and crept towards the person.

He disappeared, and a few minutes later...

“Oof!”

“Gah!”

“Eek!”

“Whoa!”

I heard some familiar screams followed by a voice scolding Shiromaru.

“Tenma, don’t scare us like that! I thought I was gonna have a heart attack!”

The people who came racing towards us were the Dawnswords, of course. Jin, Galatt, and Mennas were all complaining and walking on their own, but Shiromaru was carrying Leena on his back like a piece of luggage.

“What’s wrong with Leena?” I asked. “Shiromaru actually looks guilty for once.”

“Don’t!” The three of them shouted in unison.

“Please don’t ask about it...” Leena agreed tearfully, so I didn’t press any further. I also decided to ignore the fact that Leena was trying to hide the wet spot on her rear end.

I looked away from Leena and asked Jin and Galatt what they were doing here. Mennas took Leena and hid her around the corner as I talked to them. Apparently, they were reviewing floors they’d already cleared before they resumed their dungeon diving. They had just finished and were on their way to the nearest warp point when they’d encountered Shiromaru.

“So what are you doing here? Shiromaru was keeping watch, so you must be

working on something, huh?” Jin seemed confident and since I didn’t have anything to hide I went ahead and told him. “Hmm, that’s rough,” he said.

“I’ll be patient about it,” I told him. “Worst-case scenario, I can use mythrill on the outside and magic iron inside. I can fully remake it later.”

“Yeah, that might be the most realistic option. Wait... How far into this dungeon are you again, Tenma?” It seemed like Galatt had an idea.

“I can get back to the thirty-eighth floor if I use the warp point.”

“Why don’t you go there and try to aim for the forty-second floor then?” he suggested. “Most of those floors are primarily water with little dryland, but the ceilings and walls are pretty much untouched because there isn’t any scaffolding. Since you can fly, that’d be perfect for you.”

If Galatt was right, I might’ve had a better chance at collecting mythrill down there than here. Besides, I was already thinking of heading down that way, so it wouldn’t hurt to go sooner rather than later.

“That’s a good point. Thanks, Galatt.”

For some reason, Galatt looked surprised when I thanked him. I asked why. He said I’d never thanked him before, so it made him feel strange.

It might’ve been a little rude of me, but I was actually surprised that Galatt was helpful this time. It was frankly a little stressful that I couldn’t punish him like I usually did.

“Still, it’s probably too late to go now. It would’ve been fine before, but now that Gramps is here with me, I shouldn’t stay out too late,” I told him. “It’ll take a few days before I can reach the lake.”

“Normally, around here, it takes several weeks to clear one floor. But you can get down there in a few days...” Jin said.

“You probably shouldn’t say that too loudly elsewhere. You might end up making other people lose their confidence, or they might get the wrong idea about you,” Galatt said.

They both looked rather stunned that it would take me just a few days. Actually, I thought I could probably get down there even faster if I were to use

Detection, but I decided to keep that bit to myself for the sake of their mental stability.

“Are you done chatting?” Mennas asked.

“Sorry about that,” Leena apologized.

Just as our conversation ended, the two of them came back. Leena didn’t seem to look any different at first, but upon closer examination, I realized her pants were a different color. But since they both acted like nothing had happened, I pretended I didn’t notice.

We used the warp point just a few dozen meters from where we were and exited the dungeon. I parted ways with Jin and the others at the guild. On the way there, I had asked them for more details about the lake, but they couldn’t tell me much. Apparently, that level was pretty boring to the average adventurer.

They told me that the level with the lake was one of the largest they knew of, but it was basically a straight path all the way to the exit. There wasn’t much dry land on that level, so that made it difficult to fight there. The only positive aspect was that there weren’t any strong water monsters, but even so, there were still some adventurers who became seriously injured or lost their lives there every year because they weren’t being careful.

The lake went down about twenty meters at its deepest point, and there were several types of monsters there, mostly Rank C. Although there weren’t many of them, they would attack you if they smelled blood. If you fell into the lake during battle, it could prove fatal.

Those aquatic monsters were generally about one to two meters long and attacked opponents on land from in the water. Some could even survive out of water for up to an hour, so if you just assumed they’d die on land and let your guard down, the monsters could unleash a powerful counterattack. They weren’t a big deal when you were on land, but they were much harder to defeat in the water.

On top of that, the materials you got from them weren’t worth much and their meat was hard and smelly. For all those reasons, according to the Dawnswords, adventurers didn’t like to linger on that floor.

After I said goodbye to the Dawnswords, I did some research at the guild but didn't find much new information. When I left, it was already dark outside and the taverns were filled with lively patrons.

"Crap!"

I realized I had completely forgotten about Gramps and hurried back home. But by the time I got there, it was already too late—Gramps was mad at me. He said, "If you're going to be late, you need to tell me in advance before you go to the dungeons!"

Blanca, on the other hand, burst into laughter when he saw me getting scolded.

Gramps and the others had been waiting for me so they hadn't eaten dinner yet. They were starving and demanded that I make dinner for them as punishment. I went ahead and cooked them some meatloaf. I also made some for myself and my followers—meaning Shiromaru's vegetable-based diet was immediately abandoned—but it was more important to me that Gramps and the others weren't mad at me. When Shiromaru saw the meatloaf I made for him, he shed tears of joy and savored every morsel.

Two days later, I stood on the floor of the dungeon that had the lake. I'd spent the whole day yesterday clearing floors thirty-nine and forty to get to it. I had rushed through both floors, so I decided I'd backtrack once I was finished with this one.

"This place is huge," I said. "How many soccer fields long do you think it is?"

"Squee?"

Only Solomon was next to me right now. Rocket was inside my bag, sorting the mythril I'd collected. Shiromaru was waiting in there too—dealing with him after exploring a place this wet would've been a huge pain. Since Solomon was the only one of my followers who could fly, he was the only one out. It was a good change of pace for him anyway since there weren't many places he could fly around freely to begin with.

“Let’s look around first.”

There was a path along one side of the wall, but you had to pass through the shallow part of the lake to get there. The water was only knee-deep according to my research, but I had to be careful since that was the area where you were most likely to be attacked by the water-dwelling monsters. Luckily for me, I could just float in the air to move about.

“I’m going to start my work now, so I want you to keep watch,” I told Solomon. “If you think you can defeat an enemy, you’re free to do so, but if the enemies seem very strong or there are a lot of them, you let me know, even if I’m busy working.”

“Squee!” Solomon raised one arm as if to salute me, then started focusing on his surroundings.

I began digging in a place that caught my eye near the entrance, but even after looking in several spots, I was unable to find any mythrils.

“I still think Galatt had a good idea, but I think Solomon’s ultimately going to come out the winner here.”

“Squee?”

Solomon had attacked every aquatic monster that came after me, and he’d defeated twenty in the first hour. He defeated ten monsters called thunderfish that looked like larger snakeheads, three called anglercats that were like a combination of a catfish and a monkfish, and eight monsters called pseudocrocs. The pseudocrocs resembled alligator gars and were said to grow up to three meters in length, but the ones Solomon killed were small-or medium-size at only one to two meters.

I’d heard that the monsters in this lake didn’t taste good, so I was prepared to take their magic cores and throw the rest away. Solomon opposed that idea, however, so I decided to take them all home. You *could* eat snakeheads and alligator gars in my previous world, so maybe these thunderfish and pseudocrocs could be good if you cooked them a certain way, and if anglercat was a combination of a monkfish and catfish, it might be surprisingly tasty. If I was wrong, I could just give up and not eat it.

I was going to remove the mud just in case, but since Solomon had ended up strangling them when he'd killed them, I had to give up.

"Should we move on to the next place? Huh? Wait, this is..."

I was about to leave since I hadn't found any mythril, but just then, I saw something shiny in the shallow part of the water. I picked it up and it turned out to be a ring. And when I used Identify on it, I discovered it was even made of mythril.

"Whoa, talk about lucky! I wonder if there's anything else around here?"

There wasn't anything else made of mythril, but I decided to search the water just in case, and I ended up finding a lot of things. The most common items were weapons like throwing knives and swords, but there were also shields and pieces of armor.

"Even if these items are visible from the surface, everyone else probably left them here because of the monsters swimming around. I'm being more efficient, though."

It was difficult to retrieve the fallen weapons even if they were only a meter down. That was because whenever the thunderfish and pseudocrocs heard people walking around, they got curious and came over to check. I knew they'd attack me the moment I went into the water.

In my case, I had the golems collect the items for me so I wasn't in danger. If I were an ordinary person though, I wouldn't have lasted ten minutes unless I were covered in armor. And even if I were, I still could've been pulled into the depths and drowned.

"I'll keep searching the shallow water. Solomon, let me know if you see something from the air. And stay vigilant."

"Squee!"

The lake's water wasn't that clear so Solomon might not have been able to see to the bottom, but he seemed so enthusiastic that I didn't want to burst his bubble.

After that, I had three golems help retrieve the items from the water. They

cooperated with Solomon to keep the monsters in check while I dug into the walls and ceiling for mythril.

Once again, I didn't find anything, but Solomon continued racking up his spoils. When it was time to pack up, he had a total of fifty kilograms worth of loot. Included in that were five kilograms worth of mythril and twenty kilograms worth of magic iron. The rest were copper, iron, and steel materials. Saying that one-tenth of the haul was mythril sounded good, but some of that was actually mixed material, as the handles and such of some items were made of other metals. It was really less than half that amount. And Solomon and the golems had gotten about three times the amount of loot the rest of us had.

"Pretty good for our first run, I guess. Now our problem is the fish. I guess we'll try to eat them."

At first, I simply grilled them so I could see how they tasted on their own. I decided to try two of each type. I took out the first fish and grilled it with no seasoning while I put a light sprinkling of salt on the second one.

In order of deliciousness, with no salt, the thunderfish was tastiest, followed by the anglercat, and finally the pseudocroc. With salt, it was the anglercat, thunderfish, and then the pseudocroc.

The reason my ranking changed depending on whether I used salt or not was because of the amount of moisture in the anglercat. It didn't have much flavor without it, but once you added salt to the fish, its moisture was drawn out and you could taste the actual meat. All three types tasted better with salt, but pseudocroc had a strong odor and was tough, so it was the least tasty either way.

"Thunderfish is the most normal of the two, although it doesn't really stand out in any way. I think the anglercat tastes most like monkfish. The pseudocroc tastes less like fish and more like meat. It's pretty gamey, so I don't think we'll get much use out of it."

The thunderfish and anglercat definitely had a better flavor than the pseudocroc but weren't as tasty as regular fish. They weren't something I'd go out of my way to eat, basically.

"The main reason the pseudocroc stinks is because of its skin and organs.

Maybe it would taste more like chicken if I just ate the meat?" I wondered out loud. "And I think the anglercat would be fine fried. So would the thunderfish."

After I tried various methods of preparing them, I discovered how to best eat each type of fish. As I'd said, I wouldn't go out of my way to eat them aboveground, but they were fine for a meal inside the dungeon. I'd tell Jin and the others about it later.

"It's called a pseudocroc so I think I can use the skin as a material. Even though it's smelly."

If it weren't for the odor, pseudocroc skin was sturdy enough that I could use it as armor. But since it was water-resistant, I thought it would make a nice bag. Maybe I could start a trend of having alligator bags in this world too?

"Shiromaru and Solomon, you two seem to like the pseudocroc the best, huh?"

"Woof!"

"Squee!"

I guess they liked the texture since it was closer to chicken than fish. Rocket ate the other types of fish while the two of them concentrated on the pseudocroc. None of them seemed to mind the smell.

I had cooked quite a bit as an experiment, but I only wound up using about a quarter of the fish. We had caught a bunch, but there were still plenty of these fish monsters in the lake. They must've been very prolific, or maybe there was a hidden waterway beneath here somewhere.

"I think we're done for the day. Should we set up a bed?"

Normally I'd just use my carriage, but right now, it was sitting outside the apartment. I had to make another place for us to sleep tonight instead. I had a bed inside my magic bag, so it wouldn't take much time to set it up if we used a dead end as per usual. But, unfortunately, there were no dead ends on this level, so we had to go back up a floor.

"Well, now that we have a bed set up, we'll have to figure out how to find the bottom of the lake."

That would be my plan for tomorrow. I went over my options as I sat on the bed. I could search the shallow areas like I'd done today, but there weren't many more of them left. Even if I found the same amount of mythril tomorrow as I had today, it wouldn't be a huge harvest. So, I instead had to come up with a way to explore the depths, which left me stumped.

I thought about just diving, but that wouldn't be efficient since I had to avoid monsters that would attack me. Plus, I didn't want to dive into an unknown area.

"I don't know what to do... Uh-oh, I left the kettle on the fire!"

I was so deep in thought that I forgot I'd left the water boiling. I quickly went to remove the kettle from the stove, and that's when an idea came to me.

"Hmm... That just might work! I'll try it tomorrow."

I lay down, but I couldn't fall asleep right away because I was so excited. Shiromaru and Solomon, on the other hand, were already fast asleep. Their loud snoring sure was irritating.

"Woof!"

"Hm?"

When I woke up, Shiromaru's face was right in front of mine. Apparently, I'd been in a much deeper sleep than I thought. I'd never slept so deeply before in a dungeon or outside, but maybe I'd gotten overtired since I'd had trouble falling asleep the night before.

I was going to try out a new method today. I wanted to hurry up and head for the lake, but Shiromaru and Solomon were both hungry, so I decided to have a quick breakfast first. We still had leftovers, so we ate those and some other things I had in my bag. After taking a bit to digest, we headed back to the lake.

If my idea succeeded, it would open up possibilities for things I could do in the future.

"If I told Namitaro about this strategy, he'd tell me we could make it work no matter what. That reminds me, I still need to make a Namitaro version of my family crest. I need to write a letter to the king about it soon." Since I had only

just remembered that matter after it had slipped my mind, I lost a bit of motivation.

“All right, we’re back at the lake. Shiromaru, Solomon, sorry but there’s nothing for you two to do today.”

Once we’d arrived here, the two of them immediately started warming up, but they froze once they heard what I said. Yesterday, Solomon had gotten to go crazy in here, but on the other hand, Shiromaru had spent the entire day in the bag and I felt bad for him. However, I was going to be exploring the lake’s depths today, so there was nothing for either of them to do.

The two were about to sadly climb back into the bag when I realized that Rocket, whose name I hadn’t called, was staring at me with a puzzled look on his face.

“Rocket, I might need your help, so I’m going to ask you to stay with me.”

Hearing this, Rocket bounced his body as if to say he understood. Shiromaru and Solomon then let out cries of protest. They were so loud that although I couldn’t take them into the depths with me, I told them they could stay outside the bag and do whatever they wanted as long as they didn’t leave this floor. That finally calmed them down.

“All right, time to start. First, I’ll just try the regular way.”

I got an idea yesterday when I had put up a barrier around our campsite. I thought I’d create a barrier around myself and dive into the water. If everything went well, the water wouldn’t be able to enter it. Oxygen would be limited inside of the barrier, of course, but as long as I made it to the shore, I’d be fine. It would be a bit of a hassle, but I wasn’t an aquatic creature, so there was nothing I could do about that.

I went ahead and tried it out, but...

“Doesn’t work... You normally fix barriers to a certain location, but I thought if I made *myself* the location, it’d be okay. I guess not.”

Just like when I used a barrier for defense, I couldn’t move it once I put it out. I could erect a barrier around myself and move around, but if there was some kind of obstacle in the way like a rock, or something else, the barrier would get

snagged on it and I'd get stuck. I messed with it a bit and put up a barrier overhead, like an umbrella. The umbrella-shaped barrier was better for movement than the previous two methods I had tried, but every time I moved, water entered by my feet and submerged my bottom half in water. And, again, if there were large rocks in my path, I'd have to climb over them one by one, which was a pain. However, out of the three methods, this one was the easiest to use. It was my top choice for now, but I still had some complaints about it.

"Well, I'll only be using it for two or three days, so there's no reason to get too worked up about it. I'll take a little break for now."

Since the prospects for using the barrier seemed a little brighter now, I put a pot on the fire to boil some water. I poured the boiling water into a cup and went to take a sip out of it, but the water was hotter than I'd expected—too hot to drink even after I had blown on it a few times.

I spaced out for a while, trying to cool my cup of water down, when an idea suddenly came to me.

"Come to think of it, I've never used a barrier made from Wind magic before!"

When it came to magic barriers, they always had the attribute of whatever type of magic you used to create it. The ones I usually used were either Non-Elemental or Earth magic barriers, so I completely forgot the fact that I could use other types of magic to make them. Each type of barrier had different characteristics depending on its attributes. If it was a Non-Elemental one, the barrier would be transparent. If it had been created with Earth magic, the barrier would've been made of earth or rock.

In addition, a barrier made from Light magic made you difficult to see or even invisible. By the way, that was the kind of barrier that Jeanne and Aura had used to hide themselves in the dungeon. Back then, they had used a magical tool to construct the barrier—it wasn't because they could use magic themselves.

A Wind magic barrier didn't have much defensive power, but it could be controlled so that it kept all scents inside. That was its greatest characteristic, making it the most mundane of all the barriers, so not many adventurers used them. However, those who spent a lot of time in the forest, along with those

who lived in the forest like elves, preferred that kind of barrier over all others. So it wasn't like *nobody* ever used them.

In my case, I had spent a lot of time in the Elder Forest when I was little, and since I was already able to erase my presence and defeat prey from far enough away that my scent couldn't reach my enemies, I didn't feel the need to use them.

"Well, a Wind magic barrier isn't much different from a Non-Elemental barrier, so I should be able to make one after I practice a few times."

Each barrier required a different amount of magical energy to use, but there were almost no differences in the actual activation process. And just as I thought, after practicing a few times, I was able to use a Wind magic barrier the way I wanted. I tested it in waist-deep water, and it was as effective as I had expected. It didn't get my clothes wet, but it couldn't do much about the mud beneath my feet, so my shoes did get muddy.

I went back to shore and searched around in my bag to find some boots I'd bought a long time ago. I changed into those and got back into the lake to resume my hunt for mythril. Knee-and waist-deep water was fine, but even though I had the dome-shaped barrier, I became a little scared once the water reached my chest or was over my head. I stayed in water that was about chin-deep for ten minutes and searched around there at first. Once I got used to it, I moved to a place where I was completely submerged. The inside of the barrier had about a three-meter radius with me in the center, and when it hit an obstacle like a rock, it would change shape to absorb it.

"It's like I'm in a bubble."

For a while, I forgot about my main goal and just enjoyed walking around underwater. I saw a lot of aquatic monsters, and I had expected them to attack me once they saw me, but for some reason, they didn't approach me. If I went near them, they would either pass right by the barrier or they'd bump into it, get surprised, and then turn and flee.

"Maybe their eyesight isn't as good as I thought. They probably think I'm just a light refraction or something."

I couldn't entirely let down my guard, but I probably didn't need to be that

cautious of my surroundings. Just as that thought went through my mind, I accidentally tripped on an anglercat and fell. It seemed like anglercats liked to lie still on the bottom of the lake. This one didn't flee when it came in contact with the barrier. Instead, it simply entered it.

I panicked, but it seemed like the anglercat was more startled than I was since it had been stepped on. Once inside the barrier, it started freaking out and tried to escape. Rocket quickly jumped out of my bag and finished it off. The creature's cause of death was a blow to the head from Rocket's favorite fork.

"I guess that kind of thing can happen too. I need to be careful of where I step," I muttered as I put the anglercat Rocket had killed inside my bag. Rocket extended his feelers out towards me and poked my feet as if to say, "Be careful."

With a heightened sense of vigilance, I started searching the area as I'd originally planned.

I carefully rummaged about in the mud and rocks under my feet. I found more weapons and armor than I had in the shallow water, but unfortunately, there were just as many, apparently human, bones.

"Maybe they slipped, fell into the lake, got pulled down into the depths by a monster, and were eaten."

I said a brief prayer for the fallen adventurers and then continued picking up the scattered weapons and armor. It would be impossible to gather up all the bones, so I had to leave them there. But, if there were any names engraved on the items I found, I planned on reporting them to the guild. I'd have to consult with the guild about what to do with the found items, but normally any relics or items found in a dungeon belonged to the person who found them. Unless the guild had a very good reason, they wouldn't confiscate the items from me.

I continued collecting the items I found, and after about three hours, I had amassed about one hundred kilograms of equipment. Included in the loot were several magic bags, so I had high hopes that I'd come out like a bandit, depending on their contents. Not only that, but I had only explored about twenty percent of the lake—there were still lots of treasures to be found.

I planned on spending seven days dungeon diving this time, so I still had three

and a half days left. At this rate, I thought I'd probably be able to explore the rest of the depths in that time. I realized it would be difficult to get into *all* the nooks and crannies, though.

I thought about it, and I figured I could just go back to the surface and then come down here again. After all, I was the only one who could search the bottom of this lake. I just didn't want Gramps to get mad at me again—I couldn't stay down in the dungeon longer than originally planned without telling him first.

“Guess I'll get started.”

I went back to shore, boiled some water, and decided to take a break while I sifted through the items I found. Shiromaru and Solomon had caught quite a few monsters while I had been at the bottom of the lake, so I decided to chop them up, skewer them, and roast them on the stove. The two of them waited around the stove with drool hanging out of their mouths. I put Rocket in charge of the fire, and he would feed them once the food finished grilling.

As for the loot, I wound up with twenty kilograms of mythril items, but the rest were all made of magic iron and regular iron. The reason I had so much mythril was because I had found several full suits of mythril armor. They probably had belonged to some high-ranking adventurers or wealthy people. It was unfortunate for the victims, but a blessing for me.

I also got two magic bags and one dimension bag. They were all in pretty bad condition, but they didn't seem to be malfunctioning. Since they were security-protected, I was able to open them without any problems.

“Let's see what's in the first one... Hmm, mainly medicine and food. Nothing of high quality. Same goes for the second one.”

There wasn't anything remarkable inside the first magic bag. The second bag was similar, but the value of its contents was a bit higher. The quality of both bags was pretty low though, and they could only hold about thirty to fifty kilograms each.

“Time for the dimension bag... Whoa! For real?!”

The dimension bag's inside was about three square meters, and it was one of

those ordinary types that could be slung over your shoulder. However, inside of it were mythrill ingots and other items including gold ingots, silver ingots, and magic iron ingots. I wondered if the reason the bag looked so plain was to prevent people from thinking there was anything expensive inside it.

“Maybe someone stole it, but that doesn’t matter to me.”

I found it hard to believe an ordinary adventurer would have this many ingots, so I wondered if it might’ve belonged to a merchant. Eventually, I came to the conclusion that there was no way a merchant would’ve come down here, so I thought the bag must’ve been stolen. I’d never seen a quest posted in the guild to search the dungeon for a lost bag, so I figured there wouldn’t be any problem if I kept it.

“I can probably get a fair price for the magic bags if I sell them...”

I’d never bought or sold magic bags before, so I didn’t know exactly how much I’d get for them. But even though they were lower-tier, they were still magic bags, and they were in demand.

“I don’t really need the money though. Maybe I’ll just give them to Amy,” I mused.

A magic bag would be a good place to store Rocky’s and Birdie’s food, so she would probably be thrilled. They were pretty dirty, though. Hopefully she wouldn’t think I gave her something I found in the trash.

I started to feel anxious about it, so I used magic to wash the mud from the bags. Now that the three bags were mostly clean, I packed them in a linen bag I had and put that in my own bag. I would do some minor repairs on them when I had some free time.

“Rocket, after we rest for a bit, let’s go back down again.”

Rocket bounced his body affirmatively. Aboveground, it was probably close to sunset, so considering the time we would need to eat and rest, I wouldn’t be able to spend too much time investigating the depths of the lake. Even so, it would be a waste of time not to look again. So, I decided to revisit the spots I’d gone to today. If I stayed in the shallower areas, I’d be able to come back to shore in no time.

“Looking again, it seems there are a lot of little fish here.”

Up until now, I'd only seen monsters, like anglercats and pseudocrocs, but when I peered in between the rocks and behind them, I found a great deal of small fish. Well, if there were large aquatic monsters down here, it was only natural that there were other creatures for them to feed on. But since this was a dungeon, that thought hadn't crossed my mind until I saw them.

“Hey, there's a lot of shrimp here! Whoa!” I spotted a bunch of small shrimp moving in the mud at my feet. There was the occasional large shrimp too, so I quickly changed my focus and began catching them for food.

I found two types of shrimp: the first was freshwater shrimp that were about three to five centimeters in size, and the other was shrimp with pincers like a scampi or langoustine. The second type was about ten to twenty centimeters long. Their pincers were about half the length of their bodies, so they looked quite large. However, the claws themselves were thin and didn't seem to contain much meat, so I didn't think you'd be able to eat them like you could with crabs.

“I'm worried about all the mud on them, but I bet they'd be delicious if I grilled or fried them.”

I put the shrimp I caught into a separate bag and thought about how I would cook them later. They didn't look much different from your average shrimp, so I had high hopes for the taste.

After about two hours of hunting, I had around three hundred freshwater shrimp, which added up to around five hundred grams, and about a hundred scampi shrimp, which weighed in at about ten kilograms. I'd caught more of the scampi than I expected, but since they varied in size from fifty to two hundred grams each, I'd have to separate them by size when I cooked them.

I went back to the shore and filled a bucket with fresh water to clean the mud off the shrimp. I wanted them to soak for at least half a day to make sure they were clean, so I decided I'd cook the shrimp tomorrow night and just have a simple meal of bread today instead. Shiromaru and Solomon complained, but they calmed down once I gave them the leftover grilled fish from the day before.

“Just like I thought, we got way more loot from the depths than from the shallows.”

The next day, I got ready as soon as I got up and started searching for mythril on the bottom of the lake. Today I was diving alone, and Rocket would supervise Shiromaru and Solomon on the land so they wouldn't overhunt the monsters.

I had to pay closer attention to my surroundings since Rocket wasn't here, but I was properly equipped, so I didn't think I'd get seriously injured unless something bad happened.

“I got a good catch of shrimp today too, but if I don't stop, I won't be able to say anything about overhunting to Shiromaru and Solomon...”

Just like yesterday, the shrimp were everywhere in the mud at my feet. I used a colander to sift through the mud, and the shrimp jumped around energetically inside it. I hadn't eaten yesterday's shrimp yet so I didn't know for sure if I even needed to catch more, but once I started thinking about shrimp tempura and fried shrimp, I just couldn't stop collecting them.

“All right, time to focus on finding some mythril!” I said that in a loud voice to try and make myself forget about the shrimp so I could begin searching for the mythril. But even so, I couldn't help reaching for shrimp whenever I saw a large one.

After that, I continued searching for mythril (and shrimp) until I couldn't focus anymore. I ended up with even more loot than the day before (shrimp included).

“Let's see, there's probably twenty kilograms of mythril out of the one hundred and fifty kilograms of loot I found... Yesterday's haul was so good that it kind of feels like less.”

Under normal circumstances, twenty kilograms of mythril would practically be a fortune to an ordinary person. But since I wasn't hard up for money, and even taking into account everything I had collected so far, I was only halfway to my goal. I began to wonder if this was all there was to it, but I knew if I said that to Jin and the others, they'd give me trouble.

“Well, it’s not like I’m in a hurry. Besides, it’s shrimp time.”

I put sorting through the loot aside and turned my focus to the scampi. I stuck my hand in the bucket and grabbed one. It attacked me with its pincers, but it wasn’t strong enough to hurt me much.

“I’ll try grilling them the traditional way first.”

I lightly sprinkled the shrimp with salt, skewered it, and brought it close to the fire. It gradually turned red and a pleasant aroma began wafting through the air. Even that much made Shiromaru and Solomon drool even more intensely.

“I think it’s ready. The shell doesn’t seem to be too hard, so I think I can just eat it as is.”

I didn’t want any parasites, so I made sure it was thoroughly cooked before I bit into it. I was able to bite right into the shell and chew it without any issue. Although grilling it gave off a nice aroma, the texture wasn’t great. That was just my personal opinion, and I knew people’s tastes differed—that certainly wouldn’t matter to my two gluttons here.

I couldn’t help but be pumped when I realized it tasted fine though. Shrimp had been one of my favorite foods in my previous life, so I was thrilled to be able to taste it again. I also grilled the freshwater shrimp, but they had a weaker taste than the scampi. But since they were small and had thin shells, I could just eat them whole.

“Now time for tempura.”

Tempura was my all-time favorite shrimp dish. Of course I liked fried shrimp too, but those took a lot of effort, so I wasn’t going to try making that right now. Instead, I decided to make kakiage. Since these shrimp had thin shells, they would be perfect for a battered, fried dish like that.

For the batter, I used a mixture of pastry flour, rice flour, and vegetable oil. I didn’t use any eggs in it.

I poured some oil into a pot and heated it up. Then, I peeled the scampi and prepared them. I made sure not to forget to cut off the tip of the tail. I used cold water to make the batter, mixed it all up until roughly combined, and then it was ready.

Once I finished preparing the scampi and making the batter, the oil was the perfect temperature so I threw in the battered scampi.

“Oh man, that’s a nice sound!”

Shiromaru and Solomon were also attracted by the sizzling and the smells, and they anxiously awaited the finished tempura.

“Hmm, I think it’s about done.” I pulled the shrimp out of the pot just as they turned a light brown. The oil was still sizzling on the batter, so once I pulled the ten shrimp out, I waited for them to cool before tasting them.

“Damn delicious!”

The tempura was even better than I thought it’d be. Any mud taste was gone—instead, they had a sweet flavor, and the chewy texture was just delectable. Best of all, the fact that they were freshly battered and fried only made them more delicious.

“Woof!”

“Squee!”

As I was admiring the flavor of the shrimp, I heard whining coming from next to me. I returned to my senses and saw my two followers with drool dripping from their mouths.

I held two large shrimp out in front of me and the two of them charged to eat them. Luckily I was holding the shrimp by their tails so they didn’t bite me, but I did panic for a second.

I ate my second piece of shrimp tempura with salt and it was still delicious. At this point, I wanted to make tempura soup, but since I didn’t have all the ingredients, I had to give up on that idea for now.

Rocket also seemed to like the tempura, so while the three of them ate the shrimp tempura, I started making kakiage with the smaller freshwater shrimp. I lightly washed the shrimp, put dozens of them in a bowl, and then used the leftover tempura batter.

“I don’t have a ladle, so I’ll have to use chopsticks.”

I put the battered shrimp into the oil and used chopsticks to flatten the

clumps, turning the pieces occasionally until they were golden brown.

“I wish I could eat this with udon or rice.”

The shrimp were deep-fried in their shells, so when you bit into them, the flavor spread all throughout your mouth. It was delicious. My three followers obviously liked it too. Now that I’d tasted this, I started getting all sorts of ideas about how else I could eat them, but right now, I decided to focus on mass-producing shrimp tempura and kakiage first. I’d need to have quite a lot to satisfy my appetite. But then, I realized that everyone needed a portion too, so I worked really hard. In the end, I ended up with over two hundred pieces of shrimp tempura and one hundred kakiage. I had worried that the shrimp I’d just caught today would still taste like mud, but I didn’t notice that flavor at all.

We were weak though and only half of my efforts ended up in our stomachs. If we continued, we’d probably eat all of it. I decided to take half of what was left and make tempura onigiri for tomorrow’s snack and save the rest for Gramps. I put the leftovers into my magic bag for safekeeping. As long as you had a magic bag, food stayed as fresh as when you first made it, which was pretty handy. And as long as I could keep it a secret, no one would find out what was inside, which also had its advantages.

“I’ll have to work hard to find more mythril and shrimp tomorrow.”

Since the shrimp were so delicious, I decided to collect a bunch of stones that had fallen nearby and pile them up in the lake’s waters. I was hoping that the pile of stones would become a shrimp habitat or something.

“I’ll take another look tomorrow.”

We headed back upstairs to where we’d camped last night, thinking about making something like a crab basket the next time I came here.

“Just as I thought. The visibility gets worse the deeper you go.”

The next day, I started exploring the depths where I’d left off the previous day, but I was struggling because it was hard to see anything. The dungeon was already dimly lit, and being twenty meters down was basically like being in the dark. Not only that, but every time something moved, the mud at the bottom

got stirred up and made the water murky. Sometimes, I couldn't see beyond my barrier at all. I could see inside of it as long as I shone a weak light at my feet, which let me still find the mythrill, but I had to be careful since there were some monsters that would be attracted to the light. At one point, several monsters bumped into my barrier at once—that gave me quite a fright.

“There's not many shrimp down here, but there *are* a bunch of new faces I haven't seen before.”

As I got deeper, the number of shrimp decreased, but I found more shellfish instead, like oysters stuck to rocks. There were also creatures resembling tadpole shrimp and brine shrimp. I tried to open one of the shellfish, but the flesh inside was so black and smelled so bad that I immediately gave up on the idea of eating it. Maybe it tasted better than it looked, but since this was a dungeon, I thought that it probably wasn't the greatest idea.

The tadpole shrimp and brine shrimp were about ten centimeters in size and had soft shells so they might've been edible, but honestly, they didn't look very appetizing so I didn't catch any. Maybe I would've if I hadn't come across the scampi and freshwater shrimp first.

“There's not many items that have dropped down here, but what I *have* found isn't too bad.”

I was several meters deeper than I had gone yesterday, but there were fewer weapons and armor here. And the ones that I did occasionally find were in pretty good condition since they were covered in mud. They were less damaged than the ones I'd found in the shallow waters.

“Guess I'll go back.”

I floated back to the surface to confirm just where I'd been, then flew through the air to get back to Rocket and the others. Although I'd spent quite a long time diving, I had explored a smaller area than usual and hadn't gone far from where I'd started. As expected, my slow movement speed was due to the poor visibility.

Once I got to shore, I realized that Rocket and the others had defeated different monsters from usual. “Goblins, orcs...and hobgoblins?”

Hobgoblins were a higher class of goblins and were more formidable than regular ones. Physically, they looked like bigger goblins. While regular goblins were around one hundred and twenty centimeters tall, hobgoblins were around one hundred and fifty—about human size. But from Rocket and the others' perspectives, they probably didn't see much difference between the two types.

"The guild buys hobs just like normal gobs, so I guess we'll keep them. But what are they doing here?" I asked Rocket.

He told me that the goblins had come down from the upper floor and started drinking water from the lake. Then, they had spotted my followers and attacked them, and once Rocket and the others had finished them off, the orcs had shown up. Of course they had to defeat the orcs too, and after that, they'd sorted their spoils into a pile of goblins and a pile of orcs to make them easier to deal with later. Rocket seemed to be in the middle of gutting the orcs right now.

"I see. That makes sense they'd come down for water since there's a lake here. The reason they don't live on this floor is probably because there's nothing for them to eat and no shelter, I guess."

There was no cover here to hide in, so adventurers would spot them immediately. It just wasn't safe. Not only that, but the only foods on this floor were aquatic monsters like shrimp and small fish and it would be risky for goblins or orcs to catch them. Even though goblins and orcs had low intelligence, they would understand it wouldn't be a good idea to set up homes here. Who knows how long it took them to reach that conclusion, though.

"All right. Before we eat..."

Just as I was putting the goblins and orcs in my bag, I felt someone creeping up from behind me. I waited until the person was about to pounce and then jumped out of the way.

"Oof!"

In the very spot that I'd just been was now a very familiar adventurer wearing tiger armor. Her arms were spread out wide and she was frozen in place.

"I know the rest of you are there too," I said, pointing in a certain direction. One by one, six figures slunk out from the shadows: Gramps, Blanca, and the

Dawnswords. So all in all, seven people were sneaking around, including Amur.

“See? I knew there’s no way you could sneak up on Tenma,” Gramps remarked.

“Wow, Tenma. You might have a better sense of smell than beastfolk!”

Gramps and Blanca led the group as they walked towards me. I was suspicious that Shiromaru and the others hadn’t reacted, but when I took a closer look, I realized that Shiromaru’s and Solomon’s mouths were dirty. They must’ve been bribed. Gramps probably brought them food, so I’d have to make sure they didn’t eat too much later.

My two followers began trembling, perhaps sensing something bad was in store for them. I ignored them and asked the group what they were doing here. They all simply said they were bored. Since Jin and the others had known my location, they had led the way.

“Wasn’t much trouble since there’s a warp point above this floor,” Jin said.

Still, since Gramps and the others hadn’t been to the floor above this one, they needed to have direct contact with people who had previously accessed that warp point in order to get here.

“So you came here holding hands with Gramps? Didn’t that stand out?”

Most of the people who dungeon-dived used the warp point near the entrance, so there were generally a lot of people there.

“Yeah, but it’s not *that* unusual. The only reason we stood out was because we were holding hands with somebody famous.”

The women hadn’t been fazed, but the men seemed to have been a bit embarrassed by the attention they’d garnered. Jin and Gramps had held hands, along with Galatt and Blanca, and then Leena and Amur. Mennas had been alone. I was sure the older men had been embarrassed to hold hands with one another. It was suspicious for men to hold hands in general. No one would blink twice if girls did it, especially young girls, but some people might laugh if they saw men holding hands.

“It’s boring for you to have all the fun,” complained Amur. Maybe it looked

like I was just playing around down here to her, and that wasn't exactly untrue. She was probably bored being with Gramps and Blanca all day. "Amy misses you too."

They hadn't brought Amy along because we were so deep in the dungeon, but maybe they would've if we were in the upper levels. Maybe sometime she could go to the floor where she could collect caterpillars for Rocky and Birdie and make it simpler for her to get food for them. She would need a bodyguard, of course, but I was sure a member of the Tamers guild would be thrilled to go with her. After all, she was basically the darling of the guild at this point.

"I'll make it up to Amy later somehow," I said. "Anyway, I was just about to eat. Would you guys like to join me?"

Honestly, I didn't even know why I asked because the answer was obvious. They all sat in a circle around me—Shiromaru and Solomon included.

Tonight's menu was an assortment of aquatic monsters and I wanted everyone's opinions on them. Since the Dawnswords had a long history with this dungeon, I especially wanted to know what they thought—perhaps they knew a better way to use these monsters.

"These ones are grilled, and these are fried. They're just seasoned with salt, but if that's not enough for you, I also have some fish sauce."

I had just eaten them with salt when I'd tried them before, but this time, I broke out the fish sauce to see how that fared. I had some spices that would hide the gamey taste, but I figured we should start simple.

"Hm, it doesn't seem like anyone's bothered by the taste," I remarked.

"Yeah, it's not bad," said Jin. "It's not like it smells rotten or anything."

"True. There are definitely gamier monsters in this dungeon," Leena agreed.

"These aren't bad. The kind Jin made before were pretty stinky, so compared to that, this is nothing!" Mennas said.

"Hey, don't use me as a punch line! I kind of agree, though..."

As expected, Jin was terrible at cooking. I didn't really appreciate being compared to him, but at any rate, it seemed like no one minded the taste of

these. Gramps thought it was fine, and Shiromaru and the others happily gobbled up their share and begged for more. Now, for Blanca and Amur...

“What are you two putting on it?” I asked curiously when I saw them shake something from a small jar onto their fried pseudocrocs.

“Oh, this? It’s a seasoning from our hometown,” Blanca said.

“Here,” Amur said and sprinkled some into my hand. I licked it and was surprised to find that it tasted like curry powder.

“This is curry powder!” I exclaimed.

“Back home, we call it ‘kari’ or ‘karee.’”

“It tastes like home cooking to us,” Amur added. “Every family makes a different blend. This is my mom’s.”

Apparently, they often made dishes in their village using this curry powder, but after I questioned them further, it didn’t seem like any of them were like curry rice from my previous world. The closest thing to it was something like curry soup, which was a soup flavored with curry powder. It was usually eaten with bread, not rice.

This curry powder was much better than the one I tried to make before, and although it seemed to be made with many different kinds of spices, it wasn’t that spicy.

“Amur, do you mind if I use a little bit?” I asked.

“Go ahead.”

She nodded and I decided to try out a new recipe I just came up with. Well, it wasn’t so much as *new* as it was an expansion of what I’d made earlier.

“There ya have it! Pseudocroc tempura curry!”

Although I had to use the pseudocroc meat, it was similar to curry-flavored chicken nanban. They obviously wouldn’t know what that was though, so I decided it’d just be easier to say it was tempura.

“Hot, hot! Mmm, delicious!” Amur exclaimed.

“I’ve eaten grilled meat with curry powder sprinkled on it before, but this

fried stuff is great!” Blanca said.

I let them both try it first and they gave me rave reviews. I made another batch and served it to the others. Everyone liked it much better than the plain fried version.

“Now we don’t have to worry about the pseudocroc being gamey at all,” Jin said after trying it, and everyone agreed.

I had a bite as well, and thanks to the spices from the curry powder, I couldn’t detect any odor or gamey flavor from the croc. Now it tasted absolutely delicious. Shiromaru on the other hand didn’t seem to like the spices and preferred it fried plain, but Solomon seemed to like both.

“Well, now that we’re done eating, I’m going to dive in the lake again. What are you all going to do?” I asked.

Amur reacted to my question first and started to say that she’d come with me. Blanca assumed I’d meant regular diving so he tried to stop her, but I showed them the water barrier to explain what I was actually doing.

“The visibility is really poor though, so I can’t have you come with me,” I told Amur.

She immediately pouted and lashed out by turning to Shiromaru and tugging on his cheeks, but he was used to it—he didn’t resist or make a fuss.

“Hrm... I think I could make a barrier like that too. I’m going to try and practice a bit,” Gramps said and immediately started experimenting.

Blanca, Jin, and the others said that they would just take a break and kill time while I was diving, so I decided to ask if they wouldn’t mind sorting through the weapons and armor I’d found at the bottom of the lake. I told them that as their reward, they could have anything they wanted besides equipment made of mythril or other rare metals. They quickly agreed. Well, I knew the only equipment besides the mythril stuff was all rusted or broken, but there *were* a lot of pieces that could be used with a little elbow grease, so I personally didn’t think it was a bad deal.

“I’ll be going now.”

I took the equipment out of my bag and headed towards the lake. Jin and the others froze for a few moments once they saw the mountain of loot, but then quickly started moving again.

Amur went to the edge of the lake and watched Gramps practice. It seemed like she was trying to figure out if she could create a similar barrier.

“I think it was around this area. All right...” I muttered to myself.

I flew over to about where I’d been last time, put the barrier up around myself, and landed in the lake. When I landed, a bit of water rushed up over my ankles, but as usual, the water didn’t rise higher than that and I was able to safely reach the bottom.

Once I reached the lake bed, I immersed myself in my task. The lake’s terrain became more complex the deeper I went, and sometimes, rocks several meters tall would block my path. However, I found lots of weapons and armor around those same rocks, so in a sense it was a hot spot.

“I collected a fair amount... Hmm? What the heck is that?”

A few hours had passed since I’d begun my dive and I was about to scoop up a piece of equipment that had fallen by my feet, but when I looked at it, something felt strange. I took a closer look at it and realized that the piece of armor was greatly warped.

At first, I thought it was a shield, but upon closer examination, it seemed more similar to a piece of armor that would protect one’s head, like a great helm. It was so big that it must’ve been worn by a fairly large adventurer. But what really disturbed me was that both sides of the helm had been dented in, as if something had squeezed it.

“Wonder what got him? If it was a pseudocroc, there’d be teeth marks. They’re not powerful enough to crush anything this bad either.”

After looking around the area a bit more and not finding any other pieces of equipment that had been squashed in a similar manner, I decided to go back to the shore so I could ask everyone their opinions on the matter.

I put the great helm in my bag and was about to return to the surface when the thing that had smushed the helm in the first place suddenly attacked me. It

was a complete surprise attack, but I was able to sense it immediately. Thanks to a combination of coincidences and technicalities, I dodged it.

The first coincidence was that the barrier I was using had the same elasticity as a balloon. Thanks to that, there was a delay between when the enemy attacked me and when the barrier broke.

The second technicality was that even if the wind barrier broke, water wouldn't leak inside. My barrier could change its shape to match that of an invading object, which made it possible to avoid situations where I'd become stuck due to water entering the barrier.

Thirdly, the enemy was slow. I didn't know if it was always slow or if it was just slow on land, but the speed at which its legs attacked me wasn't that great, even considering it was a surprise attack.

However, I must've *really* pissed it off when I sliced off the tip of one of its legs as I evaded it—all of its remaining legs came flying towards me at once.

“The hell is this stupidly huge octopus?!”

The octopus tried to pick me up, but I dodged it and floated towards the surface. It extended its long tentacles to chase after me.

“Damn, you're persistent!”

I burst out of the water, and the octopus used momentum to push its tentacles out of the surface of the water too, but I hacked off one of its tentacles. They packed quite a punch, but they didn't stand a chance against my beloved *kogarasumaru*.

I wanted to finish it off with Lightning magic, but I spotted Gramps and Amur in the shallows less than one hundred meters away from me. They were both underwater, so it would be too risky to use that magic to defeat the octopus as they might've gotten electrocuted too.

Gramps noticed me and the octopus, grabbed Amur by the scruff of her neck, and tried using his flying magic to get out of the water. Unfortunately, one of the octopus's tentacles entangled my leg before Gramps could evacuate.



“Damn it!”

The moment the tentacle wrapped around my leg, I heard a snapping sound. It was followed by a rush of intense pain. The octopus was trying to drag me into the water.

“Did he break my leg?! I’m not gonna let you get away!”

I chopped off the tentacle with *kogarasumaru*, took my great spear out of my bag with my left hand, and stabbed the octopus with it right between the eyes. I drove the spear’s blade all the way into its handle, but the octopus didn’t stop moving.

“Seriously, don’t you know when to give up?!”

Its movements had slowed quite a bit, but it was still wriggling about. I thrust the spear up and down to expand the wound in order to finish it off. Finally, after all that, the octopus’s body changed color from black to white, and it seemed like I’d killed it this time.

“That thing could’ve killed me in a regular fight...”

If the octopus had wrapped itself around both me and the barrier in the first place, it could’ve broken all my bones before I’d even had time to fight back. Even if it hadn’t wrapped itself around me and had somehow pierced the barrier, it could’ve dragged me down to the bottom where it would’ve been difficult for me to fight back. If that had happened, my only choices would’ve been either to use Lightning magic (which would’ve basically blown myself up too) or use my most powerful spell, Tempest—which might’ve destroyed the entire dungeon.

As those thoughts ran through my head, the octopus began to sink back into the water. I grabbed it and stuffed it into my bag before returning to shore where everyone was in a state of shock.

“Are you all right?!” Gramps yelled.

After he had brought Amur to everyone else, he’d tried to fly over to me, but I had managed to defeat the octopus before he got there. He’d waited with Jin and the others until I had come back.

“Well, my leg’s broken, but other than that, I’m fine.”

Hearing that, Gramps silently scooped me up and laid me on a nearby boulder. He rolled up my pant leg and looked at the injured area in shock.

“What do you mean, you’re fine?! Not only do you have a broken leg, but you’ve got severe internal bleeding!”

I looked down and saw that the skin near my broken bone had turned reddish-black. The pain had numbed, but as soon as I looked at my wound, it came rushing back to me vividly. Gramps quickly cast healing magic on me, but I decided to cast another round of Recovery magic on myself. I’d need to take it easy for the rest of the day.

“I had no idea there were octopuses in these waters,” Jin said.

“Yeah, we’re definitely veterans of this dungeon and we’ve never even *heard* rumors about octopuses!” Galatt agreed.

They stared at the octopus I had pulled out of my bag to analyze it, shaking their heads. They looked mystified. If those two had never heard about it, then certainly no other adventurer in Sagan would know anything. The only ones who would’ve ever heard about giant octopuses before were either Gramps or Agris.

Gramps must’ve picked up on my train of thought because he approached the octopus and examined it too.

“I’ve never seen a creature like this. I think it’d probably be classified as a monster, but I’ve never seen nor heard of it before. I certainly know of similar creatures, but none that grow this large,” he said.

So, we concluded that it was highly likely that this was a new species. When I checked later, it seemed that the creature Gramps had spoken of was exactly like the octopuses from my previous world—a weak creature that only grew to be around two to three meters large.

I surreptitiously used Identify on the octopus and it was indeed labeled as a monster. For some reason, however, the “name” section was blank.

“Now, the only problem left is whether this guy is edible or not,” I said.

Everyone besides Gramps looked shocked. I asked why, and according to Jin and the others, they weren't even aware that octopuses were edible. Gramps had traveled all over the world, but Jin and the others had grown up inland and it seemed they weren't familiar with seafood.

"Octopus is delicious. You can grill it or fry it or boil it," I said.

I didn't mention that you could eat it raw because I thought that might be too intense for them. If I lightly boiled it, though, maybe they'd be game.

As I thought up all sorts of foods involving octopus, I did some research to figure out if this particular one was edible. The method was simple. First, I used Identify to find out whether the octopus was poisonous or not, and then I put a piece of it in my mouth to test it. I thought Identify was probably more than enough, but there were many harmful ingredients that weren't poisonous but still made something inedible. For example, the fat in certain fish might not be an issue when eaten in small amounts, but it could still cause symptoms such as diarrhea if consumed in large quantities.

I'd never eaten anything like that before, but I had eaten octopus many times in my previous life, even dried. So, if it tasted the same as I remembered, it shouldn't be a problem. Worst-case scenario, I could use Antidote and Disinfection magic so that even if I ate some, it wouldn't kill me.

I cut off a twenty-centimeter segment of the octopus tentacle that I'd chopped off earlier and froze it using magic. The octopus itself was so large that even this twenty-centimeter piece had a diameter of nearly fifteen centimeters.

Once the octopus was about half frozen, I peeled the skin off the tentacle and sliced it very thinly. The skin was slimy, so I sprinkled it with salt, rinsed off the slime, and then boiled about half of the thin slices. They only took a few seconds. I then cut them into bite-size pieces and put them on a plate. Although these were much bigger than the octopus I remembered being served before, the smell was exactly the same.

I took the remainder of the sliced raw meat and grilled it, only seasoning it with salt. I thought that since it resembled other grilled meats, Jin and the others would have an easier time eating it. It's worth mentioning that once the octopus was done grilling, the skin was also done boiling, but it was so chewy

that I couldn't even bite through it. I decided to just throw it away. Not even Shiromaru and my followers liked the skin, and they all spat it out after chewing it a bit.

"It's done. Hey, why do you look so skeptical?"

I had pulled a table out of my bag and set out the experimental octopus dishes on it. Jin and the others were keeping their distance from me and the food, which was unusual. They were all just staring at me. Amur and Blanca were also hesitating, which was rare for them too. The only ones at the table were Rocket, my other followers, and Gramps.

"Well... Is that edible?" Blanca asked.

"Can't do it. Looks gross," Amur said.

It seemed neither one of them could bring themselves to think of the octopus as something you could eat. It was much too bizarre to them.

"Hey, Tenma says it's okay. Go ahead and try it, Jin," Galatt said.

"Yeah, you're our fearless leader, Jin. So go on and, you know, lead," Mennas said.

"You can do it, Jin!" Leena cheered.

"You're basically treating me like a poison taster!" he protested.

It seemed like Galatt and the others had rather rudely deemed it to be poisonous. That pissed me off a little, so I decided to have Jin take responsibility as their leader.

"Eat it, Jin!"

"Huh? Mmph!"

I sneaked up behind Jin, grabbed him, and stuffed a piece of salt-grilled octopus into his mouth. At first, he was confused, but he then reflexively chewed the octopus a few times and swallowed it.

"The hell do you think you're doing?! Hang on a second, did I just eat the octopus?"

"Yep."

I pointed to the octopus dishes and returned to the table. “Don’t come crying to me when it’s all gone. If you don’t eat it now, there won’t be seconds.”

Having said that, I took a bite of one of the octopus dishes myself. Unlike the skin, the flesh had the perfect amount of chewiness and was overflowing with umami. To be perfectly honest, it was more delicious than any octopus I’d ever had in my previous life. Jin looked like he wanted to say something, but before he could get a word out, I began to devour the octopus so greedily that he just stared at me with his mouth hanging open.

Once Gramps and my followers saw me eating, they quickly followed suit. They seemed to enjoy it just fine. Wait a moment...

“Gramps, were you waiting for me to test it first?” I asked.

“What do you mean? You’re the one who cooked it, so I just thought you should have the first taste, that’s all.” Gramps told me nonchalantly before starting to stuff his face with the octopus. Shiromaru and the others also began gobbling it up. “Mmm, it’s delicious.”

Amur was by my side now. She stuck a fork in a piece of the salt-grilled octopus and tried it. Blanca was next to her too, eating the blanched octopus.

Amur must’ve trusted my judgment because she immediately began eating more. Blanca looked more skeptical and hesitantly chewed the octopus bit by bit, but after realizing it tasted good, he began eating normally.

Now that the two of them were chowing down, the octopus dishes began rapidly shrinking. The Dawnswords’s curiosity won out over their fear, and they each tried a piece of the blanched octopus.

Of course, after that, they asked me to make some more, so I ended up making a pile of bite-size blanched octopus and salt-grilled octopus. I was a bit worried there wouldn’t be any left for me, so I made sure to set some aside for myself while cooking.

“You all were so hesitant to try it and now you can’t get enough of it,” I said.

“Aww, don’t be like that. What kinda weirdo would *want* to try that thing if they’d never seen it before?” Jin protested.

A few hours after our octopus feast, I decided to be on the safe side and not go diving again. Instead, I worked on sorting through the loot. Jin and the others were helping, and although they had already sorted the items out into some initial major categories, the work was slow.

The ladies were in charge of reviewing the smaller items, and Jin was carrying things over to them, but he came over to me once he heard me muttering to myself. It seemed like he wanted to take a little break. Galatt and Blanca were also in charge of carrying items around while Gramps used Water magic to clean the weapons and armor. As for Rocket and the others, they were in the middle of a long afternoon nap.

“First of all, aren’t octopuses ocean creatures?” Jin asked. “I don’t know about Leena, but Galatt, Mennas, and I were born and raised on land, and our main battlefields have been here in the dungeon. We can’t help that we’ve never heard of octopuses.”

I could see what Jin meant, but that also didn’t give him an excuse to have treated my octopus cuisine like it was poisonous. I told him as much and he quickly averted his face and began whistling. I glared at him so intensely that he couldn’t take it anymore and changed subjects.

“Anyway, I can’t believe you found all this. Some of these things look like they’re decades old,” Jin said, showing me a necklace.

According to Gramps, that necklace was of a style that was popular about thirty years ago, but you didn’t see many of them nowadays. Since that style was mainly worn by adventurers, there were no jewels attached, and they were so rusted and beat-up that they probably weren’t worth much. I did find a few that were in fine shape, and once I cleaned them up, I was sure those who were interested in that thing would want them. However, when I asked Jin and the others (especially the girls) if they wanted one as their reward, not one of them said yes.

I instructed them to sort the things they didn’t want by type of metal. I was thinking about consulting with Master Gantz in my free time and asking him to make ingots of anything that could be melted down and used.

“We’ll be heading upstairs soon, Tenma. Are you going to stay here?” Jin

asked me when they were almost done sorting. They'd only come here in the first place to show Gramps, Amur, and Blanca the way to me, so they had only planned to stay a short time.

"Yeah, there are still places left to explore."

Actually, I still had more than half the lake left to explore, but since I'd gotten injured today—and also due to the poor visibility—it had taken much longer than expected. If I didn't get my butt in gear early tomorrow, I wouldn't make my goal.

Well, if I push myself a little more, I think I can find more items more efficiently... But I don't particularly want to do that.

If I wanted to be extra efficient, I could use Detection, but there was a problem if I did that—I'd get a horrible headache.

When I used Detection on something that would return a large number of results, my brain's processing speed couldn't keep up. Since I didn't know where each item was, I'd have to investigate every nook and cranny, which would put a considerable strain on my brain too. If I did this too much, I'd get a headache. It was like if you tried to play a multiplayer game online but your computer's processor speed wasn't up to snuff: it would lag out and freeze. Anyway, there were too many small creatures inside the lake that would get picked up by Detection, and that'd exacerbate the burden on my brain. I'd only attempted it once or twice before and had gotten a migraine.

When I took all that into consideration, it sounded like quite an inconvenient skill to use. But if I just used it for limited purposes, such as narrowing down a search area, searching for something I already sensed was out there, or just doing a general search, it was quite handy.

"I see. Well, good luck!"

The warp point closest to the lake was on the floor above us, so that was where the Dawnswords would go. All of them remembered to take their rewards, and I didn't even know what they had chosen. The only thing I knew was that they had compared knives and swords with each other while sorting and had secretly stowed away the ones they liked. I did know that no one took any accessories or jewelry, however.

“What’ll you do, Gramps?”

“Me? I’ll stay here. I want to practice making barriers, but most of all, I don’t have anything else better to do.”

It seemed like Gramps’s plan was to stay here from the start since he’d brought the carriage along.

“I’m staying too.”

“And if the little lady’s staying, then I will too.”

In the end, Blanca and Amur decided to stay as well. It seemed they’d left the key to the apartment with Amy.

With all of us gone, some bad guys out there might’ve thought this was their chance to check out the apartment. Unfortunately for them, Blanca hadn’t left anything behind there, so it’d be like sneaking into an empty treasure vault. Any invaders would be treated as criminals despite not even having anything to steal. Well, that was *if* they managed to escape—as it seemed like Gramps had installed some anti-theft measures.

After Jin and the Dawnswords left, we thought to go up to a higher floor in order to make camp, but Gramps said that since we were all here now, it might be a good experience to camp by the lake. We went ahead and set up camp in the farthest place away from the lake on this floor, over by the wall. We also decided on the order for lookouts. We would have three shifts, with the first being me (with Rocket, Shiromaru, and Solomon), then Blanca, and then Gramps and Amur. Amur and I had never camped by the water before, so we were given the easiest shifts—meaning first and last. I also had my followers for extra protection while Amur had Gramps, who was very experienced in camping by the water. The reason Blanca had asked Gramps to take a shift with Amur instead of doing it himself was because he’d said that “If she always works with the same person, her knowledge will be biased.”

Amur had said she wanted to pair up with me, but it wasn’t a good idea for the two least experienced to take a shift together. She had given up when the older men explained why, but when it was my shift, she secretly tried to sleep next to me using Shiromaru as a pillow. Blanca and Gramps had to drag her back to the carriage.

By the way, when I was changing places with Blanca, I had a bad feeling about something so I didn't go inside the carriage. I slept behind it instead with Shiromaru and my other followers surrounding me. When Blanca woke Amur up to switch shifts, I finally went into the carriage to sleep. When Amuro woke up though, she complained that she hadn't gotten enough sleep, and Blanca scolded her.

The next day after breakfast, everyone except Amur decided to continue what they'd done the day before. I went looking for mythrill, Gramps practiced his barriers, and Blanca sorted things. As for my followers, Rocket and Solomon were on a stroll and Shiromaru was acting as Amur's body pillow.

Part Four

“Are you going to be more cautious today?”

I decided to resume diving today. I used my experience from yesterday to expand Detection’s range. Although my range was twice as large, it only had a radius of about twenty meters around me, so I set its accuracy to only detect creatures over one meter in size to lessen my mental burden. Truthfully, I would’ve liked it to catch smaller creatures too, but it wasn’t good to put that much stress on my brain. I figured if I set it to one meter or above, it would reduce the danger of another surprise attack, like what had happened with the octopus yesterday.

“Surely if there was another creature that large lurking around, the guild would be aware of it.”

And so I cautiously began walking along the bottom of the lake. From time to time, I found pieces of flattened armor, but I didn’t see any octopuses. When I reached the shallows, I decided to finish up for the morning and return to the others.

“Amur’s still asleep?”

“Do you think we should wake her up?” Gramps asked.

“She’ll wake up on her own once she smells food. Let her sleep in until then, would you?” Blanca asked.

Since he was her guardian, we decided to honor his request. Gramps and I tried to be as quiet as possible. And just as he said, she woke up on her own once I started cooking.

After breakfast, we were all taking a little rest when all of a sudden, we heard a commotion coming from the floor above. We immediately leaped up and grabbed our weapons, readying ourselves. Well, I used Detection so I figured out who it was right away and knew we weren’t in danger, but I decided to keep it a secret from everyone, just in case.

“We’re from the guild! Please don’t attack!”

The footsteps in question belonged to members of the Sagan adventurers guild. There were five of them, and they were all familiar to me—including the guildmaster.

“Sorry we showed up without notice, but we just received some information from the Dawnswords that we’d like to confirm. Is it true that you defeated an unidentified monster you found in this lake?”

Apparently, Jin and the others had gone to the guild this morning to sell off their loot and had told them about the octopus. The guildmaster happened to be out then so they couldn’t come right away, but once the guildmaster had returned, the staff shared what they’d learned and they’d all come here right away. Meanwhile, the Dawnswords had left the city to go on a quest before the guildmaster had returned.

“You mean this guy?” I took the octopus out of my bag and showed it to the guildmaster. It was now missing two tentacles.

“Oh, so this is it! It’s possible this is a new species. Unfortunately, I’m going to have to take some records. I’ll pay you for the information and trouble, of course. Oh, and I might ask you to sell just the body to me. I might need to send it off to the capital.”

The guildmaster took out three gold coins to pay me. I accepted, but I had proposed several stipulations. Namely, I wanted to help with the butchering for the records and to buy any organs they didn’t want. The guildmaster seemed grateful for the offer and immediately accepted my conditions.

After that, the guild workers and I quickly began the official records process for the octopus, followed by the butchering.

“Now that I take another look at it, this octopus really is stupidly huge.”

Its shape was the same as the octopuses I was familiar with but exponentially bigger. First of all, just the head (was that technically part of the torso?) was over three meters across. Its eyeballs were forty centimeters big and each tentacle about ten meters long. The mouth was more than sixty centimeters across.

There were more surprising discoveries as we proceeded to record it, but the

thing that surprised me the most was the part of it that we would call a cephalopod beak in my previous world. The employee who was examining the beak wasn't familiar with it and touched it, splitting his finger open. He didn't even press down on it too hard, but even that was enough to break the skin and create a pretty deep wound. I immediately healed it with magic, but the beak had the same sharpness as a blade made by a master craftsman. It must've been stronger than magic iron at least, because we removed some chewed-up pieces of magic iron armor from its stomach. If this thing had bitten me, it could've taken off one or both of my legs. Octopuses and squids often wrap their tentacles around their prey and pull them in to eat them, so I was lucky.

Afterward, we found a magic core in the octopus's head, so we could officially qualify it as a monster. That meant a report would be sent off to the capital. The department in the capital that managed monsters would investigate further, and if they determined that it was a new species, they would notify the other adventurers guild branches. They bought the torso (including the eyes) for 500,000G, and if they indeed certified it as a new species, the guild would give me an additional 500,000G. The monster department would give me another 500,000G too.

"But I want mythril more than money..."

"Hmm? Oh, you want to exchange for goods instead of money? I can negotiate for you," the guildmaster offered.

I was grateful for the offer. The payment from the Sagan guild would also be made in mythril. Honestly, I wished the guild would sell me all the mythril they had, but since they had contracts with blacksmiths, they wouldn't. They *did* say they would ask the guild in the capital if they had any mythril they could spare, though. The upper limit was a hundred kilograms, so if I wanted more, I would have to make an additional order.

Under normal circumstances, individuals couldn't treat the adventurers guild like a store, but since I'd won the martial arts tournament and defeated the earth dragon, it seemed they were willing to pull some strings for me.

Once the guildmaster and workers were done taking records of the octopus and our statements, they went back to the guild. Not much happened after they

left, but I was able to finish exploring the lake.

In the end, I obtained around 250 kilograms of mythrill from the lake alone, which was more than I had expected. I had found most of the mythrill where the octopus had its nest, actually.

That octopus had taken its prey back to its nest to eat them, but the mythrill armor and weapons it couldn't chew up had been scattered around there as well. I found fifty kilograms in that location alone. Now that I had over five hundred kilograms of mythrill in my possession, I was halfway to my goal. If I made some compromises, I could start work tomorrow.

But I'd come so far that it would almost be a waste to compromise my vision. It would be tough to find as much mythrill in a short amount of time as I had here, but I didn't have any plans to leave Sagan right now. I considered taking my time to gather the rest.

I shared that with Gramps and then we went home. But for some reason, there was a crowd of people outside my apartment. Puzzled, I made my way through the crowd and found my golems holding several men and women upside down and all tied up. There were also several of Sagan's guards present.

I had a very bad feeling about this, but I couldn't get any closer. As I hesitated, Amy and Arie noticed me and came running over to explain what had happened.

Apparently, around noon today, the men and women who were now strung upside down had tried to sneak into my apartment and burglarize it. The golems Gramps had set up caught them, tied them up, and hung them upside down. That had caused a commotion, making the guards rush over, but then the golems had attempted to attack the guards too. Maybe they had thought the guards were more thieves, who knows. At any rate, right now, both sides were standing their ground and glaring at each other.

It was almost dark, so the burglars must have been inverted for about five or six hours now. I was a bit worried about their safety, but Amy said they'd had enough energy to curse about an hour ago, so I was sure they were fine. If you were wondering, Gramps had ordered the golems not to harm Amy and her family, so they hadn't harmed them at all when they tried to approach.

However, if they were to try to do anything to help the burglars, like loosening their ropes, the golems would gently stop them. The golems had been about to drop the burglars, but then they had started cursing at Amy, so she and Arie had decided not to interfere unless absolutely necessary.

“They have a lot of energy, despite the situation. If we let them go, they’ll definitely come back for revenge someday.”

Although it was clear to me they’d come to rob the place, it wasn’t like they had been caught red-handed, so they’d probably get off with a fine or some other kind of light punishment. It didn’t seem like they felt bad about their actions at all either. Well, even if they did come back for revenge, I didn’t think they’d be able to harm us because of the golems, but if they targeted Amy and her family instead, there was no guarantee I’d be able to protect them completely.

That was why I decided to scare them straight instead. I was pretty experienced since I had done it many times to Jin and the others. Besides, I had two other people with me who also specialized in scaring people. And since I could use Recovery magic and had a wide variety of medicine at my disposal too, they wouldn’t die that easily...probably.

I had a brief meeting with Gramps and the others and then spoke to the guards who were facing off against the golems. At first, they were reluctant to go along with my plan, saying it sounded like torture. However, these people *had* come to burglarize me, and I still had my family crest, Marquis Sammons’s, and Duke Sanga’s. Once I showed the guards the crests, they happily turned a blind eye.

I promised to bring the burglars back to the guards as soon as I finished, so the guards went ahead and left.

Now that there was no one to get in my way, it was time to have some fun.

“All right, it’s time for me to torture—er, *punish* them. Gramps and Blanca, you’ll help, right?”

“Of course,” Gramps said.

“Wouldn’t miss it,” Blanca agreed.

The two of them seemed to be annoyed with the burglars' attitudes too, so they readily accepted. Amur didn't seem particularly interested, but at the same time, she didn't want to be the only one who was excluded. After pretending to think about it for a few moments, she also volunteered.

Doing it here would just cause trouble for Amy and her family, so although it was a pain, I decided to take them all the way to the guild and use the sparring room there. However, there would be other adventurers and workers at the guild too, so they would probably intervene if I took things too far—in theory. Whether or not they actually would was another story.

"Amur, you go on ahead and secure the room. We'll take them there in the carriage."

"Got it," Amur replied and ran off to the guild.

Since we were doing something that was technically illegal, we had to get permission from the guildmaster first. People didn't really care much about criminals' human rights in this world though, so I wasn't expecting the guildmaster to turn us down. Still, it was important to obtain his permission first. If he said no, I could just take the burglars down to my secret lair in the dungeon, so it wouldn't be a big deal either way.

"Taking them in the carriage is fine, but why make it easy on them?" Blanca asked.

"I have a good reason for that," I said.

"What are you going to do?" Gramps asked.

I told them my idea. The two of them stared blankly at me for a moment, but then their lips curled up into twin wicked grins at the same time. I thought those evil smiles looked good on them, and I must have had the same kind of look on my face too.

We made our preparations and headed to the guild.

"Hey, look at that."

"What is it?"

“Pfft!”

“How ridiculous!”

Passersby pointed at us while they jeered and laughed. Well, to be more precise, they pointed *behind* us at the carriage (with no curtains) and laughed at the burglars.

The burglars were in the carriage, tied up with rope, gagged, and with wooden boards hanging from their necks. On each board, I had written down their crime and a (completely fabricated) statement from each person. Amy and I had thought up the fake statements. Amy had actually written more merciless ones than I had. She must have had a lot of pent-up resentment towards them.

Shiromaru pulled the carriage through town as everyone around us made fun of the criminals. Even if we released them now, they’d never hear the end of it.

“Guildmaster, we’ll be using the sparring room.”

“Fine with me. I will have to supervise, though. If any of them were tortured to death on my property, the guild’s reputation could be damaged. Someone from the capital would have to come and investigate.”

Amur had told me that ahead of time, but it was still a bit of a letdown that the guildmaster agreed so readily. I suppose it was good to have an accomplice just in case something happened, though.

With that in mind, we unloaded the burglars in the center of the sparring room. Novice adventurers usually received special training here, but no one was using the room today. It had been reserved for private use by the guildmaster.

“It’s better to keep things private if you’re doing something illegal, even if everyone knows about it,” the guildmaster said.

As I tied the burglars to chairs, Gramps and the others began to prepare all sorts of supplies, like large pliers and saws. I wasn’t sure where they got such items, but just showing them to the burglars seemed to be effective. Before, they had been acting defiantly, but now, all the color had drained from their faces. One burglar acted like he wanted to say something, so I took off his gag.

“W-We know the leaders of Shadow Crimson! You won’t get away with this!”

he yelled in a trembling voice.

The other burglars started to settle down a little, but the guildmaster's face grew stern. I thought I'd heard the name "Shadow Crimson" somewhere before—I remembered they were the band of outlaws Jin and the others had told me about in the capital.

"And the fact that you just mentioned their name in front of me means *you* won't get away with this," the guildmaster said.

All of a sudden, it felt like the temperature in the room had dropped. I guess hearing something like that from the guildmaster of a dungeon city packed quite the punch.

"Hey! Are you listening out there?" the guildmaster yelled towards the door. "Bring in the guys from before!"

"Yes, sir!" I heard someone reply, followed by the clamoring of several sets of footsteps.

"I'm sorry, but I had some staff on standby just in case. I didn't think I'd have to stop you, but I had to be prepared regardless."

The guildmaster seemed to have put measures in place so he could make excuses in case something happened. I think he probably planned on pretending to try to stop me if I came close to accidentally killing the burglars, and at the same time, he'd create a situation where it looked like the guild was innocent. At any rate, I knew all along there were several people right outside the door, so I figured something like that must be going on.

We waited for a while, listening to the burglars curse, when we suddenly heard more footsteps running towards us. Then, the door burst open.

"Guildmaster! Is it true you caught the remaining members of Crimson?!" the man in front yelled towards the guildmaster.

I had seen this man several times before at the guild. Behind him were more people, all wearing the same alarmed expressions on their faces. It seemed like these guys were the ones Jin had mentioned—the ones who had fought against the Shadow Crimson previously. The man in front was their leader.

The men exchanged a few words with the guildmaster and then approached the burglars angrily.

“Sorry, but we got to them first.” Before they could reach the burglars, Blanca and I stepped in front of them. Gramps casually circled around behind the men and took out his staff to ward them off.

“Hrm... Sorry about that,” the leader said, backing off.

I was surprised at how quickly he did that, but it seemed like the other members weren’t so accepting of the situation. However, once they realized they were surrounded, they quickly decided to stay calm.

“I have a pretty good idea of your situation, but honestly that’s got nothing to do with me,” I said. “Waltzing in here and sniping our spoils is against the adventurers’ code, don’t you think?”

I was challenging them, and I could tell that all these guys—except for their leader—were so pissed that they were about to burst some blood vessels. The leader knew I was right though, so he kept his cool. It wasn’t like they could do anything, since Gramps was blocking their path from behind.

“However, depending on the conditions, I might be willing to part with them. Or at least give you rights over them,” I offered.

“Huh?” the leader blurted out in a dazed voice.

I couldn’t blame him for having that reaction after such a drastic change in my attitude, but this was exactly how I wanted the situation to go.

“You want to get information out of them, right? Well, I wanna make sure they never try to harm my friends again.”

“What are you trying to say here?” he asked me suspiciously.

I ignored his attitude and continued. “In other words, I think I can help you out. I’m not asking for money, so you’ve got nothing to lose here. If you don’t want to work together, then you’ll just have to wait until I’m done with them. Although they might be silent *corpses* by the time that happens...”

I threatened them a bit to show them I wasn’t lying. After all, I didn’t care about getting information about Shadow Crimson, and in the worst-case

scenario, I'd just take the burglars back to my secret base and finish them off there. In doing so, I might make an enemy of the Sagan adventurers guild (and the guards), but killing a criminal who tried to harm you wasn't a serious offense. I'd probably have to leave town, but that would be it. And since Amy and her family had heard the burglars talking about retaliation, it was very likely it'd be judged as self-defense anyway. On top of that, the guards hadn't arrested them. I had verbally promised I would turn them over, but there wouldn't be any particular penalty if I didn't do it. So, from the beginning, I had thought of these guys as nothing but my property. You know, it really was sad how this world didn't value human lives, especially in the case of criminals.

"No, we'd like to work with you, but it just sounds too good to be true," the man said. "Are you sure there's nothing else?"

Just as I thought, it didn't seem like he'd believe me too easily. But despite whether they believed me or not, they'd have no choice but to go along with me.

We negotiated for a while, and they ended up agreeing.

"Well, don't think too hard about it. We're going to teach them a *really* good lesson to make sure they never think about doing bad things ever again, and while we're doing that, you can get the information you want out of them. Pretty simple, right?"

The newcomers froze for about ten seconds when they heard what I said, but gradually began to understand the situation. I went ahead and got ready, although there wasn't much to do. All I needed was a bucket of water and a cloth with a very pungent-smelling liquid I would use as medicine.

"All right, let's get started."

Once preparations were complete, I decided to start teaching the burglars a lesson. First, I told them that if they expressed sincere remorse for what they'd done, and gave up all the information they had about Shadow Crimson, I'd release them. Each burglar received a "lesson" from one of us for about one minute, and then we would switch. The criminals all had blindfolds and gags on them except during their lessons, so they couldn't talk. However, it would be pointless if they didn't suffer a bit, so when it seemed like they would talk, we

made it too painful for them or we would gag them until time was up. In all, it took about fifteen rounds until the first one was released.

Once one was released, the others quickly followed suit. After we extracted information from them, we learned that the burglars had only name-dropped Shadow Crimson because they thought it would scare me. They didn't even know much about Shadow Crimson at all.

Once they were freed, the burglars all looked relieved, but even the slightest noise startled them and they began to scream in panic. I realized that during our lessons, we forgot to plug their ears—now they were overly sensitive to sounds. Maybe we'd gone too far?

However, putting my remorse aside, the men who had participated in the criminals' education were *really* pissed that they had wasted their time with the fake Shadow Crimson information.

The leader walked up to one of the burglars and whispered something in his ear. Upon hearing it, the color drained from the man's face and he began to panic again, but the leader ignored him and came over to me.

He once again apologized for their rudeness when they first showed up. I accepted his apology, and his men bowed their heads once again. They all then left the sparring room.

"What'd that guy tell him, Tenma?" Gramps asked.

"That's what I'd like to know," Blanca said.

"Me too!" Amur chimed in.

The burglars were acting so scared that they looked like they'd gone mad. Gramps seemed to think it was because of whatever the leader had whispered to them, but he didn't know what the man'd said. Not even Blanca and Amur, who both had supersensitive hearing due to their beastfolk nature, had been able to hear, which made them all really curious.

"He said, 'Not only do you have us to be afraid of, but the *real* Shadow Crimson too. So you better be careful.'"

Even though Shadow Crimson had been defeated, the leaders had escaped, so

it was highly possible they'd already recruited more members without anyone knowing. So, if they caught wind that someone had been arrested and used their name, they'd probably retaliate for being slandered. Not only that, but these people were so bad that they were infamous in this kingdom. It wouldn't be some half-hearted revenge—they'd probably kill these guys and enjoy every bit of it.

So, the burglars had been frightened when they'd heard that. They had already been broken thanks to our "education," so they couldn't mentally bear this invisible threat.

After that, the guildmaster called the guards, and they took the burglars away. The guards who came were the same ones who had tussled with me before, but once they saw the current state of the burglars, they looked shocked. The guildmaster explained they might have the Shadow Crimson after them, and although the guards seemed to be in disbelief, they didn't ask any more questions.

"Well, that settles that. Shall we go home?"

We had done what we came here to do, so we decided to go back to the apartment and explain the situation to Amy and her family. The guildmaster seemed like he wanted to say something, but he had no reason to keep us so he just watched us go.

"It's late and I'm hungry. Should we eat something on the way home?" I asked.

"Yeah, but I don't know any restaurants around here. Can you pick for us, Tenma?" Blanca asked. Gramps and Amur agreed with him.

Honestly, I didn't know much about the restaurants in this area either. I always had Rocket and the others with me, so I mainly bought things from food stalls or cooked for myself.

"I don't know either, so let's just look around."

The three of them were surprised by that, but once I explained about Rocket and the others, they seemed to understand. I guess it was a common issue with Tamers and Agris had discussed something similar with them before.

The restaurant we ended up in wasn't that great anyway, so we probably would've enjoyed eating the salt-grilled meat that Rocket and the others had eaten instead.

"So they were arrested?" Amy asked once we explained what had happened to the burglars. She looked really relieved. I didn't know whether it was because there was no longer a threat to her and her family's lives or just because the arrest had gone smoothly.

As we spoke further, she said there had been many burglaries in the area lately, so perhaps they'd been the ones responsible. I hoped this would stop other breakins from happening again, but I was a little worried. However, I was sure word about this incident would spread, and it would take someone who was either very stupid or very confident in their abilities to attempt another burglary here.

We said goodbye to Amy and walked around the shops looking for mythril for a while, but after stopping at several places, I came up empty-handed.

"Let's go to the dungeon, Tenma," Amur said as she chomped on a meat skewer.

I didn't feel like it though, since we'd just gotten back. I turned her down and she pouted, but didn't seem like she was going to try and go off on her own. Instead, she silently followed behind me.

"Well, if it isn't Tenma!"

Suddenly I heard a voice from behind and saw Master Gantz standing there. An apprentice stood behind him and held some bags, so he must have been out shopping.

"I heard you got a lot of mythril. But how are you planning to remake your horse?" he asked.

"Master, that's top secret information. You know plans are classified information," his apprentice interjected.

"Ah, that's right," Master Gantz replied.

I actually wanted to ask his advice about something. I told him so, and he immediately got excited, grabbed my arm, and dragged me towards his workshop. It all happened so fast that it startled me, but I think it surprised the apprentice even more. After all, Master Gantz just took off sprinting, leaving his apprentice behind. Amur had no trouble keeping up with us though.

I felt bad for the apprentice, so I asked Master Gantz to slow down. He turned and complained to his apprentice even though he was the one at fault, but he must've felt a little guilty because he waited for him anyway.

After that, I put his bags inside of my magic bag and we all took a carriage back to his workshop. Master Gantz was so excited on the way there that he could barely sit still. Since there were other customers in the carriage, I unfortunately couldn't tell him how to make Valley Wind on the way there. They all averted their gazes from him anyway since he was acting like some kind of weirdo—they clearly didn't want to get involved.

"All right, will you tell me now?" Master Gantz had pulled me over to his desk as soon as we had gotten inside his workshop. There were all sorts of documents and ores on his desk, but he violently swept them all to the side.

"First, I'll talk about how I made the now-broken Valley Wind. Basically, I built it by making parts for each joint. I poured molten magic iron into molds, which I then connected by spherical joints. The advantage to doing that is that it was easy to construct and make sturdy. The downside is that it requires a lot of magic iron, which makes it really heavy," I explained.

"It's sturdy, but it broke into pieces when it was struck by the bicorn's lightning, right? So wouldn't it melt before it breaks?"

Master Gantz was right, but that was because I had made it when I was inexperienced. I had melted down magic iron that wasn't pure, so I couldn't completely remove all the air when I had poured it into the mold. So, when it had gotten struck by the bicorn's lightning, the air bubbles had burst and shattered the pieces. That was my theory anyway. When I explained that to the master, he nodded.

"So now I want to try out a new method," I said.

“Oh, before you say anything else, I want you to know that I promise not to tell anyone about it or try it without your permission. I’ll even sign a contract if you want.”

Master Gantz had one of his apprentices bring over a piece of paper. It had my name, the terms of the contract, and even the penalties for breaking it all written down. I refused of course, but the master wouldn’t give in, so I reluctantly signed it. Apparently, it was commonplace for people to come to him for advice about things that had to remain a secret, so he was used to these kinds of situations. The penalty clause stated that “If this contract is broken, the punishment is slavery.” It might’ve been nice to have Master Gantz as my slave, but it would also cause a lot of trouble, so I didn’t want it to come to that.

“So, first, I thought about reinforcing the bones with metal to make them the core. Then, I’ll cover them with armor made of mythril...”

“But if there’s even the slightest gap between the metal core and mythril armor, that could be bad, right?” Master Gantz had immediately identified my problem. If a gap were to form, as he’d said, it could cause distortions or damage whenever it moved too fast.

“If you’re concerned about gaps, why not make it full of gaps? Make the metal around the bone thinner and the armor thicker. That way, the armor will be providing more support than the bone,” he suggested. It reminded me of a plastic model robot. Although they were hollow inside, they could still stand, and you could pose them freely.

“That might be better. In that case, it might be easier to think of the bones not as the core, but as circuits for mana. Plus, it’ll save mythril.”

“Now your plan is becoming clearer. All you’ve got left now is the details.”

After that, Master Gantz and I discussed various things. Since he had come up with the idea, he wanted to be fully involved in the construction. I was grateful for the help, but his apprentices didn’t look crazy about the idea. When I asked them about it later, they explained they had several urgent jobs coming in soon, so they realized that now they would have to pull several all-nighters in a row. I thought they would complain about it, but they seemed interested in the construction and I figured I shouldn’t worry about it too much.

We talked until dusk and made a rough schedule before I left. The work would start in a week, and in the meantime, I'd gather the necessary materials. Master Gantz had planned to start the next day, but his apprentices had desperately begged him to reconsider. They succeeded and he put it off for a week. I also supported the apprentices, saying I needed more time to gather materials anyway, which they deeply appreciated.

It had already been a week since our meeting and I was at the master's workshop again to visit.

I'd been working hard this past week to gather the remaining necessary materials. I had gathered more mythril, like usual, but I had also flown (literally) to the capital to pick it up. As a result, it hadn't been easy, but I had finally secured the two hundred kilograms of mythril I still needed. That was because I had run into a squad of knights in the capital while I had been searching for the mythril, and that'd helped spread the word that I was back in town. That had gotten me summoned to the castle. Luckily, I had been released quickly since the queen had come right away to stop the king, Prince Lyle, Luna, and Ernest from getting carried away. However, until she showed up, they'd been all gung-ho about accompanying me back to Sagan. I had racked my brains trying to figure out how I was going to escape from them. I'd thought that if they followed me back to Sagan, they'd try to make the golem with me. Honestly, they just had no idea how much trouble they caused a person...

Anyway, now that the king and the others had found out about Valley Wind 2.0, I knew they wouldn't shut up about it until I went back to the capital to show it to them after it was finished.

"Let's get started, Tenma."

Master Gantz's voice snapped me back to reality and I pushed the events in the capital out of my mind.

I took all the mythril out of my magic bag and handed it to him. Today, we were going to be melting it all down. Master and his apprentices had made molds for Valley Wind 2.0's parts beforehand. We would first melt down the mythril, pour it into the molds, then once it hardened, we would finish forging it. I also had a bunch of silver to reinforce the mythril with while we forged it.

“You know, I’m really lucky that the master agreed to help me. There’s no way I could’ve strengthened the mythrill without messing up the armor’s shape,” I muttered to myself.

I probably could’ve done it myself if the parts were simpler shapes, but it would’ve been impossible to do alone given how elaborate these molds were. The best I could’ve done was make the surfaces smooth, but that was about it.

“Yeah, you better be grateful! This is the first time I’ve taken on such a big project, but I’ve made tons of armor using the same process. It should be a piece of cake!” Apparently, Master Gantz had heard me. His reply had oozed with confidence. I chuckled and then began to focus on my tasks.

My job was to apply mythrill to the bones that would be Valley Wind’s core. I had to carve grooves into the bones that would strengthen the golem’s frame, and I was supposed to carefully fill those grooves with mythrill. If I failed to do it properly, it could result in many complications, such as the legs not being equally reinforced. That could cause it to suddenly break while running. In order to prevent that, I needed to do several trials before I’d actually go through the process of carving the grooves. I ran tests with sticks of the same size and had Gramps do some final checks. Thanks to all that work, I was currently thoroughly sleep-deprived.

“All right, let’s get started! Everyone stay focused!”

“Yes, sir!”

The apprentices and I all instinctively responded to the master in unison.

Amur watched from the corner of the workshop. Later, she told me, “It looked like you were one of Master Gantz’s apprentices too.”

It was the fourth day of construction on Valley Wind 2.0 and we were about a quarter of the way done. Progress seemed slow, but Master Gantz said, “We’re actually working faster than I expected, considering we’re taking plenty of breaks and refining the mythrill in a special way.” He also mentioned that he thought it would’ve taken us ten days to get to this point.

I guess that was to be expected since the process included getting the

materials ready while also dealing with other tasks like having food, medicine, and any necessary treatment for injuries at the ready.

First, the meals. We had prepared highly nutritious foods that were also easy to eat. I cooked some of them myself, including dishes made with bicorn meat and octopus, and I made some snacks to tide us over between meals during our work too. It was expensive to get ingredients to feed so many people, but the workers were delighted. However, one thing I didn't provide during the day was alcohol, much to the chagrin of the master. I didn't want that to negatively impact anyone's work. So, he made me promise to provide it once work was done for the day instead.

Next up was medicine. I made sure we had plenty of homemade energy drinks. I had used only the best ingredients, which would raise the cost beyond what ordinary people could afford, but since I had sourced the ingredients myself, they were essentially free. The only real cost was my time.

Finally, if anyone got injured, I immediately used magic to treat them. If we needed any other supplies, Blanca and Amur were available to fetch items from around Sagan. Gramps was even poised to fly to another town to buy whatever was necessary.

Thanks to all that support, we had ended up working much faster than the master had anticipated.

Our work progressed and the number of tasks I needed to do increased. I mainly worked on combining the finished exterior and core bones to create parts and adjusted the balance by assembling the finished parts. It was actually quite challenging.

First of all, combining the exterior and bones required my full attention since I had done most of the construction and adjusted them myself. It seemed that the bicorn had been quite healthy and there were no distortions or deformities in its bones, so the only thing I had to do was repair the cracks that had occurred when I fought it. However, adjusting the balance while attaching the outer shell was quite tough.

Not only did I have to make sure the balance was good between the left-right and front-rear pairs, but the balance when Valley Wind was walking with each

leg had to be fine-tuned. Each part was large and heavy, so if Gramps and Blanca weren't available, I had to use Guardian Giganto. That was an incredibly difficult task since I had to be careful not to knock things over while we adjusted the balance. Amur offered to help, but there wasn't really much she could do compared with Gramps and Blanca since she was so much smaller than either of them.

However, the hardest task by far was the leg joints. I had given up on using a similar style of joints on the first Valley Wind. Due to the new model's increased output, thanks to the addition of the bicorn's magic core, there was a risk that the joints would slip or break while it ran.

After I consulted with Gramps and Master Gantz, we came up with a solution. We would join two spheres to serve as each of the joints, which was the result of much trial and error. Although this design was inspired by ball-jointed dolls, that technique didn't exist in this world, so I had to call it my original idea. I used the ball-jointed dolls as a reference, but I barely understood the technique myself. I was just recalling dolls I had seen on TV or in magazines.

It would have been ideal to use some kind of rubberlike material that would stretch and contract like real muscles, but I couldn't find rubber or anything similar with enough strength to support such a huge body. So, we decided to split the joint into two spheres and connect them by tying each part together instead. But if we made the joints too tight, the movement would be jerky. If they were too loose, they could slip out when it moved. Adjusting the joints so they had the perfect amount of tension was incredibly difficult.

However, Master had the most difficult time with this process. Since everything was trial and error, I had to consult with him at every stage, which doubled his own workload. But thanks to his enthusiasm for this brand-new technology, it didn't really cut down on our work speed at all. It was like we had entered "the zone," as they'd say back in my previous world.

After a lot of effort, I managed to finish the first leg with the master's help. We were satisfied with the result, and when I followed the exact same process again, the assembly of the remaining legs went smoothly. However, the first time I saw the new legs, I thought, *This is going to take some getting used to...*

That was understandable since Valley Wind was being rebuilt with all-new technology, but the difference was incredible. The previous Valley Wind had joints made out of sticks inserted into holes like plastic models had, so its movements were kind of stiff and clunky. But Valley Wind 2.0 had a wide, smooth range of motion. Although its range of movement was closer to that of a real horse, in my mind, a horse and Valley Wind were the same thing. I wasn't accustomed to riding real horses though, so I'd have to learn how to ride him all over again.

"I'll just have to worry about that later," I said, putting off the issue and returning to the task at hand. I helped Master with his tasks for a while, but before I knew it, dinnertime had arrived so the day's work had to end.

The apprentices were surprised when we called it a day so early, but Master Gantz said today's work had been more physically and mentally demanding than usual, so he wanted to end early to recharge. I really hoped it wasn't just because he wanted to drink some alcohol...

I finished all four legs over the next four days. Meanwhile, Master Gantz and his apprentices had mostly finished the torso. It had been easier to forge due to its size, but they had spent more time than they'd expected because they'd gotten carried away with the details and Master had insisted upon perfection. By the way, he was particularly fixated on the decorations on the armor under Valley Wind's belly. Those weren't even visible when it stood normally.

They expected to complete the torso within a day or two, so I decided to take that time to make rough adjustments to the leg connections. These adjustments weren't particularly difficult because Master Gantz had already paid special attention to those surfaces when he made the torso. That made the likelihood of problems fairly low.

To be honest, the only reason I did those was because I was bored. I was almost finished with the legs, which only left the torso to be assembled and checked. But since that was up to the master and his apprentices, I had nothing else to do. Now, the only other remaining tasks were the head, neck, reins, saddle, tail, and internal mechanisms, but since the master had taken the lead on production, I had nothing to busy myself with at the moment.

“Tenma! Go ahead and polish the magic cores if you don’t have anything else to do!” Master Gantz yelled at me when he caught me wandering around aimlessly. I then went to a corner of the workshop and began polishing the magic cores.

We were planning on using the original magic cores from Valley Wind as well as those from the bicorn, the octopus, and the wyvern variant. I wanted to use an earth dragon core too, but there was no more room for magic cores, so I decided to save that for another purpose down the line. If I had to put a price tag on Valley Wind 2.0, even the royal family might hesitate to pay that sum. Of course, I had no intention of ever selling it, though.

I spent three hours polishing magic cores, and by then, the torso had smoothly progressed to a good stopping point so we ended our work for the day. I’d probably have to do more work tomorrow afternoon, though.

I was looking forward to it...until it actually came to that time.

“Master, you’re being way too meticulous...”

Once again, Master Gantz was going overboard and kept adjusting the balance of each fine part again and again. As a result, I ended up polishing magic cores again for the entire day. I polished them so much I had worn holes in the cloth.

Part Five

The next day, Master Gantz finally seemed satisfied with his adjustments, so I thought I'd be able to join in on the work. However, he didn't complete his finishing touches until the end of the workday, so once again, I polished the magic cores all day. At this point, the magic cores were so stunningly beautiful they could be mistaken for gems, so I waited for my turn by polishing magic cores that we weren't planning to use at the moment.

"All right, time to get to work!"

I was heading towards the master's workshop the next day when, suddenly, someone called out to me.

"There he is! Tenma, help us!" I was suddenly accosted by Agris and the members of the Tamers guild. They took me inside the adventurers guild, where they usually held their meetings.

"What's going on? I'm really busy right now," I complained with slight annoyance.

Agris quickly caught his breath. "I'm really sorry to bother you, but it's an emergency! The Saqalat brothers are trapped in the dungeon!"

I asked him to explain, and he told me that while they had been exploring a newly discovered section of the twentieth floor, the Saqalat brothers had been attacked by a horde of monsters. They'd tried to run away, but they had ended up being cornered in a dead end.

The only reason the Tamers guild got this information was because one of their followers, a flame tiger, had managed to escape. It had been carrying a piece of parchment containing details about what had happened, a plea for help, and their location.

"What kind of monsters are attacking them?"

"A horde of about thirty goblins, mainly led by hobgoblins."

Four or five hobgoblins wouldn't pose much of a threat to the Saqalat brothers and their followers, but thirty of them was a different story. However,

since the newly discovered part of the dungeon seemed to be a goblin nest, and because they had been ambushed too, it would be difficult for anyone but a skilled party to get out of this one.

“All right, I’ll go right away. I think I should be fine alone, but could you let Gramps and the others know, just in case? And be prepared for the worst-case scenario.”

What I meant by the worst-case scenario, of course, was that the Saqalat brothers had already died. And if that were the case, then the easiest method would be to destroy that new section of the dungeon to completely exterminate all the monsters at once. That meant I might not be able to recover their bodies or belongings. Since Agris and his companion had known the Saqalat brothers for a long time, I would leave handling those matters and informing the family to them. Of course, I could provide details later, but I thought the initial news would be more appropriately delivered by Agris.

“You don’t need us to come with you?”

“Since it was an ambush, it will be easier to move with fewer people,” I told him.

“All right.”

As soon as we were done talking, I was ready to head straight to the dungeon when a tiger with a flowing red mane leaped out of Agris’s bag. It was the Saqalat brothers’ flame tiger, which Agris had been holding on to.



“Are you coming too?”

“Gruff.” The flame tiger seemed to understand me and came closer.

“Tenma, will you take her with you? She must be worried about her masters. Besides, that flame tiger—her name is Frau—should know exactly where they are, and she’s strong enough that she won’t be a burden to you.”

Frau was smaller than Shiromaru, but as she was a tiger, she had a muscular body and a fierce face. Even though she had injuries all over her body, they didn’t seem to be severe. She wouldn’t get in the way, and it made sense to me that she’d been able to escape from the hobgoblins alone.

I put her inside my bag to be with Rocket and the others while I made my way to the dungeon. From there, I immediately proceeded to the warp point closest to the twentieth floor and then took Frau out of my bag to guide us.

We were one floor above our destination and Frau quickly figured out where we were. She headed for the stairs leading below without hesitation. I tried using Detection to locate the brothers, but the structure of the dungeon was too complex to find them.

But as soon as we descended to the twentieth floor, I could feel the tension in the air. It was like all the monsters on the floor were agitated because of the goblins.

The proof of that was that as soon as we entered, several monsters that had dog faces attacked us. They were called kobolds. Kobolds were superior to goblins and other monsters in their class like werewolves, which were larger and stronger. Kobolds were Rank D while werewolves were Rank C. However, they usually moved in small groups and were skilled in making coordinated attacks, so the level of danger fighting against them increased with each additional member.

The kobolds had rusty knives and worn-out swords—probably items that had been discarded or dropped by adventurers. However, Frau quickly took care of them. Her fighting style prioritized speed and striking power. Perhaps it was because they were both tigers, but her attacks reminded me of Blanca’s. But at the same time, Frau seemed to struggle with defense. It occasionally left her

back vulnerable to the kobolds. Although their difference in ranks made it difficult for the kobolds to land any attacks, at least they weren't hobgoblins. If they were, she really would've been in danger.

"Graaar!"

Once we'd taken care of the kobolds, Frau turned towards me as if to say, "Hurry up!" but I paused briefly to summon Shiromaru from the bag.

"The monsters are agitated due to the goblins. Shiromaru, support Frau, and I'll cover the rear."

"Woof!" Shiromaru barked in response and nuzzled his nose against Frau's to greet her.

Frau returned the greeting and dashed forward as if to say, "Seriously, come on!"

I thought she'd probably be fine alone, but I didn't want to put her in danger in case more monsters like the kobolds attacked. Even though I knew we wouldn't lose, we'd waste valuable time if we were attacked by a lot of monsters at once. I had to assume we'd be interrupted, so I planned to move quickly with either me or Shiromaru dealing with the monsters so we could get to the Saqalat brothers as soon as possible.

Frau led the charge for a few minutes until we arrived at the entrance to the new section the Saqalat brothers had discovered. I hadn't been here before, but they had most likely discovered it due to a wall collapsing for some reason. It revealed a hidden corridor.

"Wait, Frau!" I quickly stopped the flame tiger, who was about to rush ahead, so I could take a closer look at the entrance. Frau didn't appreciate being interrupted and bared her fangs at me, but I ignored her and continued examining the entrance.

"This seems like it's not a new section at all. It's more like it was always a goblin nest. Rocket, I'll leave this one to you."

After I examined it for a bit, I decided to leave Rocket to guard the spot. A side passage was hidden right near the entrance, probably constructed for the purpose of ambushing prey. It was cleverly concealed, but there were footprints

faintly visible. When I used Detection, it revealed several goblins. I expanded the range and found dozens of them nearby. But for some reason, it felt strangely difficult, like something was interfering with my radar.

“There they are! Let’s hurry!”

“Graaah!”

I pointed in the direction of the response and Frau leaped towards it. Shiromaru followed suit and dashed after her. I trailed behind them and placed golems near the hidden passageway. None of the goblins were moving at the moment, but positioning the golems there decreased our chances of being attacked from behind or letting the goblins escape. Well, the chances of them escaping with Rocket stationed by the entrance were practically zero, but goblins were really profitable these days. The more chances for recovering them to sell, the better.

I passed several side passages and suddenly emerged into a wide area that was about the size of a soccer field.

“There they are! We made it!”

Towards the back wall, about fifty or sixty goblins had all gathered in a single spot. I used Detection to pinpoint the location of the Saqalat brothers and their remaining follower, a mountain turtle. Besides some goblins, it seemed no one had died.

“Frau, Shiromaru, rampage all you want. I’ll take care of the biggest one though.”

The tiger and wolf both roared and rushed to drive away the goblins clustered in front of the brothers. I drew my sword from my magic bag and advanced towards the huge goblin that had been eyeing us since we’d entered the room.

I used Identify and discovered it was a goblin king, clearly the leader of this group. In general, goblins were considered to be quite dumb creatures, but hobgoblins had significantly more intelligence. Even still, they roughly had the same IQ as elementary school children. And regular goblins were about as smart as preschoolers.

But once you went past hobgoblins, things changed. There were warriors,

magicians, archers, generals, and finally kings and queens. There might've even been goblin emperors, like how Rocket had an emperor form, but there hadn't been any reports as such so far. It was said that beyond the rank of general, those monsters had more intelligence than ordinary human adults. The only higher-ranked monsters here were the hobgoblins and the king. Since the group was in such a confined area, that might be why only one of them had evolved into a king.

After the goblin king ordered the surrounding hobgoblins to intercept Frau and Shiromaru, he turned to face me and drew his weapon. Although the hobgoblins around him were about 160 centimeters tall, he was over two meters tall. Not only that, but since he was very muscular, he was pretty intimidating to face head-on. I guessed its rank was somewhere between B and B+, and he probably had about the same level of strength as the orc king I had defeated a long time ago. His weapon was a greatsword that probably had been used by an adventurer, and although it was rusty and dull, it was heavy enough to pack quite the punch when used as a blunt weapon.

The goblin king had a cocky smirk on his face, thinking that since his weapon was bigger than mine, that meant it was stronger than mine, but his expression quickly turned from confidence to shock. That was because one strike of my sword had sliced his weapon off near the base, and it was now sticking out of the ceiling. The goblin king stared dumbfounded at what was left of the greatsword in his hand, which was now only a few centimeters long.

I wondered if this goblin king had only ever fought against the goblins under his command. It was a wonder he had even evolved into a king. It might've just been a stroke of luck, or maybe he'd hogged all the nutrients for himself to evolve while the other goblins had starved. Either way, it didn't matter. He was now vulnerable, and I decapitated him in an instant.

The lower-ranked goblins never expected their strong leader to be defeated so easily, and they all froze in their tracks despite Shiromaru and Frau charging towards them. Their claws and fangs made quick work of the monsters.

Now that we'd swiftly defeated the king without any casualties, we drove away the rest of the goblins. However, the Saqalat brothers hadn't been quite as fortunate. They had suffered bruises and fractures, but thankfully, none of

their injuries seemed life-threatening. Their follower, the mountain turtle, was the worst off. It had numerous cracks in its large shell, and in some places, the shell was completely shattered, revealing the flesh beneath.

“Thank you, Ten—”

“Aqua Heal!”

“—ma...”

The Saqalat brothers were about to bow, but I cast a healing spell on them first. This spell was only applied to the surface of their skin, so although it didn’t heal their fractures, their cuts and most of their other injuries were likely taken care of. I went to examine the mountain turtle before I examined the brothers any further.

The mountain turtle had expended a great deal of its energy, and since its shell had been struck repeatedly, I guessed it had damage to its internal organs. The damage didn’t seem to be too severe though, so I thought with careful application of healing magic, it would likely make a full recovery.

First, I removed the broken pieces of its shell that were stuck to its flesh and cast Aqua Heal several times, using the exposed areas to target its internal organs. Under normal circumstances, it’d be impossible to completely heal it in one go because of the nature of its injuries. I proceeded cautiously and monitored the turtle’s condition, which took some time. Still, with some extra effort, the turtle seemed to regain its stamina. It even tried to walk, despite its wounds not being fully closed. It wasn’t safe for it to do so yet, of course, so I asked the brothers and Frau to come closer to help me calm it down. That seemed to work.

Now, all that was left to do was to repair its shell, but I wasn’t sure how to go about that. At first, I thought about putting some kind of cast on it, like when human bones broke, but I gave up on that idea because I didn’t know how to make plaster. My next idea was to bake clay onto the shell, but I was too worried about its strength and the risk of infection, so I gave up on that too. However, the brothers then mentioned that mountain turtles could regenerate their shells, so I just applied some oil and attached a waterproof cloth to the shell as a temporary measure.

Just as I was finishing up treating the turtle, Rocket arrived with the golems. Just as I had thought, there had been goblins hidden in the passageways attempting to ambush us from behind, but Rocket and the golems easily took them out. Rocket also reported that he'd collected all the corpses and brought them over, so I transferred them to my magic bag. There had been about forty goblins in the attempted ambush, indicating that the goblin king had possessed some understanding of battle strategy. After Rocket's report, I thoroughly scanned the area using Detection, but I found no surviving goblins. Instead, I discovered a pile of treasure, collected by the goblins, that sat deeper in this section of the dungeon.

"I'm really curious about the treasure, but I need to prioritize treating the brothers first... Wait, Rocket! Where are you going?"

Just as I was about to resume their treatment, I noticed Rocket getting onto Shiromaru's back. It looked like he didn't want to wait to check out the treasure. Behind them, Solomon rode on Frau's back. She didn't look very comfortable with that, but Solomon ignored her. It seemed like Frau didn't dare defy Solomon as he was a dragon and therefore stronger than her, so she quietly followed behind Shiromaru.

"Solomon, get off of Frau. If you want to ride someone, you have to go with Shiromaru."

Shiromaru looked surprised, but he returned to his actual size and obediently let Solomon ride on his back along with Rocket. It seemed like lately, he'd forgotten how big he actually was. Once Frau didn't have Solomon's weight on her back, she returned to the brothers, looking relieved.

Now, the only injuries the brothers had left were fractures. Once I set their bones properly, I thought a healing spell would be enough to finish treating them. I also cast Cure and Resist to prevent infections. They would need to rest for a few days, but otherwise, there should be no lasting effects.

Once I was done, I asked how all this had happened, and they gave me an incredibly simple answer.

"We found a new path that wasn't on the map and decided to explore it, but we ended up being chased by the goblins."

I thought their actions had been quite reckless, but I did have sympathy for them considering they were blacksmiths and adventurers. They had thought there might be undiscovered ore veins in the new area. They were likely to get a lecture from Agris and the others later, so I decided to spare them one from me. In case you were wondering, they were considered to be quite competent blacksmiths, but they didn't make enough money to survive on that.

As adventurers, they were slightly inferior to Ted and Wright. But their work in that area mainly consisted of gathering materials for their own blacksmithing needs. They also got blacksmithing materials from Ted and others at discounted rates or sometimes even for free, so they were quite fortunate compared to their peers.

As the brothers continued telling me their story, Rocket and the others returned from the treasure room. Apparently, they had made various discoveries and they seemed quite satisfied. But they didn't just find treasures—they had found a bunch of bones that seemed to belong to adventurers. We decided to take them along so that they could be properly buried later. The reason this was important was so they wouldn't turn into undead monsters later. It was best to bring remains back to the surface and let the church or a similar authority take care of them. I would just give them to the guild and let them handle it.

I didn't have any conflicts with the church, but there were some followers within it who had *unique* beliefs. There had been a church in Kukuri Village, but in remote villages like mine where hunters and adventurers made up most of the population, indigenous beliefs were valued more highly and the teachings of the church didn't spread much. However, the priest who had been dispatched to Kukuri Village was quite eccentric. Even though he had been a priest, he hadn't seemed particularly interested in spreading the teachings of the church. The truth was the church didn't really have much power in this world. That was because there were genuine gods (whom I'd met myself) who granted blessings and revealed revelations to their followers and even to nonbelievers.

At any rate, now that we had collected the bones, there was no reason to stay here. I *did* want to secure the goblin's nest though, since it seemed like I could

use this room in the future. Unfortunately, there was no warp point that led here directly, so I'd need to set up some kind of other mechanism for easy access. I didn't have time to figure it out now though, so I just sealed up the entrance temporarily.

I headed towards the treasure room and we finished collecting the bones and treasures.

Now that we had done everything we needed to do in the goblin's nest, I decided to go ahead and return to the surface with the brothers. Those two had to consider their followers' injuries and exhaustion levels, so we decided that I'd carry all of them in my dimension bag. Frau and the mountain turtle went into my bag without protest, but the Saqalat brothers had never been inside a dimension bag before, so it took a little time to get them in there.

After they were safely inside the bag, I moved to the entrance of the goblin nest. I was about to plug it up with magic as I'd planned, but then Gramps and Agris showed up. Once they saw me, they looked around and noticed that the brothers were nowhere to be seen.

"Are we too late?" they both asked, and were about to express their condolences, but then I explained that the brothers were both in my bag.

Relief washed over their faces, but only for a moment. When Agris peeked inside the bag to check on the brothers, they were both fast asleep, snoring.

Agris scowled. He was so angry that it looked like he was going to drag them out and lecture them at any second.

"They've gone through a lot today. How about you just let them sleep for now?" Gramps suggested, convincing Agris to lay off.

Agris had backed down for now, but I knew it was only a matter of time before he would lecture them. I couldn't say that I blamed him, because honestly, this was entirely the brothers' fault. I had a feeling they would be getting lectures not just from Agris, but from everyone else involved too.

Gramps and I carefully sealed up the opening to the nest and placed a mark that no one else would notice on it before we went back aboveground. Ted and Wright were waiting there anxiously. I showed them how the Saqalat brothers

were snoozing inside my bag, and it looked like they wanted to say something.

I asked Agris what would happen next, and he asked me to go to the guild for now. He'd already finished notifying the guildmaster about the brothers' situation, and the staff were currently trying to gather more information about what happened. So, if I didn't hurry up and tell them I'd slain the goblins, the guildmaster might decide he needed to inform other adventurers about the situation.

In that case, they'd find out that a new part of the dungeon had been discovered and adventurers would flock to the area. They would most likely plunder all the minerals and materials there that I hadn't had a chance to look for yet.

Well, I thought I had probably brought back the most important items even though I hadn't examined everything yet, so I couldn't be *too* upset if some undiscovered materials were taken. Still, it felt like a waste not to hog the space for myself.

"Despite Valley Wind's construction, I wonder if I should have left Rocket and the golems behind to continue excavating?"

"Don't worry. You belong to the Tamers guild too, Tenma. And since you're the one who rescued the Saqalats, it's only natural for you to go and explain. I can supervise Valley Wind's construction, so don't worry about it. You can go on to the guild!" Gramps said.

I appreciated his sentiment, but I couldn't help but worry anyway. I had a feeling that Gramps had something up his sleeve when it came to Valley Wind. I decided to warn him just in case, but knowing his personality, it was hard to imagine him sitting back and staying quiet when it came to something as intriguing as Valley Wind 2.0.

I was still quite concerned when Gramps and I parted ways after we left the dungeon. Nevertheless, I headed to the adventurers guild with Agris. We saw several adventurers on the way and none of them seemed any more excited than usual, so I guessed that the guildmaster hadn't disclosed the information about the new area yet.

Once we arrived at the guild, a staff member quickly escorted us to the

guildmaster's office. Some adventurers looked at us suspiciously, but as soon as they spotted me, they averted their gazes. They probably thought it had something to do with the octopus, or maybe they thought I'd caused some kind of trouble again. For the first time, I was grateful for my uncanny knack for finding trouble. Well, maybe just a little bit...

After we entered the guildmaster's office, we immediately explained the situation, although, honestly, there wasn't much to explain. I told him that the brothers had discovered a new section of the dungeon, but it had turned out to be a goblin nest. I had gone to rescue them and successfully slew the goblins, including their king. I reported that we had discovered the bodies of adventurers who the goblins had most likely killed. At that point, I suggested that we give their remains to the church, but the guildmaster seemed reluctant to get the church involved. So, he decided to hold a memorial service under the banner of the guild instead, and he'd only delegate some of the proceedings to the priests.

It was none of my business—he could do whatever he wanted. However, he wanted me to attend the memorial. I declined, saying there was no need for me to go, but he insisted since I was the one who had discovered their bodies. He also said that clarifying my affiliation to the guild would serve as a defense against any attempts the church might make to recruit me. In the end, that was the only reason I agreed to participate.

Officially, it might've seemed like I was participating voluntarily, but in reality, I was only doing so because the guildmaster insisted—that meant I was being compensated. But if that information were to be leaked to the public, it would cause quite a commotion, damaging both my reputation and the guild's. So, he would compensate me in the form of a reward for discovering the remains, and we agreed there would be no written contract.

If the guildmaster reneged on his deal after the memorial service, I'd have no evidence. But if that happened, I would leave Sagan and tell several certain noblemen whom I was friendly with (and the royal family) what'd happened. So, no matter how you looked at it, the guildmaster would end up suffering if he didn't follow through. It seemed like he understood such things though, so I felt I could trust him even without a contract.

“Regarding the new area of the dungeon, I will have to announce it. But I’ll give you ten days before I do.”

According to the guild’s rules, the guildmaster was required to make any newly discovered area public; and it couldn’t be kept a secret. However, he was giving me a ten-day grace period, which meant that was how much time I had to monopolize it. I would have to be hasty with the excavation.

“That’s about it. As for the troublemaking Saqalat brothers, they’ll have a lecture waiting for them.”

It sounded like their actions were problematic, even by the guild’s standards, and they would be receiving a personal reprimand from the guildmaster. Adding in Agris’s lecture on top of that and they were in for a hell of a time. If I hadn’t healed their injuries, I might’ve been able to delay the lecture a bit... But I didn’t want anyone to resent me, so I stayed out of it.

“Good for you two. Instead of two hells, you’ll just get one,” I said.

“Even though it’ll be a combined lecture, it’ll be *way* more intense than if it were separate...”

“In that case, it might’ve been better to split it into two sessions...”

The two brothers had been sitting on the floor of the guildmaster’s office this whole time and were only speaking up now.

I left the depressed pair and the guildmaster’s office behind me and rushed over to Master Gantz’s workshop. I had to get there fast, before anyone made any weird modifications to Valley Wind 2.0. With that in mind, I raced through the streets.

The moment I arrived at the workshop, I rushed over to Valley Wind without even saying hello to anyone. It was a good thing I had arrived when I did because Gramps and Master Gantz were trying to attach something to my golem. Various prototypes lay scattered at their feet. Judging from the number of them, it looked quite serious, but thanks to their meticulous nature, I had arrived just in time to stop them. Perhaps if there’d been one fewer prototype, their dreams would’ve already come true.

However, I had successfully thwarted their plans, much to Master Gantz’s and

Gramps's frustrations. I ignored them and took a look at the parts that were about to be installed. I was impressed not only by how many there were but at the quality of them since they'd been prepared in such a short amount of time.

First of all, there were wings that looked like those of a Pegasus. However, there seemed to be no practical use for them other than being purely decorative. According to Master Gantz, they might've slightly amplified Valley Wind 2.0's mana, but if those were attached, that would leave no room for me to ride him.

Next was some kind of tube that looked almost like a cannon that would be placed on his back. There were gun barrels on either side of Valley Wind 2.0's neck, which made it look like a horse version of Guntank. Master Gantz said they could fire out magic spells, but they were still in the prototype phase, and so far, they hadn't been successful even once. The failures were due to insufficient mana and accuracy, which resulted in inadequate range and power. The latest evaluation of their experiments was that it was even less effective than if a child had cast Fireball. They'd thought that perhaps my magical power could be useful when paired with it.

Finally, there was something that looked like a pile bunker getting ready to be attached to the side of Valley Wind 2.0. It seemed to be the most practical of their ideas, but it wouldn't automatically retract when fired, and its range was ridiculously short. The recoil was so intense that I could very well fall off Valley Wind 2.0 while using it. Still, they thought, for some reason, that I could handle it. By the way, a Wind magic circle provided the propulsion necessary for firing it, which was applied to the back of the stake and inside the tube. It would release compressed air upon firing.

"I don't approve of using people as guinea pigs, but this pile bunker looks good."

Both the master and Gramps seemed pleased when they heard me say that. However...

"We don't need the stake, and the tube doesn't have to be so big. Basically, I want a foothold I can stand on while I'm riding."

Once I finished my thought, the master's head drooped with disappointment.

I ignored his reaction and started brainstorming ideas with his apprentices. Structurally, we decided to cover the area underneath the saddle with a tube similar to the pile bunker, which would be about twenty centimeters wide, and then we'd sharpen the tip of the platform to reduce the air resistance. If it went smoothly, it would provide better support than stirrups and make it less likely that I'd lose my balance when I swung a weapon. Initially, we planned to attach the platform with a belt and put the saddle on top.

Gramps weaseled his way into these conversations too, but the only one who didn't participate was Master Gantz. Gramps just seemed like he wanted to participate in the production regardless of what happened.

After that, the master sulked because he hadn't been included. He began making the neck part alone and refused to let anyone help. I was worried that he might install another one of his weird gimmicks, but, from everything I saw, it seemed like he was making it according to our initial plans.

At the end of the day, once our work was finished, I was about to leave when Amur came into the workshop. She wore a sulky pout on her face as she walked right over to me and tried to kick me in the shins. I dodged a few times, but she kept stubbornly aiming for me, which made me feel irritated. I kicked her right back. The tip of my shoe landed a critical hit on Amur's shin, so she toppled to the ground and clutched her leg.

"Are you okay, Am— Ouch!"

I was worried I'd kicked her too hard and went to place a hand on her shoulder, but she suddenly bit my hand! Startled, I pulled it away to see the bite marks around my right pinky. The marks were red, but she hadn't broken the skin, so I guess she'd held back. Still, if she hadn't, she could've easily broken my pinky or even bitten it clean off.

"That wasn't funny, Amur!"

"It's your fault, Tenma."

I yelled at her, but she just turned away in a huff. I had no idea why she was so upset, but her cheeks were puffed out and her tail flicked back and forth across the ground with irritation.

“There you are!” called an angry voice that echoed through the already tense room.

It was Blanca with his hair standing up on its end. His sudden appearance dispelled the grim atmosphere in the workshop. He ignored my look of surprise, silently approached Amur, and promptly bonked her on the head. Even though I hadn’t known the two of them for long, I wondered to myself how many times I’d witnessed this exact scene.

“Sorry for the disturbance, Tenma,” said Blanca. Once he noticed the marks on my hand, he bonked Amur again. “And I’m sorry for those bite marks too.”

“What happened? I asked her, but she just kept saying it was my fault.”

“Well, she chased after you when you went into the dungeon so I went after her, but she got lost and ended up wandering around aimlessly. In the end, she left me behind and ran off. I had no idea where she was and searched the lake we’d gone to before. I couldn’t find her, so I went back up to the surface and heard that she’d already left the dungeon and ran off somewhere. I figured she might’ve come here, so here I am.”

As I took a closer look at Blanca, I realized he had a bunch of small scratches all over his body. He must’ve been really worried about Amur because it didn’t even seem like he noticed them.

After that, Gramps and Blanca helped me get Amur’s story out of her and we found out why she was angry. I wasn’t sure it was warranted, though—she just seemed to be taking it out on me.

Here was the flow of events:

I entered the dungeon → Gramps was notified → Gramps entered the dungeon, couldn’t find me, and went to talk to Agris and find out why → Amur charged into the dungeon → She couldn’t find me and then aimlessly searched for me → Blanca followed after her → Amur deserted him and left on her own → Blanca wandered around the dungeon looking for her → Blanca gave up and returned to the surface → He found out Amur already left and rushed to the workshop → He got irritated when he saw everyone here enjoying themselves.

Still, I didn’t think I was entirely to blame for this, although it *was* true that I

had completely forgotten about Amur. Even I had to admit I didn't have a very strong case. I wouldn't be able to handle getting bitten again either.

"I understand. I don't entirely agree with everything, but I know I'm not completely innocent here, so let's just end this matter. Okay?" I said.

"Mm." Amur seemed to have calmed down after she bit me and heard me admit fault, so she nodded slightly.

I thought it was settled, but...

"No, that won't do," said Blanca. "She's caused too much trouble here. It's time to go home back south."

"Okay, got it. See ya later, Blanca!" she replied cheerfully.

"You're coming with me!" He then bonked her on the head three times. "We were supposed to go back home a long time ago. Everyone's probably worried!"

"Don't worry, I'll just live with Tenma. Go on by yourself and—"

Before she could finish, he gave her a fourth bonk. That blow seemed to pack the most punch of them all and the sound echoed loudly through the workshop. It also knocked Amur unconscious. Blanca quickly tied the unconscious tiger princess up with a rope, gagged her, and threw her over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes.

"Sorry, but I'm leaving now. I'll probably head back south tomorrow or the day after, so I'll keep her restrained until then. She'll probably try every trick in the book to get untied, so just ignore her."

And with that, Blanca left the workshop.

"I wonder if that's really okay?" I said.

"You're worried about Amur?" Gramps asked.

"No, I'm worried about Blanca. Carrying a bound and gagged girl over his shoulder isn't a sight you see every day. He might get arrested."

My worries turned out to be justified, because on my way back from the workshop, I heard a commotion. I asked a worker at a nearby food stall what had happened. He told me that a suspicious-looking beastfolk man had just

been arrested for trying to kidnap a girl just a little while ago.

I knew it was very likely to be Blanca and Amur, so Gramps and I hurried to the guard post but they were already gone by then. Luckily, someone among the guards had known about Blanca and Amur's relationship and had released them as soon as they could. Of course, Amur had pretended not to know Blanca and acted like a complete victim, so when the sympathetic guards had untied her, she had run off at full speed. She was still on the run when Blanca was released, and the moment he was free, he went after her.

Neither of them returned home that day.

"Now, should I head to Master Gantz's workshop first or have breakfast?"

After I woke up, I got ready and planned on going to the workshop first thing, but since Shiromaru and Solomon sat at the table, I decided to start the day by making breakfast. I didn't skip breakfast every day, but lately, I'd gotten into the habit of eating at a food stall along the way to the workshop in the morning.

"I wasn't planning on making anything today, so I'll just whip up something simple," I told them as I took out some meat from my magic bag and boiled it. I didn't want the smell of grilled meat to stink up the carriage first thing in the morning. I made a chilled shabu-shabu-style salad for Rocket and my followers. I also boiled a small portion of extra meat as a side dish for myself.

"Come to think of it, those other guys might need some food soon." I opened up my dimension bag which contained the spiders and saw that the food I'd put in for them before was running low. They regulated their own food intake, so I'd been giving them some food every few days. They were still wary of me, so I'd gone with this method because I didn't want them to stop eating if I gave them too much food at once. Sometimes I forgot that the spiders were even in the bag, so I made a point to check on them every time I fed my followers their meals.

The spiders always divided the food I gave them into portions and stored what they didn't eat for later. Or at least that's what they'd done up until yesterday, but today was different. As usual, I opened the bag to give them a few days' worth of food. Two of the three spiders—the golden one and a silver

one—approached me when I held the food in my palm. They hesitated for a moment and then began to slowly eat it right out of my hand. However, the other silver one refused to come near me and was clearly still very cautious.

“I wonder if I could make them into familiars?”

The two spiders who had eaten out of my hand seemed like they could, but the remaining one still wasn't interested. That made me a bit sad, but I resigned myself to the fact that compatibility mattered a great deal when it came to taming. I decided to give up on the one who didn't seem fond of me and considered just making the other two my followers.

Just then, Gramps returned from his walk, so I told him my thoughts on the matter. As he listened, Shiromaru and Solomon swiped the meat kebabs Gramps had bought while he was out.

“This is a good opportunity. Why not make them your followers in front of everyone?” Gramps suggested.

By “everyone,” he had meant the Tamers guild, including Amy. These spiders were quite rare, so it might've caused trouble if I kept them as my followers without telling anyone. I was a bit worried about Blanca and Amur not being present for the affair, but it was their own fault for running around. Blanca wouldn't complain about not being there anyway. He might say that it was a shame he couldn't have seen it, but that was about it. Amur, on the other hand, would make some kind of selfish demand and then Blanca would physically restrain her.

Now that that'd been decided, I went to inform Amy of the plan and then headed to the Tamer's guild room at the adventurers guild. Amy was really excited because this would be the third time she'd witness a Taming. It was only my fifth time, so really there wasn't much difference between us. As for the members of the Tamers Guild, they—and Agris, especially—were very excited.

“Why wouldn't I be?! We're about to witness a Taming of monsters so rare they've barely appeared in literature!”

He was so thrilled that he drew the attention of all the other adventurers and guild staff who were there that morning. Everyone quickly looked away when I glanced at them and pretended not to be interested, but it appeared that they

were eagerly eavesdropping every time Agris raised his voice.

“All right, just calm down,” I told him. “I can’t do it here, though. I’ll have to do it in the dungeon.”

There was a sense of disappointment in the air that came from the other adventurers and staff once they heard that. However, it was really noisy here, so if I released the spiders inside the guild, I was afraid they’d get wary of me again and I’d be back to square one. Besides, I had no intention of taming them inside the guild, and I wasn’t particularly close to anyone here, so I had no obligation to show them the taming process. No one here could change my mind by glaring at me—not even the guildmaster!

“But I want to see it!” he seemed to say with his eyes, but I ignored him and walked towards the door instead. He didn’t have the authority to make me perform a Taming inside the guild, but he wasn’t irresponsible enough to skip out on work and follow me either, so he stayed put.

We were just about to go inside the dungeon when Amy suddenly raised her hand.

“Master Tenma! I’ve only been down to the tenth floor of the dungeon!”

“Oh!”

I was so wrapped up in the thought of taming the spiders that I’d assumed all the members here were skilled and I hadn’t even considered going anywhere but the twentieth floor. I had completely forgotten about Amy’s situation. She wasn’t even an adventurer but had still gone quite deep, mostly to carry someone’s bags. Still, that was quite dangerous. I wondered who she had gone with and looked over at Agris and the other members of the Tamers guild only to find that they were avoiding my gaze.

“You’re careful to make sure she’s safe, aren’t you, Agris?” I asked.

“Of course. We only bring her along when we’re gathering food for her followers, and we always go as a group. It would take a lot more than the monsters on the tenth floor to take us down!” Agris declared proudly.

“Well, as you’ve seen from the Saqalat brothers’ example, dungeons can be unpredictable. Don’t bring her deep in the dungeon anymore, not under any

circumstances,” I said with a hint of anger.

He and the other members of the guild nodded in agreement. I could’ve said more, but I didn’t want to upset Amy and left it at that. I would have to make sure to drill it into their heads later when she wasn’t around.

“Well, putting that aside... I know it’s probably best not to, but I’ll make an exception just this once and use *that* method. That way, Amy won’t be able to go back to the twentieth floor alone, and we can safely reach our destination.”

“What method do you mean?” Amy asked curiously.

I explained how I would do it, and then we all used the warp point together to reach the twentieth floor.

“You can come out now, Amy.”

I opened the dimension bag and Amy emerged from it along with Rocky and Birdie. On the way back, I would put her inside the bag again to ensure she wouldn’t remember the route. That way, she wouldn’t be able to go back to the twentieth floor on her own.

However, once we reached the goblin’s nest, I saw that the entrance we’d sealed up had been forcefully reopened. I put Amy back in the bag while we investigated, which slightly disrupted our plans. However, this was the safest way to do it. Although there were no monsters there, we did find several venomous bug-type monsters that were difficult to detect, even when I used Detection. After we defeated them and made the place virtually bug-free, I let Amy out of the bag again.

However, we did unexpectedly find one creature that was neither a monster nor a bug inside the nest. As long as we didn’t provoke it, there wouldn’t be any problems for now, so we decided to leave it alone for the time being.

“Is this the place? It doesn’t look like a goblin’s nest,” said Amy.

“Oh, it was. I can still smell goblin in some places. It’s best not to go too deep, and you’ll especially want to avoid that hole over there. It’s probably the goblins’ toilet.”

The one who had answered Amy was the creature lurking in this place—a girl

named Amur. After she'd run away, I used Detection all over Sagan trying to find her, but there had been no response. I'd figured that she must've been hiding in the dungeon, but I never expected her to be in this exact place.

When I asked her how she had known about this place, she said that in the master's workshop, she had overheard that there was a nest on the twentieth floor and she followed my scent (or Shiromaru's or Frau's) all the way here. That part might've been a lie, though. She could've just looked for conspicuous dead ends.

Anyway, as she had pointed out, there was a faint odor coming from the distance. It was the smell of goblin feces and urine. I decided I should deal with that before I did the Taming.

The first step was disinfection. I used Detection on the odoriferous hole to confirm that there were no people or objects inside. Then, I used Firestorm to burn deep inside the hole. I evacuated everyone to the farthest point from the hole before doing this and created a mist with Water magic around it in order to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning. Thanks to the mist, even if the burning cloud of feces traveled outside the hole, it wouldn't spread too far. Finally, I used Earth magic to fill the toilet with soil and then I was done.

Dealing with the goblin toilet took a bit of time, but now I could proceed with Taming the spiders without any worries.

"All right. Come on."

I opened the dimension bag where I carried the spiders and called out. The two spiders who'd grown fond of me approached. I extended my hand to offer the pact, and they accepted, so they successfully became my followers. The guildmaster had been so eager to see it, but actually, it was all pretty anticlimactic. I was the one who did it and even I thought it had been unexpectedly simple. However, Agris was so moved that tears had welled up in his eyes. I could've teased him about it, but I refrained because he was in such a strange mood. I didn't want to get him overly excited.

"Master, aren't you going to make the other one your follower too?" Amy asked. She came closer while holding the silver spider that had remained in the bag. The spider was wary of me as usual, but it didn't seem to mind Amy

holding it at all. Rocky and Birdie also seemed quite interested in that spider, occasionally leaning in to sniff it.

“Amy, why don’t you try making that spider your follower instead? It doesn’t look all that cautious of you, and it seems like it might be compatible with Rocky and Birdie too.”

“What?!” Amy’s bewildered voice overlapped with Agris’s agitated one as they asked that at the same time. I wondered if he was hoping *he* could tame it, if all went well.

“I mean it. Since it didn’t warm up to me, I’d either have to release it back into the dungeon or slay it to get its materials,” I said. “Instead of doing either of those, don’t you think it’d be better if you took it in and made it your follower?”

Amy pondered this. Meanwhile, Agris must’ve secretly wanted her to refuse because he had taken up a prayer pose.

“All right. I’ll do it!” Amy decided to tame the spider right away, before she changed her mind. And just as I had expected, she easily succeeded. “Its name is Spidey!” she announced.

I had thought it was a pretty basic name, but everyone from the Tamers guild cheered and applauded—except for Agris, that is. Upon closer inspection, although he began to clap, it seemed like he was conflicted about something.

After the applause died down, everyone suddenly turned to look at me. I guess it was time for me to make my own announcement. However, I hadn’t given any thought to names.

“Well, I’ll name them Kin and Gin. I think they’ll have long lives,” I said.

“What kind of names are those?” Gramps asked, and everyone nodded in unison.

It was a joke that only I understood since I had named them after the Japanese words for gold and silver respectively, but I thought the names were perfect. However, Rocket was slowly swaying from side to side in front of me, indicating that he disagreed. Apparently, he didn’t like the names Kin and Gin. Oh, and the spiders didn’t seem to understand what was going on at all—they had just been playing with Shiromaru and Solomon this whole time.

“Um, how about Goldie and Silvie?” I suggested, offering names derived from gold and silver. I had just blurted those out, and despite being reminiscent of Amy’s naming style, Rocket bounced up and down at my suggestions, indicating that he liked the names.

So the spiders were thereafter known as Goldie (the gold one) and Silvie (the silver one).

The older men seemed to want to say something about the new names, but since Rocket was the leader of my followers and had given his approval, I ignored them.

Now that I had two new followers, I decided to check once again what kind of abilities they had. And the results? They were definitely unsuitable for combat.

Name: Goldie

Age: 8

Class: Golden Silk Spider, Rank S

HP: 1,000

MP: 800

Strength: D-

Defense: C+

Agility: B

Magic: D-

Mind: C

Growth: D

Luck:C

Skills

Silk: 8

Venom: 5

Conceal: 4

Magic Manipulation: 3

Silvie had the same stats, and it seemed like they were close to their limits. I thought I could potentially improve their skills with further training, so I decided I'd do it gradually. It didn't seem like they'd be particularly useful even if I did that, but then again, it wasn't like I needed more fighting power to begin with. It wasn't really a problem.

"Look! Rocky and Birdie seem to really like Spidey!" Amy was in high spirits, delighted that her senior followers were welcoming the new addition. The members of the Tamers guild were watching her and Spidey with great interest.

"Can you come over here for a minute, Agris?" I asked.

Agris had been watching her with a particularly serious look on his face. He frowned at me but then came over. "What is it, Tenma? I was watching Spidey."

"Don't overdo it or you might upset Amy—then you won't have any access to it. I did warn you. Anyway, putting that aside, I kind of suggested that she make Spidey her follower on a whim, but since it's so rare, do you think someone might try to steal it from her?"

"It's possible. You're trying to ask me to take care of Amy and her new follower, right? Of course that was my intention, but I can't be on guard twenty-four seven, you know." Agris immediately caught what I was getting at and agreed to do what he could. However, I couldn't help but feel sorry for Amy since I had been the one who had suggested this before thinking it through.

Maybe I should've let Agris tame it instead.

"Why don't I give Amy a few guardian golems? Five decent ones should be able to hold off any attackers until help arrives," I said. It might've been overkill to hand her one of the top-class royal golems, so I decided to give her the best regular ones that I used the most.

"We should ask Alex for his support," Gramps suggested. "Normally it might draw some criticism, but Sagan is under the direct control of the royal family, so asking him makes sense. If you write him a letter and tell him there's a girl here

who's tamed a legendary monster that rarely even appears in literature and ask for his help, I'm sure he'll be interested. Start by saying you want his advice, and I'm sure someone close to him will show up."

I took Gramps's recommendation to heart and decided to write a letter. If everything went well, that would be a powerful deterrent. There would be a price to pay, though, so I would start by asking for guidance and gradually negotiate from there.

By the way, when Gramps had said the name Alex, the first thing I'd thought was, *Wait, who's Alex, again?* I wouldn't tell him that, though.

"If anyone comes, it'll probably be that idiot Ernest, or maybe the third son. Negotiating with them should be easy. Oh, and don't forget to include your full name and crest in the letter, Tenma. That will make a big difference."

I heeded Gramps's advice again and finished writing the letter. I didn't go into too much detail though, since it was intended to just be an initial consultation.

"This should do it. Ted, could you deliver this letter to the capital as soon as possible? If you take it to Gramps's mansion or to the knights' barracks, it should reach the royal family. There's another letter here explaining why I wrote this one, so if something happens, you can let them read that one. Worst-case scenario, if you hang around Gramps's mansion for a while, someone from the king's guard will come to check it out anyway."

"What if they try to arrest me?" Ted asked.

"Just mention Aina's name. She'll be able to vouch that you're an acquaintance of mine. Here are three gold coins as your payment. And I'll give you an extra coin for emergencies too. You can use that for meals and lodging."

"Got it. Are you sure this is okay, though? This amount is nearly twice the market price!"

I ignored Ted's question and he happily left the goblin's nest. He planned to return in four days, in a week at most. I told Amy that she should keep Spidey a secret until then, and I arranged five golems for her exclusive use.

At first, Amy seemed bewildered by my gift of the golems, but after I explained how rare Spidey was, she hesitantly accepted them. In my opinion,

they weren't really that expensive since I'd just reused the cores of old golems to make them. She seemed convinced by that explanation, but I couldn't help but notice that Agris and Gramps were looking at me in disbelief. However, I'd made the golems myself, so I was the only one who could determine their value. Therefore, I pretended not to notice.

"Well, there's nothing else to do here, so shall we go back?" I asked.

Everyone but the Saqalat brothers nodded. Even though this was the place where they'd had quite a scary experience, for some reason, they wanted to continue mining here. That was why they'd come here in the first place. I understood their desire to continue, but unfortunately, their magic and dimension bags were almost full.

I didn't want to carry their extra loot, so we all started to leave. Not wanting to be left behind, they quickly stopped mining and followed after us. I guess they didn't want to be left alone in this place after all.

After we put the dungeon behind us, I entrusted Amy to Agris and the others so Gramps, Amur, and I could hurry to the master's workshop. Today, I'd left Valley Wind 2.0 completely in the hands of Master Gantz, and as soon as I left the dungeon, I suddenly became very worried he'd made some kind of weird modifications while I had been gone. I completely forgot about Amur and Gramps and ran as fast as I could.

I didn't want to use flying magic in the middle of town. It wasn't against the rules or anything, but it wasn't exactly encouraged either. But I was basically moving at the speed of a galloping horse. Everyone I whizzed by looked surprised as I zoomed past them and off into the distance.

I arrived at the master's workshop after sprinting at full speed for ten minutes. Since I'd run so fast, I couldn't breathe properly. When I stepped inside, I saw that the master was asleep, hugging a barrel of alcohol, and wearing a satisfied smile on his face.

I had a bad feeling and went to check on Valley Wind 2.0, which was almost completely assembled by now, but didn't see anything out of the ordinary. However, there were remnants of some kind of crafts scattered around the workshop.

“I can’t believe it... What’d they do?”

Nothing looked visibly different, but knowing Master Gantz, there was a good chance he’d made some kind of modification. I kicked the barrel he held to wake him up.

I wondered where his apprentices were, but I soon found them all bound and gagged in a heap in the storage room. Once I freed them, they looked at the master with eyes full of anger and resentment. It was pretty difficult to stop them from trying to attack him.

“What’s going on?! Who’s attacking me?!” the master shouted, groping around for his barrel. Apparently, he was still half asleep.

The apprentices and I stared at the master while he searched for his barrel. For some reason, he didn’t notice us and crawled at full speed towards his desk, roughly shoving aside his chair. We figured something interesting was about to happen, so we all decided to observe him from a distance.

After he moved the chair, he started messing with the floor beneath it. We watched as he removed a square piece of the flooring with a clatter.

He lowered his upper body into the hole and started counting something inside there. He was focused on doing that so we thought this was the perfect opportunity to do something.

We sneaked up behind him and shouted, “What are you hiding?!”

“Bwaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah?!”

We were the ones who’d tried to startle him, but he let out such a piercing shriek that he startled us instead. He quickly tried to pull himself out from the hole, only to bang his head hard on the edge of the table above him.

Master Gantz groaned in agony for a bit, but after a few moments, he seemed to have regained enough composure to look around. Tears welled up in his eyes as he glared at us.

“You scared me! What if I had split my head open and bled to death?!”

“We weren’t trying to scare you, Master. Besides, all we did was call out to you. Were you doing something shady?”

We insisted we'd done nothing wrong by trying to get his attention, so the master couldn't blame us for it. After all, he couldn't prove we'd tried to startle him, especially since he'd been half asleep. Besides, we never expected him to be so startled that he'd bonk his head either. The whole thing was completely unexpected—in other words, a total accident.

“Hah, whatever. Let's just go and talk in the other room.”

“No, let's talk here. I want to know what you did to Valley Wind 2.0, and I'm curious about what's going on beneath the floorboards there.”

The master tried to casually lead us out of the workshop, but I insisted that we stay here. My main concern wasn't whatever was hidden under the floor, of course, but whatever he'd done to Valley Wind. It was better to confront him about that here.

“Tch.” Master Gantz clicked his tongue and stood in front of us in an attempt to hide the hole. We continued to glare at each other, but just then, the workshop door burst open.

“Hmph!” It was Amur, who was pouting and looking very unhappy.

“Now's our chance! Get him!”

Since Master and I were distracted by Amur's sudden appearance, the apprentices quickly came to their senses and took action. Under normal circumstances, it would be nearly impossible to take down the master even if they all banded together, but this time, they managed to catch him off guard. They successfully pushed him away from the hole.

“Hey! Wait a minute!” Master Gantz tried to resist his apprentices, but he didn't stand a chance against their momentum, which gave one of them enough time to investigate the hole.

“Whoa...” The apprentice who peered inside let out an astonished noise and then switched places with another apprentice. One by one, the apprentices all checked out the hole in this fashion. Master Gantz looked like he had given up, but the apprentices still took turns holding him firmly, just in case.

“What's inside? Whoa...”

Once the apprentices were done looking, I peeked inside too. I couldn't help but let out a similar reaction.

"Alcohol, alcohol, alcohol, alcohol, alcohol, alcohol, and money. I'm going to assume the money is being used to buy more alcohol, so that means this entire hole is basically filled with booze? Still, this wall is amazing..."

I suppose I shouldn't have been surprised that the hidden hole had been just about filled with alcohol, but I also couldn't help but be amazed that the walls of the cellar had been made entirely out of orichalcum. It was probably to protect the wine. There were magic circles carved onto a wall to prevent detection by magical means. I memorized the magic circle so I could use it sometime.

Master Gantz had made a safe inside the cellar that was two meters long, two meters wide, and one meter tall, also made entirely out of orichalcum, just to protect his alcohol. His obsession with the stuff was a little scary.

"Master, didn't you complain about not being able to pay for materials before?"

"Hey, we worked hard to scrape together enough money to pay for the tavern bill, didn't we?" his apprentices said.

"This safe must be worth 1,000,000G! Does that mean all of our struggles were meaningless?!"

I was fascinated by the unusual safe, but his apprentices were furious. And I couldn't blame them. I would've been incensed too if I'd found out Gramps had done something like that.

After that, a fierce battle between Master Gantz and his apprentices ensued, but I really didn't care so I'll skip that part of the story. Let's just say it ended up a tie due to the intervention of the city's guards.

"Valley Wind 2.0 is almost finished, so I'll just take it from here. I don't want anyone to tamper with it any further." I still needed to thoroughly examine it to see if it had been modified somehow.

Amur was quite unhappy and had become even more dejected after the battle between Master Gantz and the apprentices, but luckily, just one pastry

was enough to cheer her up.

“Shall we go back?” I asked.

“Mmm.”

Amur and I returned to the apartment, leaving behind Master Gantz and the apprentices, who were currently being scolded by the guards.

However, Amur had forgotten something very important. And that was the fact that Blanca was on her tail...

The moment we returned to the apartment, Blanca immediately captured her and confined her.

“Thanks, Tenma.”

“Mmph, mmph!”

“I didn’t really do much, but sure...”

Blanca thanked me for bringing Amur, but she misunderstood that, thinking that I’d tricked her into returning. She continued to shout despite being gagged. I denied it, but in the end, I guess it did seem like I’d inadvertently deceived her, which made my heart ache a little.

Oh right—I’d completely forgotten that Gramps existed and had locked up the carriage before I fell asleep, so the next day, I had to apologize to him profusely for locking him out overnight...

Part Six

A lot had happened, but four days had passed since the incident with Valley Wind 2.0. And during those four days, work inside Master Gantz's workshop had been suspended because the pro wrestling scuffle had spilled out onto the streets and involved others. I wasn't able to find out how exactly he'd tampered with Valley Wind, which irritated me, and the last development had been that Blanca and Amur had resumed their game of chase.

Blanca had tied up Amur even tighter than he had last time, but she'd still managed to escape from the apartment when he wasn't watching. She'd used a rock from the side of the road to cut through her ropes. Blanca had only been in the bathroom for five minutes tops when she'd pulled her escape act.

I told Blanca there was a good chance that Amur was hiding in the dungeon. Actually, I knew for sure that she was in the dungeon since I'd used Detection and noticed her there, but I was keeping my ability a secret. I told him where the goblin nest was so he could find her, but so far, he hadn't.

A short while ago, Ted had arrived from the capital with a response from the king. He said he hadn't interacted directly with him but had exchanged letters through Cruyff instead. But obviously, since Cruyff had been involved, I could be assured that this letter was legit.

"The king does seem interested in Amy, just as I thought."

"Tenma, you better be careful how you phrase that because it makes Alex sound like some kind of pervert, like Ernest. Well, I'm not saying it's *not* true, but you shouldn't say it too loudly," Gramps warned.

I told him what the letter had said, which was basically, "If something interesting is going on in my territory, I'm going to visit!"

"Well, that sounds like something he'd do, but hopefully those around him will try to stop him. If anyone comes, it'll be that idiot Lyle or the third son."

I knew that Ernest was busy, but Prince Lyle was probably just as busy. However, since his personality resembled the king's the most and he wasn't nearly as busy as the king himself, I figured he'd come up with a reason to travel

here one way or another.

As I chatted with Gramps about that, I heard a sudden commotion outside. My carriage was parked next to the apartment, so it was slightly set back from the street. The fact that we could hear it all the way from here must've meant that something unusual was going on.

"Uh-oh. Tenma, I've got a bad feeling about this..."

"What a coincidence, Gramps. Because I not only have a bad feeling, but I'm certain that something bad is happening."

The sound seemed to be getting closer and closer to the apartment. Eventually, we heard several sets of hoofbeats clip-clopping nearby. I used Detection to discover the source of the clamor.

There was a rapping on the carriage door.

"Tenma, we're here! Come on out!" called out a familiar female voice.

"You're here already, Kriss?"

I opened the door and saw Kriss there, just as I expected. I could've guessed that even without Detection, though. There were only so many young women who would just bang on my door without hesitation.

"That idiot Ted... He tricked me."

I didn't know that someone would get here so soon. That meant they had probably traveled with Ted until somewhere near Sagan, but he had gone home ahead of them. It wasn't really Ted's fault—after all, he was just a commoner, so he couldn't refuse a request from the royal family. But still, I was frustrated and felt like venting. And that was because the member of the royal family who *did* show up was...

"Queen Maria, Tenma's right here."

That's right. I wouldn't have minded if it were the king or Prince Lyle, but I tended to get a little nervous in front of the queen. This unexpected visit was kind of bad for my heart.

"Hello, Tenma. It's been a while," she said. "You seem to be as active as ever, though. Anyway, I heard you came to the capital recently. You could've at least

come by to say hello.”

She sounded slightly irritated. I assumed she was talking about when I had flown to the capital not that long ago to gather materials for Valley Wind. I guess she was mad about that.

“Hi, Tenma! Where’s Solomon?”

“Couldn’t you at least greet him properly, Luna? You should say, ‘Hello, Tenma. I’m so glad to see you again. You’re looking well!’” said Tida, scolding her.

Luna and Tida stepped down from the carriage, behind Queen Maria. Luna apologized, but when she spotted Solomon, she charged at him. He casually dodged her and playfully ran away. He wasn’t going very fast, so I figured he must be having fun playing with her.

“It’s nice to see you again, Your Majesty. And I apologize about last time. I was in a hurry...” I said.

That part was true. I didn’t have time for a visit to the castle, and I didn’t want to cause any unnecessary commotion either. The queen seemed to already have some idea of that, especially the part about not wanting to cause an unneeded fuss, so she didn’t press any further.

Anyway, I called Amy over to the carriage so I could explain exactly what I wanted to ask the king. But then, an unexpected incident occurred, which surprised not only me and Gramps, but the queen as well. And this incident foreshadowed that many hectic and possibly terrible things would happen in the future...

“Tenma, who is this?”

It seemed that Tida had fallen in love with Amy at first sight. He blushed and tugged on my sleeve, wanting to get information about her from me. Queen Maria seemed taken aback and didn’t know how to react to his behavior.

Amy just looked at us with confusion since she didn’t understand why I’d called her here.

“Kriss, please escort Tida back to our carriage. It’s impossible to have a

conversation like this,” Queen Maria said.

“Yes, Your Majesty. Your Highness, shall we step outside for a bit?”

“Huh? Wait, Kriss!”

Kriss pushed Tida out of my carriage without letting him get a word in edgewise. He tried to resist, but he didn’t stand a chance against Kriss’s strength. She easily pushed him out.

“At least we can talk now. That reaction from Tida certainly was unexpected,” commented the queen. “So, Tenma. What about this girl?”

Amy hid behind me, seemingly startled by the queen’s gaze. Queen Maria seemed a bit sad from her reaction and I wasn’t sure what she’d say if I laughed, so I bit the inside of my cheek to suppress it, just in case.

“Well, this is Amy, and she is my landlord’s granddaughter. I’ve known her since I first came to Sagan, and now she’s my student—although everyone else refers to her as my apprentice.”

It still felt weird for people to say that I was Amy’s master when I had really only taught her the basics in a short amount of time. At this point, the members of the Tamers guild had spent more time teaching Amy about magic and taming than I had, which was another reason I felt uncomfortable saying she was my apprentice.

“It’s nice to meet you. I’m Amy.”

After Amy introduced herself, I explained what had happened when I’d first met her in Sagan, and then I told Queen Maria that I had given a rare monster to Amy for her to tame, on a whim. I wanted the support of the royal family to help protect them.

The queen sighed and held her head in her hands. “Tenma, you really are Ricardo’s son and Master Merlin’s grandson. You’re just like them, in a bad way...” she muttered.

Gramps, who was quietly listening nearby, seemed to be thrilled that she’d said I resembled him.

The queen then continued. “Well, I don’t mind supporting the girl. After all,

she's a citizen of Sagan, so it's wise to try and prevent trouble in advance. But this means you'll definitely have to join our faction now, Tenma."

"That's fine, but don't you think it's a bit late for that?"

The fact that the king and Prince Lyle had visited Gramps's mansion meant that people in the capital were already assuming that I had joined the royalists.

"I suppose that's true. In that case, how about we spread some rumors that she's being supported by the Archduke? That would prevent people from raising a fuss about your apprentice being under royal protection. And while we're at it, we can have them say that I'm curious about the girl too."

Now that we'd worked out the details, it was decided. However, the subject of our conversation didn't seem to fully understand what was going on, so I'd need to explain it to her later.

"By the way... Amy, would you be interested in attending the academy in the capital?"

Amy seemed puzzled by Queen Maria's sudden question.

"If we're spreading the story about her being under the Archduke's protection, the fastest way to do so would be to have her attend the academy, of course. The students would run back, tell their parents, and spread the word naturally. And since the students are familiar with Tenma, they'll also come to know that she's Tenma's apprentice. That will make it easier for us to act if anything happens."

Entering midyear meant that she would have a tougher entrance exam than being admitted normally, but they would use the archduke's influence to push her application through. In terms of my previous world, this would be seen as cheating, but apparently, it was incredibly common in this world among the nobility. As long as you didn't completely bomb the exam, they'd let you in. The most common reason nobles would use their power to enroll a child partway through the year was if an illegitimate child was discovered. There were other reasons too, of course, like in the case of adopting a child. So although it was rare to enroll in the middle of the year due to reasons like Amy, it wasn't unheard of.

“How strong is Amy academically?” the queen asked.

There was a school in Sagan, but it wasn't as formal as the academy in the capital and therefore only taught the basics. One could reach a slightly higher level of education if they desired it, but only about one out of ten students requested it. Amy had learned the basics and received additional tutoring from the Tamers guild, so in my opinion, she'd be ranked at about the average level at the academy. Agris had told me before that she had a really good memory.

“In that case, there shouldn't be a problem. The decision is up to Amy, of course, but I think it's best to talk to her parents about it. I can't decide for her.”

The queen seemed to notice Amy struggling to keep up with our conversation, so she decided to let the girl discuss it with her family first. I gave Amy a simple explanation of it all—I told her she might be able to enroll in the academy in the capital, but she should decide after discussing it with her family. By the way, it seemed like Amy had understood that Queen Maria was some kind of noble, but hadn't realized she was actually the queen.

On a side note, once Amy relayed the queen's proposal to Arie and Karina, they realized who she was talking about and now understood why there was such a commotion. They tidied themselves up and rushed to greet us, trying to catch their breath. After some more discussion, it was decided that Amy would enroll in the academy.

The queen intended to push her admission through regardless of the exam results.

“Surely there won't be any problem if we name-drop Tenma and Master Merlin, right?” the queen asked.

Her tone of voice was slightly intimidating, so Gramps and I nodded without hesitation. Tida was extremely pleased once he learned Amy would be going to the academy. Meanwhile, Luna just seemed confused.

We would discuss details about her enrollment tomorrow, so in the meantime, Amy and her family returned home.

“Well, it sounds like you've been busy. What's happened since the last time I saw you?”

The queen seemed eager to hear about my adventures in Sagan. I told her all about how I had ended up fighting and successfully defeating a bicorn during a quest, but it had been at the expense of Valley Wind. Then, I talked about going into the dungeon to gather materials to rebuild it and how I'd discovered a lake on one of the floors where I fought an octopus monster no one knew existed. I also mentioned that now the monster had been officially recognized as a new species.

The queen, Tida, and Kriss were all interested in hearing about my battles against the rare monsters. Luna, however, was only interested in how the bicorn and octopus tasted.

"Well, it's about time for lunch, so how about you find out for yourself?" I suggested.

No one objected. I asked if anyone had any specific requests as to how I'd prepare the meat, but aside from Luna, who said, "Whatever you want, as long as it's yummy!" (which was actually the most annoying request, in a way), the other three said they couldn't answer because they didn't know what it tasted like.

I contemplated what Luna'd said and ultimately decided to make what had received the best reviews when I'd served them to Gramps, Amur, and Blanca. I also decided I should whip up something that was easy to make, even if I had to substitute ingredients.

The bicorn dish was easy to decide on, but I hesitated a bit with the octopus. Several options came to mind, and I narrowed it down to two.

"I can make meatloaf from the bicorn meat, but how about the octopus? Deep-fried? Or maybe takoyaki?"

However, I realized I lacked essential items for making takoyaki, so I had to go with the simplest option. Deep-fried it was.

"I wish I could make takoyaki, but I don't have a takoyaki pan," I said. "I'll have to make do with what I have."

Since I didn't have anything that could stand in that kind of pan, I settled on deep-frying the octopus. I thought having both meatloaf and fried dishes would

be kind of heavy for lunch, so I decided to season the fried octopus with just salt and pepper. That would let everyone adjust the flavor with lemon to their liking. As for the meatloaf, I used lean cuts from both the bicorn and the buffalo to reduce the overall fat content.

I used a mixture of salt, pepper, freshly squeezed ginger juice, and several other spices in it, along with sautéed onions. I shaped the mixture into small, thin, oval-shaped patties so I could make as many as possible. I concocted a sauce from the meat juices that were left over in the pan afterward, mixing it with sugar, fish sauce, alcohol, and crushed tomatoes. Everyone was free to drizzle as much sauce on the top as they wanted. I also made a salad and some bread to go with the meal.

Cooking didn't take much effort, but it did take some time due to the large number of people. There were three royal family members, three palace guards including Kriss, and me and Gramps here. Once everything was ready, I had Kriss taste test (meaning testing it for poison) before I presented the dishes to the queen and everyone else. I plated the royal family's meals individually and served everyone else from large platters.

Many of the guards were nobles and might not have been used to being served so casually, but it was impractical to fit everyone inside my carriage. At the same time, however, I couldn't just take the queen and her party outside. In the end, I decided to let the guards serve themselves.

"This is delicious," Maria said, seeming pleasantly surprised while still maintaining her elegant demeanor as she ate.

I wasn't expecting her to devour her meatloaf so fast.

"I've never tasted anything this good before!" Tida seemed surprised too, but unlike Maria, he ate slowly.

"Can I have more meat?" Luna's mouth was covered in bits of food and she was already requesting seconds.

Although they all ate at different speeds and styles, they all seemed to greatly enjoy the meatloaf. Everyone asked for more, and the extras I'd prepared disappeared completely.

The deep-fried octopus was a bit overshadowed by the meatloaf, but it received positive feedback due to its taste and how easy it was to eat.

I was surprised that Luna ate the most meatloaf, followed by Kriss. Luna seemed to fixate on her favorite foods, and Kriss was very active, so she had a big appetite. On the other hand, Tida ate the least, and I ate the second least. Tida preferred to savor his favorite foods slowly, and I was always so busy serving people seconds that I barely had time to eat myself.

“Well, it’s about time we went back to the estate,” the queen said.

By “estate,” she meant the home the royal family stayed in when they visited Sagan. It wasn’t used often, but caretakers kept it clean and ready for them to use at any time.

It was slightly smaller than Gramps’s mansion back in the capital, but its garden was almost twice as large. That was because they needed enough space for carriages for the guards and other invited nobles. It could also be used as an emergency evacuation site in the event of a disaster. While there were fences, walls, and moats in the garden, no flowers were planted there.

After I said goodbye to Queen Maria and her group, Amy and the others came back. They wanted to hear more details about her going to the academy. I apologized for not asking their permission before the discussions had advanced and gave them as much detail as possible. Well, I didn’t have all that many details right now because the queen said we would go over that tomorrow, so I just answered their questions to the best of my abilities.

Amy’s family was mainly concerned about three things: money (meaning tuition), housing, and guardianship. They were very worried about leaving Amy alone in the capital. I said I could pay for her tuition as a way to take responsibility for the recent commotion, but since the queen had suggested she enroll in the academy in the first place, I assumed that the royal family would cover her expenses. I still wanted to pay a share of it, but they refused and said they would pay for it themselves, even if it was difficult.

I felt bad that they would go so far out of their way to avoid owing me something. I told them honestly that I thought the royal family would cover it, which led to even more discussions. We ultimately settled to split the costs

between myself and Amy's family, a compromise that was mainly reached because of my insistence. I would assume responsibility for the situation.

And as for housing and guardianship, there was no need to worry about those at all. There was a dormitory at the academy, and since she'd be sponsored by the royal family, there was no doubt she'd secure a spot there. In the unlikely event that it was full (which was *very* unlikely since there were spare rooms expressly reserved for late entrants), she could always live at Gramps's mansion and commute. If that were the case, then Jeanne and Aura would be tasked with her care.

I told them that I expected someone from the royal family—either the queen herself or the archduke, who she'd mentioned before and was the most likely candidate—would serve as Amy's guardian.

Amy's family seemed very grateful once I mentioned that. I then apologized for unintentionally dragging them into a power struggle, but they laughed it off and said it was too late for that. Apparently, Amy had been attracting attention ever since I had won the martial arts tournament, and several nobles had expressed their desire to hire her. She'd turned down those offers since they were clearly opportunistic, but there was a possibility that some nobles would present offers that were difficult to refuse in the future. Her family had actually planned on asking Marquis Sammons, who had ties with the Tamers guild, to back her. This seemed like a good opportunity for that.

From the perspective of someone seeking support, perhaps we were underestimating Marquis Sammons. But according to Gramps, there shouldn't have been any issues since he belonged to the same faction and had a good relationship with the royal family. In fact, if Marquis Sammons were to hear about this, he would probably want to collaborate with the royal family and become Amy's joint guardian.

"For Marquis Sammons, not only is this an opportunity to establish a relationship with Tenma by helping Amy, but it's a chance for the royal family to cooperate more with the marquis's family. It's a mutually beneficial arrangement," explained Gramps. "Tenma, you should be more aware of your worth."

Amy's family just nodded in agreement.

As it turned out, there was no need to worry about finances though, because they had decided the next day that they would earn money by selling the silk Spidey produced to the royal family. That would be enough to cover her tuition and living expenses, including some pocket money. But since they didn't know how much silk the spider would produce yet, they would borrow money from the royal family at first (with me cosigning) and then pay them back. However, since she would be admitted with their recommendation, she would get a steep discount on tuition, and she might even get it partially or completely waived depending on her grades. So, as long as the spider produced even a little bit of silk, there wouldn't be a problem.

Even though I felt like we'd caused Amy and her family a lot of trouble with all these discussions, it all seemed to be heading in a favorable direction. I felt relieved.

If you were curious about the fugitive Amur and her tracker Blanca, it seemed like he was very close to capturing her. It'd only be a matter of time before Amur would be apprehended.

"All right, there are no issues with walking. Let's pick up the pace a bit," I said, and increased the speed of Valley Wind 2.0, which I had officially renamed Thunderbolt (Raiden).

Both Valley Wind (Tanikaze) and Raiden were the names of sumo wrestlers. They had a master-disciple relationship and, among sumo wrestlers, were considered two of the strongest. Now, I know I'm going off on a tangent, but although I got Thunderbolt's name from the wrestler, Valley Wind's name originally had a different origin. It was originally a play on the name of a certain eccentric's beloved horse, but once I remembered it was *also* the name of a wrestler, I decided to name the new Valley Wind after his disciple. I also chose that name since Thunderbolt had a magic core infused with a bicorn, which had lightning attributes.



“I think Thunderbolt surpasses Valley Wind in terms of overall abilities,” I said, switching from a brisk walk to a canter, and then to a full-speed gallop, as I circled around the city of Sagan. However, despite the increase in its abilities, Thunderbolt was a bit harder to handle than Valley Wind, but not beyond my capabilities. It wouldn’t be a huge problem.

However, there was something even more surprising about Thunderbolt.

“One of my goals was always to create a golem with its own will, but I never thought it would be so easy.”

It was clear to me that Thunderbolt sometimes acted on its own. For example, it would fold its knees to lower itself so I could mount it without being commanded. It would also avoid mud puddles I hadn’t even noticed, and it even defeated monsters that appeared on its own.

Also, Thunderbolt didn’t need to have Rocket inside it to steer like Valley Wind did. Although there was still space for Rocket to fit inside, since Thunderbolt’s abilities surpassed Valley Wind’s even without him in there, there was no need for him to do so. Unmanned, Thunderbolt seemed to have thirty percent more power than Valley Wind when the latter didn’t have Rocket inside and was still ten percent more powerful than when Valley Wind *did* have Rocket as a pilot. If I pushed it to full speed, I thought Thunderbolt could probably exceed 200 kilometers per hour, depending on the conditions. He wasn’t going that fast before; he topped out around maybe 150 kilometers per hour. It was just a guess on my part—since a full gallop came with a lot of jostling, it wasn’t something I’d do regularly.

“Now that Rocket can be free, I’ll have more firepower too,” I said.

Rocket wouldn’t be able to keep up with me when I was riding Thunderbolt, but he could ride either Shiromaru or Solomon to solve that problem. And if he gave them commands, they’d definitely be stronger that way.

I decided that since Thunderbolt seemed to have his own will, he should’ve been called an artificial monster instead. And as such, his power couldn’t be measured against the monsters near Sagan. It wasn’t feasible to test them against Shiromaru, and it would be too cramped to fight in the dungeon. His exact strength was unknown, and although there might’ve been differences

when it came to attributes, I'd say he wouldn't lose easily against even Rank S monsters.

"That should do it."

Since I'd spent a few hours riding him, I decided to end the test-drive there. I went back to my original spot and spotted several people there waiting for me.

"Oh, you're back!" said Kriss. She led a group comprising herself, Queen Maria, Luna, and the knights.

"What are you doing here? And where's Tida?" I asked.

They were obviously waiting for me, but I confirmed it just in case. Besides, I really was curious about where Tida was.

"We're waiting for you, of course. It looked like something interesting was going on, and I was curious about your new Valley Wind made of bicorn materials. As for Tida, it seems he's very concerned with making himself look good at the moment..." the queen replied and approached me as I was still on Thunderbolt.

I dismounted and was about to put him away in my magic bag, but she said she wanted to look at him, so I left him out.

The queen walked around Thunderbolt and examined him from various angles. Luna quietly approached him from behind and tried to mount him. That resulted in something very unexpected.

"Grrr... Gaaah!" A threatening noise came from Thunderbolt's mouth and he opened it up wide.

"Eek!"

"Kyaaah!"

Luna screamed loudly when she saw Thunderbolt's fearsome face up close and ran behind me in fear. Queen Maria was also near Thunderbolt and let out an adorable shriek. She fell onto her backside.

"Your Majesty!"

In response, Kriss and the other knights rushed over to her and drew their

swords against Thunderbolt. Thunderbolt ignored them and instead continued to intimidate Luna, who was still hiding behind me.

Honestly, it didn't even register to me that they had screamed or that Luna panicked and retreated. All I could think about was one thing.

"He made a sound and opened his mouth!"

That was it. I'd checked him over meticulously before, but I hadn't noticed that he could open his mouth at all. And the fact that he could make sounds meant that there was some kind of unknown mechanism inside his throat.

I peered inside Thunderbolt's open mouth and found a cavity that went back towards his neck, just like I'd expected. I stuck my hand inside, but I couldn't feel anything there, so maybe it just led to the space that was meant for Rocket. I tried asking Rocket if he knew what was going on but he didn't know either, so he decided to enter Thunderbolt's mouth to investigate.

Thunderbolt seemed temperamental when intimidating Luna, but he compliantly listened to and obeyed me and Rocket. Even still, he remained cautious of Luna and kept his face turned towards her.

"Aha! So it was connected after all!"

Several seconds after Rocket had entered Thunderbolt's mouth, the entrance to the space for him on Thunderbolt's back opened and Rocket emerged from the inside. It seemed like a part of the front portion of the space could be removed, allowing him to pass through from there. Rocket reported that there were protrusions inside the throat, and when they vibrated, they could produce sound. Rocket also reported there were some unfamiliar patterns inside the throat area. He accidentally touched them, but it seemed they weren't dangerous.

"So we won't know anything until I interrogate Master Gantz..."

Kriss came up behind me. "More importantly, Tenma, will you explain what just happened so we can understand too? Now, of course we'll overlook it because it's you, but under normal circumstances, you could've gone to jail for that!" she demanded in a slightly angry tone.

"Well..."

I explained to the queen and Kriss what I understood so far, including the fact that Thunderbolt was threatening Luna because she tried to touch him. Fortunately, Luna was the only one who had attempted to do so, so he considered no one else to be an enemy. It almost seemed like Thunderbolt's memories were a mixture of his time as Valley Wind and as a bicorn. He recognized me as his master and Rocket and the others as his companions, at least. Thunderbolt and I could communicate with each other to some extent, but he couldn't grasp finer nuances like Rocket and the others did. However, Rocket seemed to be able to communicate perfectly with Thunderbolt.

"Amazing. There's no other word for it," Queen Maria said as she stroked Thunderbolt. He disliked being touched by strangers, but he was okay with those I permitted. His strong sense of caution was likely related to his being made out of the bicorn's magic core and materials.

"Tenma, if we can touch him, do you think we can ride him too?"

It looked like Kriss wanted to ride Thunderbolt. But when I asked him through Rocket, Thunderbolt seemed resistant to let anyone besides me ride him. Rocket had a gentle expression on his face when telling me this, but he was relaying a very firm refusal.

However, there was one loophole, and that was if someone rode along with me. Rocket told me that Thunderbolt had given permission, and once I told everyone that, Queen Maria was the first to eagerly raise her hand. Kriss wanted to ride first, but she obviously couldn't cut in front of the queen.

The queen sat behind me, her arms wrapped around my waist. Rocket supported her so she wouldn't be thrown off, but all the guards except for Kriss looked nervous.

I ignored them and instructed Thunderbolt to go faster. The area I'd been testing him in extended far into the distance and was flat and relatively smooth, making little impact on our ride. Still, I didn't want to be too tough on the queen, so I only intended to let him run for a few minutes.

But after Queen Maria briefly experienced a speed of over a hundred kilometers per hour, the only thing she had to say was...

"Wow, this is incredible! This is way more exhilarating than riding an ordinary

horse!”

In this world, horses could probably reach speeds close to a hundred kilometers per hour with magic, but only for short bursts of time. They couldn’t sustain those speeds like Thunderbolt could. Not only that, but it would be impossible for an ordinary horse to achieve that speed with two people on board, even with magic.

“Grandma! Me next!”

“It’s my turn next, Princess Luna!”

Kriss and Luna were arguing about whose turn it was, but it seemed like the queen wasn’t satisfied yet. She pretended not to hear them and gestured for me to continue.

Thunderbolt had been running for almost an hour straight, and according to Rocket, it seemed like he was getting tired. I decided we should take a break. Luna and Kriss seemed to be suspicious of Thunderbolt and Rocket, but they knew if they forced him to do something he didn’t want to do, it would just cause a commotion. They had no other choice but to quietly wait for their next chance. Also, since I’d ridden for over an hour (or twice that, if you counted earlier), I was pretty tired myself.

“Phew... There were some minor troubles, but in the end, we just reaffirmed that Tenma is exceptional, didn’t we?”

Kriss and the others burst out laughing in response to the queen’s statement. I was a little annoyed by their reactions, but since I couldn’t argue about Thunderbolt, I decided to ignore them and instead asked the queen why she’d come here. After all, it was a little odd that the queen of this kingdom would bring the prince and princess just because of my letter.

“Oh my! Don’t look at me like that!”

The queen seemed shocked and covered her face with the fan she had taken out of her dress. Since her actions seemed too deliberate, I kept quiet and continued to watch her face until she eventually sighed and told me the truth.

“I just have a tiny favor to ask,” she began. “You’ll have to go a bit far, but that shouldn’t be a problem now that you have Thunderbolt, right?”

“Well, I haven’t raised my rank as an adventurer yet, so I can’t accept direct quests.”

As a rule, you weren’t allowed to take on personal quests directly from a client until you were Rank B or above, not unless the guild made a special exception due to your abilities and achievements.

“Tenma, you won the martial arts tournament, slew an earth dragon, and thwarted a coup. Do you really think you lack in ability and achievements? Besides, the guild would never turn down a request from the royal family!”

In other words, it was entirely up to me whether I would accept or not.

“And don’t worry; it’s just a quest to deliver a letter to someone. Since it’s far away, it will take some time.”

It didn’t seem like it would be a big deal. I was about to ask her for more details, but she said it would have to wait until we got back to the apartment. I expected her to tell me more at their estate, but since I would need to talk to Gramps first, I thought it would be better to go back to the apartment.

Kriss and Luna were disappointed that they didn’t get to ride Thunderbolt, but they couldn’t go against the queen’s orders and obediently followed.

As soon as we got back to the apartment, I noticed Amy and Tida playing outside. Well—they actually seemed to be talking about something instead of playing. It seemed like Amy was the one initiating the conversation, so maybe there had been some progress.

Amy noticed us approaching first and greeted us. “Oh! Welcome back, Master.”

Tida followed suit a few moments later, but his expression made it obvious that he wished he could’ve spent more time alone with her.

“I’m back. Is Gramps here?”

“Yes, he returned a little while ago.”

“Then Blanca returned too, carrying Amur over his shoulder,” Tida informed me.

Apparently, Blanca had safely captured Amur. He probably wouldn’t let down

his guard again soon, so I had a feeling our farewell was swiftly approaching.

“Oh, Blanca’s back too? What perfect timing!” the queen said.

I had a bad feeling about this. All I could do was pray that nothing bad happened.

I went inside the carriage to discuss the queen’s request with Gramps. “I’m back.”

However, I found Blanca and a very securely bound Amur inside. Blanca had been waiting for me so he could say goodbye before promptly returning home.

“Perfect timing, Tenma. We’re just about to leave to return to our homeland. We owe you a lot for everything. If you ever find yourself in the Southern Autonomous Region, you’re always welcome,” Blanca told me. He was about to carry Amur outside but he was suddenly interrupted by the queen.

“Could you wait a moment?” she said. “I’d like to ask you a favor.”

Blanca seemed bewildered by Queen Maria’s sudden request and tried to decline, saying they really had to hurry home. However, the queen said it had to do with their homeland, so Blanca reluctantly sat down to hear her out.

“The favor I want to ask of Tenma is to deliver a letter to Viscount Lobo, who governs the Southern Autonomous Region. So, the favor I’d like to ask you, Blanca, is if you would guide him there.”

That did seem like a reasonable request since they were already heading back home. However, Blanca didn’t seem so sure about it.

“So you want me to introduce Tenma to my brother? Is this a personal request or an order from the royal family?” he asked.

“It’s a *request* from the royal family,” insisted the queen. “You can refuse, of course, but you have nothing to lose by accepting. There will be an appropriate reward too. I think it would be quite beneficial for you to accept, don’t you?”

There seemed to be some tension between the queen and Blanca, but I felt that there were very few people in this world who could successfully negotiate with the queen. A resolution was quickly reached when Blanca agreed to take on the quest.

Still, I was curious about Blanca referring to the viscount as “my brother.” If he were really his brother, that would mean Lobo was Amur’s father.

At that point, my gaze naturally shifted towards Amur. Even though she was tied up, she had her chest puffed out proudly and wore a smug expression on her face. It certainly never seemed like she was the daughter of a viscount from her typical behavior.

Just to be sure, I asked Blanca and the queen about it, and they both confirmed she was indeed the viscount’s daughter.

“It’s up to you, Tenma. Will you accept?” the queen asked, and Amur looked towards me expectantly too.

I was financially comfortable, and there was also Amy to consider. Plus, I wanted to continue dungeon diving.

Gramps had been silent until now, but he chimed in. “I don’t think it would hurt for you to accept it,” he said. “You’ve only been to places inland, Tenma. I think this is a good opportunity for you. Plus, you’ll get a generous reward and have an escort.”

Amur was the one who gave the biggest reaction to Gramps’s comment, of course. From her perspective, she was going to stay in Sagan to be with me and had been running from Blanca ever since. Her capture had ruined her plans, so the fact that I was going to now deliver a letter to her father was a sudden development in her favor. However, since she was still tied up with rope because of Blanca (and she still had a gag in her mouth), all she could do was let out muffled cries and struggle. I had no idea what she was actually saying.

“What’s the content of the letter, Queen Maria?” Blanca asked politely as he held Amur down. She was flopping around like a fish on land.

“Well, I can’t tell you that, of course. It’s an official letter from the royal family to Viscount Lobo, after all. But don’t worry. It’s basically just small talk.”

I could sense quiet tension between the two of them, but Blanca wouldn’t be able to break the queen’s will.

He relented. “So it’s not like there’s some unreasonable demand in it, then?”

Queen Maria nodded in response, so Blanca relaxed a bit.

Wanting to change the subject, I turned to Blanca and asked him something I'd been wondering. "By the way, if he's Viscount Lobo, does that mean that Amur's full name is Amur Lobo?"

Blanca, Queen Maria, and Amur all shook their heads.

"No, where we live, very few people go by their family names, including the leader of our clans. You'll only hear that name when he's referred to by his official title, Viscount Lobo. And to be precise, he's an honorary viscount."

The Southern Autonomous Region was said to be a somewhat unusual region since it was originally inhabited by multiple clans and hadn't originally been a part of the kingdom. But long ago, there was a war with another country and it became a territory. After many twists and turns, it later was referred to as an autonomous region. And since multiple clans lived there, the leader of the territory changed frequently and many did not use their family name. According to Blanca, using your family name invites a lot of trouble.

"Will you accept this request, Tenma?" Queen Maria asked.

I said I would and signed the contract right then and there. The reason everything went so smoothly was that the queen assumed I'd accept the quest. She already had the contract prepared.

"I want you to go as soon as possible," she told me. "I'm sure you have preparations to make, so would you agree to depart in about a week? I'll take responsibility for Amy and continue those discussions, so there's no need to worry about that."

The queen seemed really excited about Amy, so I thought it probably wouldn't be an issue to let her take that over. We decided to go ahead and get ready for our journey. Honestly, there wasn't much to prepare; all I had to do was put my belongings in my magic bag. The only other things left to do were to buy more food and prepare some small provisions. And at that point, Blanca decided to untie Amur at last, since there was no longer a reason for her to run away.

“What are you doing, Tenma?”

The next day, we started getting ready for our journey south. I was working on repairing the magic bags I’d found in the lake in the dungeon when Luna came over. I discussed what I was doing, and when she noticed that there were multiple bags, she looked at me expectantly, wondering if she was going to get one. Kriss noticed this and took care of Luna for me, bringing her back to the queen. Kriss must’ve thought Luna was getting in my way. Luna desperately tried to resist, but she stood no chance against Kriss. She finally calmed down once the queen glared at her.

“I think that should do it.”

I was so absorbed in repairing the bags that it was somehow time for dinner when I was done. Everyone else had mostly finished their own preparations. Gramps and Blanca were currently discussing which route we should take to get to the Southern Autonomous Region, and Amur was chowing down on a meat skewer next to me.

“What else... This, this, this...” Now that I had finished repairing the magic bags, I tossed various things that could come in handy inside of them. “Now I just have to give these to Amy.”

I filled two of the bags with preserved food for emergencies, magic cores that could be exchanged for money, and several guard golem cores. The golems I chose weren’t like the ones I made for the queen, but they were just about as strong. I had about ten of them, and I’d probably rank them as Rank B monsters if I had to.

“You’re very overprotective, Tenma...” The queen looked surprised, but honestly, I wasn’t sure they’d be enough if a powerful noble tried to do something to Amy.

“I know there are people who don’t think highly of me, and they might target her instead.”

If there was anyone stupid enough to target Amy, as her master, I had an obligation to take action. And of course I had no intention of showing any mercy to them, no matter who the opponent might be.

I told the queen as such and Gramps agreed. He said that Amy was his grand-apprentice, so it was only natural.

Once the queen saw Gramps and me nodding to each other, she quickly tried to grab Tida, but I said that I had no intention of interfering in anyone else's romantic relationships. However, I also mentioned that the rule wouldn't apply if, by some mistake, Tida went berserk and tried to forcefully make Amy his own, disregarding her feelings...

Perhaps because of that, the queen began to discuss appointing a bodyguard for Amy with Kriss. Since the queen said she would take responsibility for Amy, if anything happened, that meant the royal family would bear responsibility for it. This was a very serious issue. Honestly, I thought they were going overboard, but at the same time, I was happy to know that the concern for Amy was genuine.

It was late at night by the time I'd gotten everything ready for Amy, so I decided to call it a day.

We were planning on buying provisions the next day, but before that, I had to visit Master Gantz to interrogate him. I wanted to know just what mechanisms he'd rigged Thunderbolt with before I departed for my journey.

"Infiltration successful. Target spotted."

The sun hadn't risen yet and it was still dark outside. Apart from the craftsmen who started work early in the morning and the guards patrolling the area, no one else walked around outside.

I broke into the master's workshop. This might sound like trespassing, but his apprentices had already given me permission. Last night, I had remembered that I still had to sell goblins to the guild, and on the way there, I'd bumped into Master Gantz's apprentices and had decided to include them in my plan. They had been going out for drinks at the tavern. Honestly, all I had to do was bribe them with enough money to buy a few drinks—they had sold their master out for one silver coin.

"Ahh, what a nice sleep... Huh? What the—?"

The master finally woke up and shouted when he found himself tied to a pole.

“Shut up, Ma—er, ya bloody sot!”

“Keep it down. It’s first thing in the morning, Ma—er, ya drunkard!”

“That’s why yer wife left ya, Ma—er, ya damned fool!”

The last one was a bit harsh, but basically, it seemed there was a theme here. By the way, the people hurling insults at the master were disguised as apprentice blacksmiths whom I’ll call A, B, and C.

They knew I was going to tie up Master Gantz, so they had come here in anticipation of that.

“Stop joking around and untie me! Hey, aren’t you embarrassed going around looking like that? Especially you, Tenma!”

The apprentices were dressed in casual clothes with paper bags over their heads, but as I was dressed like someone who was going to work at the capital, I didn’t appreciate his comments. Well, I *was* wearing a mask similar to a certain murderer who’d show up on Fridays, but still. It’s not like I was wearing this outfit because I *wanted* to.

“All jokes aside, do you have anything to tell me about Thunderbolt, Master?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about!”

He decided to play dumb, so I brought out Thunderbolt, put him in front of Master, and instructed Thunderbolt to open his mouth.

“Are you *still* trying to say you don’t know?”

Only then did Master Gantz admit that he’d put the mechanism inside Thunderbolt’s mouth. Apparently, he had wanted to try and see if Thunderbolt could use a Breath-type attack, but he had given up halfway through because it was impossible for him to generate a powerful spell like Breath. He had ended up leaving it in the space that was connected to the area for Rocket. He intended it to be an evacuation route for Rocket, and the magic circles and the protrusions inside of his throat were remnants of his experiment.

“By the way, Tenma, Thunderbolt’s head is actually unfinished.”

I didn't know what he meant by that, but then he told me he'd intended to place bicorn horns on top of Thunderbolt's head so he'd look more like a bicorn.

"And I've got a hunch that once we put the horns on, it'll boost his Lightning attribute," he added.

He wasn't positive, but his theory was that if the bicorn's will was strong inside of Thunderbolt, using bicorn materials to bring his appearance closer to a bicorn would be advantageous. I decided to follow Master Gantz's suggestions and gave him the bicorn horns. I didn't have any other use for them at the moment, so if there was a possibility that they'd improve Thunderbolt's performance, I figured it would be better to use them like this.

"One of them is broken though, so that will be shorter than the other."

He said it would take him until tomorrow evening at the latest to finish, so I decided to leave Thunderbolt with him and go shopping. It was frustrating to me that he kept getting his way, but if it led to a better Thunderbolt in the end, then I'd just have to deal with it.

As for my shopping, I needed sugar and salt first. I also wanted some spices, but I heard that many of them came from the Southern Autonomous Region. So, I planned to purchase the bare minimum here in Sagan.

I wandered around the city until evening and was able to get more than twice as much salt and sugar as I intended. I also bought all the spices I wanted. There were some impulse purchases too, but those were mostly fruits and vegetables, so it wasn't like I was wasting money.

When I returned to the carriage, the queen and the others were relaxing there. However, I couldn't see Tida, so I asked Kriss where he was. She told me Amy was showing him around the city. Apparently, Tida thought he was on a date, but he had a ton of bodyguards following him without his knowledge. I thought that was a bit of overkill, but there were plenty of strong people left here to protect the queen like Gramps, so Kriss thought she'd be fine staying here on her own.

I muttered, "Slacker," in response, and Kriss told me it was her privilege as the captain. But the moment she said that, the queen's eyes became a little sharper so I had a feeling she was in for a lecture later.

The other three also seemed to have nearly finished their preparations today, so we decided to take it easy until our scheduled departure date in a few days.

“Tenma, I’m bored. Let’s go shopping,” Amur said the next day after breakfast. There was something I still wanted to get, so I immediately agreed. She looked shocked. “Are you being affectionate with me, Tenma?!”

“I don’t have to go with you, you know.”

“I’m only joking! Let’s go!”

And so we went shopping. I tried inviting everyone else, but they all declined with smiles on their faces. For that reason, it was just the two of us, and Amur was in such a good mood that it was a bit sickening. From time to time, she’d chirp, “Date! Date!” but it seemed like she was unaware she was saying it out loud.

“This is our first stop. Wait here,” I said when we reached my first stop. Amur declined and insisted on coming with me. But as soon as she walked in...

“I can’t...”

She immediately went back outside our destination—an apothecary. As such, the inside of the shop was filled with the scents of medicine herbs and various medicines. For those who weren’t used to those smells, they could be very pungent. They could even make someone sick, and it seemed like beastfolk were especially sensitive to the odors.

“All right, I’ll take this, and this... Are there any other herbs here that can be used to treat wounds? Looks like they just have dried ones... Well, I’ll take this one and this one. I’ll also get some stomach medicine and antipyretics. Oh, those are dried too? Whatever.”

And so I bought various herbs and medicines.

Mom had taught me the basics of making medicine, so the ones I used were mostly homemade. But using my own wouldn’t result in me learning much, so occasionally, when I found highly effective medicines, I would buy them and check out their effects.

This shop didn't have many high-quality items, but the other apothecaries weren't really any better, so I just chose the best items I could find.

I finished up my shopping and went outside to find Amur standing in front of a nearby food stall, stuffing her face with meat skewers.

The moment she spotted me, she trotted over but then turned her nose up at the smell. "Oof. You reek, Tenma."

I was used to the smell of herbs so I didn't mind it, but apparently, she found them to be really stinky.

"All right, let's finish our shopping."

She quickly finished her meat skewer and fell into step beside me.

"Sorry, but I have to stop by here too," I told her.

There was another apothecary a few hundred meters away, and I went in there to buy a few more things. This shop sold good-quality medicine balls, so I bought several different types.

"Smelly..."

After that, I went around to a few more apothecaries to buy all sorts of herbs and medicines. I bought small numbers of herbs I didn't have on hand at every shop, so in the end, I had a large quantity of them. Unfortunately for Amur, it seemed like the distinctive odor of the herbs (especially the strong odor of poultices) had clung to me. She had been looking forward to shopping with me, so now she was in a bad mood. In the end, all she had ended up doing was waiting outside of shops and stopping by food stalls to kill time. Now that I'd achieved my goal of obtaining herbs, I was going to accompany her to the shops *she* wanted to visit, but she was so cranky that she declared she was going back to the carriage. She hated the smell of herbs and didn't want to walk around with me anymore.

And so we returned to the carriage. Everyone who was still there was surprised at how cranky Amur was and how stinky I was.

"I admire your passion for apothecary studies, but I think you need to learn proper etiquette towards women first, Tenma..." Queen Maria said.

I decided to pretend I hadn't heard her. That was mostly because I didn't think it was a good idea for a man to argue with a woman about this, but more than that, I didn't have enough EXP to beat a married woman like the queen. When faced with a battle like this, it was wise not to even enter the arena when the opponent had all of the advantages. Some people might've called it running away, but there's no shame in running away from an opponent you can never beat!

Probably.

Now that I'd dodged the queen's verbal attack, I decided to use my free time before I needed to go to Master Gantz's workshop by making some medicines using the herbs I'd purchased. Amur and Blanca evacuated the carriage before I started, probably because the smell of the herbs was too strong. Queen Maria and Luna also seemed dismayed by the odor, but their curiosity must've gotten the best of them because they stayed in the carriage. Kriss wanted to leave too, but she lingered since the queen remained. Gramps was used to the smell, so he just sat back with a cup of tea and ate some sweets.

"I think this'll work."

As I was rehydrating the dried herbs with water, Amur came back inside. Her voice sounded muffled because she had apparently plugged up her nose. Her nostrils were packed quite carefully and it seemed painful, but she pretended like she was fine so no one said a word.

Right then, I was making an ointment using bicorn fat. It was actually quite easy to make, so if you followed the directions carefully, even an amateur could make it.

First, you needed to boil the bicorn fat in water until it became a liquid. Then, you'd continue boiling it for thirty more minutes to completely disinfect it.

Next, you'd grind up the medicinal herbs while adding clean water. I was using dried herbs this time, so I used the water I'd used to rehydrate them earlier and then I used a fine mesh tea strainer to remove the leaves and stems.

Finally, you needed to whisk the slightly cooled oil and strained liquid from the medicinal herbs together until the mixture formed peaks. After all that, the

ointment was complete.

I sterilized several small jars in boiling water and filled them with the ointment to make it easier and more convenient to use. I then sealed the jars carefully to make sure no air got inside.

I used this same process to make hand cream, but for that, I used a small amount of perfume and water in the mixture. Then, I gave them to the ladies as presents to butter them up. I had made quite a bit—so much so that I could give them out to all my friends in Sagan as well.

Once that was done, I gave some to Queen Maria and the others. I also gave Kriss enough for Jeanne, Aura, and Aina, and I gave the queen additional jars for Princess Isabella and Princess Mizaria as well.

“Well, I’m going over to Master Gantz’s place now. I might be late getting back, so go on and eat dinner without me,” I told Gramps before I left for the workshop. Amur tried to come with me, but I told her I didn’t know how late I’d come home so she had to stay. A man and woman being out late at night together wasn’t a wise idea.

“Are you done, Master?” I asked as soon as I spotted him inside the workshop. He told me he had been able to safely attach the horns on Thunderbolt. “There’s something else I need your help with.”

His shop was still suspended for a few days as punishment, so I figured as long as the people here had some free time, I could ask them to help me out. I was going to use Thunderbolt as a bargaining chip if he seemed reluctant—I’d let him off the hook for putting strange mechanisms in him without my permission—but there was no need. Master Gantz readily agreed without even asking what I wanted. Now that he’d killed some time working on Thunderbolt, the only other thing he had to do was drink, so he was grateful I was giving him something else to occupy himself with.

“I want you to help me make some knives, short swords, and then some pots and pans from the magic iron I used for Valley Wind.”

Master Gantz specialized in weapons and armor, so I wasn’t sure about asking him to make pots and pans, but he nodded and started to check the furnace and his tools. Later, he told me that when he was an apprentice, he’d made

pots during his training to make money.

“I have close to a ton of magic iron, so I’ll give half of it to you to thank you for your help, and I’ll use the other half to make things,” I said. “Will you be making knives and short swords? I figure the apprentices can make the pots and pans. There’s something else I want to make too.”

“That’s fine, but I think you’ve got the wrong idea about something, Tenma. Valley Wind wasn’t made out of magic iron, but magic *steel*. I think the magic iron had changed.”

He explained further and told me that when you infuse magic iron with a large amount of magical energy, it can become magic steel—a magical material one level higher than magic iron. It was slightly inferior to mythril in terms of hardness, but in a way, it was even rarer than mythril. If you had enough money to buy magic steel, you’d probably choose to buy mythril anyway since it was lighter and more durable. In terms of price, magic steel was only about twenty percent cheaper than mythril. Since magic iron was less than half the price of mythril, it was a better deal. Also, magic steel was a little lighter than magic iron too. Because of all of these factors, you didn’t see much of it on the market.

“Well, now you can see why it would be a waste to use a first-class material like that on pots and pans!” he said.

Now that the master was finished with his explanation, we got to work.

He set out to make fifty knives. On top of those, I also wanted fifty machetes, ten hunting knives, and thirty throwing knives. Each one would be made of iron from the blade to the handle. The throwing knives would be about fifteen centimeters long, similar to a kunai. After he took care of those, I had him make ten short swords too, and I left the design for those to him.

The apprentices were in charge of making ten smaller pots, ten larger pots with two handles, and ten frying pans. Of the ten frying pans, five were small and five were large. It seemed like the apprentices often made pots and pans as part of their training, so they said they could complete the order in two days. Once they were done, they would help Master Gantz with his work.

Meanwhile, I would make some new weapons and cooking utensils myself. I was going to make shuriken, otherwise known as throwing stars. I’d start by

taking a square of iron and sharpening the four corners until it made a star shape. I was planning on putting a magic circle with summoning magic imbued in them so they'd return to your hand after you threw them. I got the idea from a book I read before written by Marquis Sammons. As for the cooking utensils, I was going to make a takoyaki pan, a pan to make obanyaki (large, stuffed pancakes), and I also had plans to make a large iron hotplate so I could cook okonomiyaki.

First, I decided to start crafting some iron plates, which were quite easy to make. I poured softened magic steel into a mold for it to set and cool naturally. I used this method to make three iron plates of varied sizes. One would ultimately be the takoyaki pan, so I searched through the tools until I found a hammer with a rounded tip. I used it to make the half-dome shapes I needed. The pan would be big enough to make fifty takoyaki at a time, so it would be suited for home use.

As for the obanyaki pan, I actually made two that could cook five pieces at a time. Each pancake would turn out to be around ten centimeters in diameter and three centimeters thick, so they would be pretty filling.

But after I made the obanyaki pans, I realized I'd made a huge miscalculation.

"The sun is going to come up soon..."

I had been so absorbed in making everything that I'd lost track of time. It seemed like the same was true for Master Gantz and the apprentices as well because they were all way ahead of schedule.

"We should probably get to sleep," I said.

"Great idea!" everyone cried out in unison.

Now that we were aware of the time, we all suddenly got sleepy. Everyone decided to find a corner of the workshop to get some rest in.

We woke up after lunchtime, filled our bellies with food I'd bought beforehand at the food stalls, and then resumed our work.

"Should I hit it like this, Tenma?"

“Tenma! I burned myself!”

“Luna, I told you to be careful! I’m sorry, Tenma. Can I have some medicine?”

“Master, the fire’s out of control!”

But for some reason, the workshop had become more like a science classroom. That was because Gramps thought it’d be a good idea to bring Amur and everyone else here.

“This kind of turned into a mess...” Gramps, the ringleader, said cheerily as he slurped on some tea. Next to the ringleader, Kriss and Blanca—who were *supposed* to be serving as chaperones—were also enjoying their tea.

The queen was currently at a meeting with representatives from Sagan.

The reason everyone had come here was because Gramps had been worried since I hadn’t come home last night. He’d wanted to come check on me, and Amur took advantage of it. Blanca was worried that Amur would get out of control so he came along too. Luna and Amy were curious about what I was doing, and since Amy said she was going, Tida decided to come along as well.

Kriss had originally planned on escorting the queen to the meeting, but since Tida and Luna had said they wanted to come see me, the queen had told Kriss to go with them instead. The remaining guards would accompany the queen. Master Gantz didn’t like the idea of having children or amateurs in his workshop, but he uncharacteristically didn’t say a word. I had a feeling it was because there were members of the royal family here, but if something happened, I was sure he would hold me accountable. Also, I thought the bag Kriss had handed him might’ve had something to do with it.

Anyway, I asked the four of them to help me make the throwing stars. Even if they failed, it would cause the least amount of damage among the various projects while still letting them feel like they’d done some blacksmithing. While they did that, I finished up my iron plates. All I really had to do was polish the surfaces and slightly sand the edges, so I could still keep an eye on the four of them.

As they enjoyed themselves with blacksmithing, the master worked on the throwing knives at an incredible speed. He completed them within an hour or

two. Since he was a master, I suppose it wasn't a surprise that he was on a completely different level from me and his apprentices in terms of speed and accuracy. By the time evening rolled around, the apprentices had completed their assignments and joined the master in his work, which sped up their progress even more. But a big factor in things moving more quickly was that Gramps took everyone home (forcibly, when it came to one person) before dark.

"Mwa ha ha! Take a look at this!"

Just before the sun rose, Master Gantz finished the very last short sword. Now all that was left were the machetes and hunting knives, but he boasted that with the help of his apprentices, he could finish all of them by the end of the day. However, the apprentices were shaking their heads, so I had a feeling he was exaggerating.

"Well, I'm going to sleep. I'll continue after I wake up," Master Gantz declared, then promptly began snoozing in a corner of the workshop, just like he had yesterday.

I decided if that was the case, I might as well return to the carriage. I had taken a short nap today, so I was feeling good enough to make it back home.

Gramps was already awake when I returned to the carriage. We chatted briefly about the work, and then I decided to take a quick bath and go to sleep. While I slept, Rocket, Shiromaru, and Solomon had crawled into my bed with me so it got a bit hot, but since I hadn't been able to spend much time with them lately, I just put up with it. Amur had tried to get into bed with me too, but I had kicked her out. And after that'd happened, she received her usual swift bonk on the head from Blanca.

A few days later, it was finally time for us to depart. We had finished all our preparations the day before and arrived at the southern gate of Sagan early in the morning.

Amy, her family, the Dawnswords, the members of the Tamers guild, and the royals and their escorts were all there to see us off. Queen Maria and the others were supposed to leave before us, but Tida insisted on saying goodbye, so the

queen had agreed to extend their stay. Of course, he claimed he'd wanted to see us off too, but I had a feeling he had another reason he wanted to stay behind. It was obvious to everyone.

"Well, it's time to leave," I said. "Amy, study hard. The next time I see you will probably be back in the capital. If there's any trouble at all, just ask the people from Kukuri Village for help, Aura, or her older sister Aina, and they'll take care of you. Don't be shy, okay?"

"Okay, Master!"

I'd given Amy a letter addressed to Aunt Martha and Uncle Mark explaining everything, and I had sent letters ahead to the castle and to Jeanne and Aura as well, but Amy might've had better luck asking Aina for help if she was in trouble.

Amy nodded cheerfully in response. One of the short swords Master Gantz had made hung at her hip. It was engraved with the Otori family crest, so if anyone who knew it saw it, they would know she was related to me. At the very least, adventurers, guild members, and the knights from the capital would recognize it immediately. I thought there were probably some adventurers who might foolishly show up and try to target her, but if they saw that she was someone who had a relationship with me and the royal family, that would probably ward off most attempts at criminal activity. At least, I hoped so. That was also why I'd given her bodyguard golems (and weapons). I had also instructed her to use Gramps's mansion as a place of refuge, just in case.

"You let me take care of Amy. Also, I want you to be careful, Tenma. There are many eccentric people in the Southern Autonomous Region," the queen warned me with her eyes fixed on Amur and Blanca, who stood behind me. They looked away but didn't react otherwise.

"I'll be very careful. Well then, I, Tenma Otori, Rank C adventurer, am setting off to deliver this letter to Viscount Lobo."

"I'm counting on you. I'm sure you'll be fine, but I want you to prioritize your life, even if that means the letter gets destroyed. And that's an order from the queen," she stressed.

"Yes, Your Majesty! Well, we'll be going now."

The queen and I exchanged a rather dramatic farewell, and after saying goodbye to everyone else, we climbed into the carriage being pulled by Thunderbolt and headed off to the Southern Autonomous Region.

“Bye, Master!” Amy waved.

“Be careful, Tenma!” Tida said.

“Good luck, Tenma!” Luna called.

“Don’t forget to bring me back a souvenir!” Leena and Mennas both said.

“Have fun!” Galatt said.

“Don’t do anything reckless!” Jin called.

Everyone shouted and waved to us. I leaned out the window and waved back, but within ten minutes, all of their figures had faded into the distance.

“We’re not in a hurry, so let’s take the slow road. You’re in charge of navigation, Blanca.”

“Leave it to me. There are lots of interesting places along the way.”

Since Blanca knew the route the best, he was in charge. He sat in the driver’s seat of the carriage and looked so happy he could make a child cry. He would have to drive for much of the way, but it was a lot less of a burden than his original plan of walking back home with Amur. Plus, we were using Thunderbolt, so he might even arrive back home quicker than he’d planned. That was why he’d said we had plenty of time to make detours along the way, and he selected a few stops for us.

It would take about one and a half to two months to reach the Southern Autonomous Region. Sometimes it could take three months if there were problems with the weather or accidents on the road. Blanca and Amur had made the trip in various ways before—by carriage, on foot, and even by boat.

That’s why we were both shocked when I told them it would take about a third of the time to get there using Thunderbolt. I decided not to tell them I could’ve gotten there even faster if I were traveling alone at full speed. If I surprised them even more, who knows what might’ve happened to Blanca’s face.

“Anyway, if we aim for a month, I think we should be fine unless something unexpected happens. I’ll be counting on you two a lot during this journey.”

“You got it!” responded both Amur and Blanca.

“Um, Tenma? Make sure you don’t forget about me...” Gramps said.

And so, my second big journey began. But unlike my journey three years ago, I had companions with me. It made me a bit nervous, but I was sure that we were going to have a lot of fun.

Extra Story: One Day, A Girl Met a ??? in the Woods

“Tenma, may I have a word?”

That morning, I was getting the carriage ready so we could depart when Queen Maria suddenly approached me. It seemed like she had something to ask me, and I also had the impression she was feeling a bit guilty about whatever it was. At any rate, I hesitantly invited her inside the carriage so I could hear her out.

“Yesterday, Luna went with you to do some blacksmithing, right? Well, ever since then, she’s been saying she wants to use the sword she made.”

She was talking about one of the short swords—apparently, Luna thought she’d helped make it. Since I’d thought it wouldn’t be a good idea to give Luna a sword without the queen’s permission, I hadn’t let her have it. Thankfully, it seemed like that’d been the correct decision. If I had, Luna might’ve tried to use it on her own.

“And although he didn’t say anything about it, Tida seems to feel the same way.”

Well, I supposed it made sense they wanted to use things they’d had a hand in making, but from the queen’s perspective, she seemed to be worried that they both felt that way. It probably made her remember the time they’d sneaked out of the castle to hunt those calves. Thankfully, I’d happened to be passing by when that’d happened, but if I hadn’t been there, the two of them could have died.

That was why she not only wanted me to lend them some swords but also to keep an eye on them.

“Well, I’m just about done getting ready, so I don’t mind.”

“Wonderful,” she said. “I’ll bring Tida and Luna over around lunchtime.”

“I see. So that’s why you need help.”

I was talking to Wright as he drove around the carriage Queen Maria had provided. I'd run into him while he was wandering around town. He looked like he had a lot of time on his hands. I didn't know Wright that well, but from what I did know about him, he was a man I could trust. But most of all, he had hardlynx followers who were very powerful and could protect Tida and Luna in the forest. So, after having received permission from Tida, I went to go hire him.

I rode Thunderbolt alongside the carriage. Kriss and the other knights were surrounding the carriage in order to guard it. Our destination was only a few kilometers away from Sagan so I doubted any super dangerous monsters or thugs would show up, but you never know—that'd been where I'd run into the bicorn, after all.

"Yeah, and the hardlynxes feel really at home in the forest, right?"

"Absolutely."

It would've been safer to take them to my secret hideout in the dungeon, but there were only rocks there, so I would've had to bring along targets for the swords. On top of that, the air quality inside the dungeon was pretty bad. But in the forest, there were plenty of things they could use for target practice. It was just a much healthier place for them to exercise.

"I wish Amur and Blanca could've come, but it seems like they haven't gotten ready to go at all."

Well, to be more precise *Amur* had been the one who hadn't gotten prepared at all. Blanca had turned down my offer because he had to watch over her. Gramps was staying with the queen in the carriage, both to guard her and to serve as a conversation partner. At first, I'd thought about just bringing them along in the carriage, but he'd said it would be easier to guard her if they stayed put.

"Wright, I want you to ask the hardlynxes to guard the surrounding area. I don't think there will be any strong monsters in this forest, but if you see anything dangerous, let me know."

"You guys should be careful too."

After we both gave each other a warning, Wright and the knights headed off into the forest. I'd given him some golem cores too, just in case. However, I'd already used Detection on that part of the forest to ensure there were no dangerous monsters around.

Once Wright and the others had disappeared into the woods, Amy raised her hand and asked a question.

"Master, what should we do now?"

She was here because Luna had invited her along, saying, "I don't want Amy to be excluded! That's not fair!"

Tida nodded in agreement with Amy's question.

"Basically, I'm going to test you on the weapons we made yesterday and let you practice using them," I said.

"Right. Hey Tenma, do you have the ones with the dulled blades ready?"

As Kriss had just mentioned, I'd dulled several of the weapons' blades for this purpose. Although they weren't completely unsharp, it would greatly reduce the chances of injury.

"Now, before we give them to you, Tenma and I are going to show you the basics," she told the kids.

I gave Kriss one of the short swords. She first demonstrated how to draw and hold it, and then she began showing them the basic forms. Even though she was demonstrating completely novice skills, her movements were beautiful and fluid. I was in charge of the machete and throwing stars. Those two weapons didn't necessarily have a proper form for using them, so I just showed the kids how they worked.

Perhaps that was why Amy was more captivated by Kriss's demonstrations than mine. And Tida, in turn, was more captivated by Amy. Meanwhile, Luna kept staring at me with eager eyes that seemed to say, "Hurry up and let me do it already!"

"All right, let's try these out. You need to listen to Kriss and me very carefully and don't do anything without our permission. If you don't follow the rules...

Hmm, let's see... I know! I'll have Rocket eat you."

Of course Rocket wouldn't actually eat them, but he *would* absorb them into his internal dimension bag until they'd had enough time to reflect on their bad behavior. Regardless, the three of them nodded with wide eyes.

"Now, let's start with the short swords. Draw it just like how Kriss showed you, and then hold it properly."

And that was how the Beginner's Combat lessons led by Kriss and I began.

After a while, the three of them split into two groups. One group focused on how to use the weapons, while the other quickly lost interest and became distracted. The first group consisted of Tida and Amy, and the second group was just Luna.

I had a feeling that Luna was going to start getting cranky soon. Kriss seemed to have the same thing in mind because she kept glancing over at me nervously.

"Kriss, why don't you have them take a break and then let them practice with you? If they keep it up while they're tired, they'll develop bad habits."

"That's true," she said. "They haven't mastered the basics yet, so it'll be hard to fix any bad habits they develop."

Kriss seemed to understand what I was getting at and agreed right away. She told Tida and the others to take a breather. I brought a table and chairs out of my bag. Tida and Amy seemed annoyed that we were making them stop, but Luna immediately took a seat and began lazing around.

"Watching a master is part of practicing. Tenma, how about you and I spar with the short swords?" Kriss suggested. She was attempting to calm Tida and Amy down. She took their weapons and handed one to me. I grabbed it and backed away from Kriss for a few paces, then waited for Tida's signal.

"Begin!"

At the signal, Kriss lunged towards me and thrust her sword. It felt like she wanted to win right away, forgetting we were just sparring for the benefit of the three kids who were watching. I deflected her sword with mine and

immediately launched a counterattack.

Kriss gradually became more agitated as I continued fending her off, swinging her blade at full force. She'd definitely forgotten about Tida and the others.

Being constantly on the defensive wasn't very fun, so I decided to retaliate. Unlike Kriss, my attacks were focused on trying to teach Tida and the others, but I still packed a lot of force into each blow. Kriss had to take on a defensive stance in return. After I had attacked her for a while and made some impressive moves, I decided it was her turn. But the moment I eased up on the offense, she hit back at me even more intensely than before. Maybe she thought I'd been mocking her or something.

But, unfortunately, her attacks resembled Dean's style while being inferior to his in every way. That wasn't a bad thing. Instead, it was proof that she'd really taken his teaching to heart and adopted it. The reason it was unfortunate was just because I'd spent a lot of time sparring with Dean at the capital. I knew exactly what would be coming.

She couldn't break through, but then she made a small feint to create a momentary pause. That was followed up with a series of downward strikes. I could've dodged the attacks, but if I had done so, then I was sure her next attack wouldn't have been appropriate for the children to watch. I kept responding to them instead.

"Oof!"

Once I parried all her attacks, I grabbed Kriss by the arm. "I think this is a good stopping point. How about we call it here?"

That basically forced her to end our sparring session.

"That confidence you have is really infuriating sometimes..." Kriss narrowed her eyes at me slightly.

I'd had Shiromaru on standby as a therapy dog, but he didn't do much. Shiromaru seemed a bit spooked that she was acting differently from usual instead.

But luckily, Amy rushed up to Kriss and showered her with compliments. "Wow, Kriss! That was amazing!" she said. "I've never seen anyone fight so

beautifully before!”

“Huh? Oh... Really?” Kriss seemed bewildered by Amy’s reaction.

Amy didn’t notice and continued peppering Kriss with questions. Before long, her praise seemed to have put Kriss in a better mood.

While Amy was interrogating her, Tida came over to me instead. “Tenma! How did you defend yourself against all those attacks from Kriss?!”

Apparently, Tida had many opportunities to watch the king’s guard train and spar with each other, so he probably knew Kriss’s strength the best out of anyone here right now. Perhaps that was why he was surprised that I’d continued to block her attacks.

I shot a sidelong glance at Kriss to make sure she was still busy answering Amy’s questions. Then, I went ahead and started to teach Tida some things, but I noticed Luna beginning to act suspiciously out of the corner of my eye.

She slowly backed away from us and went behind a tree. Then, she sneaked away and hid in the bushes.

“Rocket, go take care of Luna. And show this to Wright and the knights.”

I tasked Rocket with guarding Luna and handed him a letter addressed to the knights and Wright. It said, *“Luna went off on her own. Make sure she doesn’t notice you watching her.”* That would be more than enough to explain the situation to the knights as they knew Luna’s antics well. Plus, I’d warned Wright beforehand, so I was sure he already had his hardlynxes hiding in the area.

“Is something wrong, Tenma?” Tida asked.

“No, nothing. Anyway, back to what I was saying about defense... I’ll show you what I mean, so go ahead and try to attack me.”

Tida hadn’t noticed that Luna had disappeared yet. The same went for Kriss, as she was still giving Amy advice and showing her pointers.

“Okay. Here I come!”

Since Luna was in good hands with Rocket and the others, I focused on helping Tida.

“Let’s take a break, Tida.”

“O-Okay.”

Around an hour had passed since we’d commenced our training, so I decided to give him a break. He’d spent most of that time swinging his sword around so he collapsed on the ground, breathing heavily. Once Kriss saw that Tida was taking a break, she paused her training with Amy too. Since Amy had just been learning the basics, she wasn’t gassed like Tida was and didn’t have to sit down.

Meanwhile, Kriss looked around and finally realized Luna was gone. She ran over to me in a panic. “Tenma, we’re in trouble! Princess Luna’s gone!”

“What?” Tida looked around and realized his sister wasn’t there. “You’re right! She’s missing!”

Amy heard the commotion and began to search the surrounding area, calling out Luna’s name. Rocky and Birdie had been quiet up until this point, but once they sensed that their mistress was upset, they began flying around the area and chirping.

Why’d it take so long for them to notice? I wondered silently.

Kriss looked like she was about to rush into the forest.

“Luna’s fine,” I said. “I noticed she was beginning to act suspiciously and was sneaking off, but I asked Rocket to follow behind and protect her. I passed along the message to Wright and the knights to keep an eye on her as well.”

“What?!”

Tida and Amy seemed relieved to hear that, but Kriss looked stunned.

“I’m sure Wright will come make a report soon, so we can listen to the details then. His hardlynxes are experts at stealth operations in the forest. They can stay close to Luna without her noticing. They’re supposed to be guarding her. And Rocket’s there too, so unless there’s a bicorn-class monster, it’s very unlikely she’ll be harmed. After all, Rocket’s an emperor, remember?” I said.

I was tracking her location using Detection, and so far, there were no dangerous monsters around her, so I thought it was fine to let her wander around freely. But since Kriss and the others didn’t know I could use Detection, I

realized that it would be unreasonable to expect them to feel relieved just taking me at my word. Instead, I compared Rocket's strength to the strongest monster that had appeared around Sagan—the bicorn. That seemed to work against Tida and Amy, but Kriss didn't seem convinced and continued glaring at me.

"Once Wright shows up and we know where Luna is, we can send Shiromaru back with him," I said. "Then, she'll be even safer than Tida is."

I decided to dispatch Shiromaru in order to convince Kriss. Shiromaru looked surprised by that, but when I dangled a treat in front of him where Kriss couldn't see, he sat straight up and looked alert. Solomon did the same thing.

"Tenma, it seems Princess Luna isn't in danger. And thanks to Rocket's wonderful guidance, she hasn't noticed us yet either."

Just then, Wright came back to give his report. It seemed that Rocket had successfully joined up with the knights.

"All right. I'll go check the surroundings too. We should get a report from the knights in a little bit," Wright said before he disappeared into the forest.

Shiromaru and Solomon were both ready to go, and combined with Wright's report, that was enough to make Kriss calm down. After that, one of the knights appeared and let us know that everything was fine with Luna.

"I see..." Kriss said. "Since there's no danger around Princess Luna thanks to Rocket and the hardlynxes, that means you have some time on your hands, right? *Right?* Now come here!"

"Huh?"

Kriss grabbed the knight's shoulder as he tried to return to the forest and yanked him over to where she'd been teaching Amy. She instructed him to stand there and wait while she called Amy over to explain something. Occasionally she'd point to the knight's jaw or solar plexus, so I figured she was showing her the vital points of the body.

"Do you really think this is okay, Tenma?" Tida asked.

"I was just thinking maybe someday Amy might say she wants to try it out on

you, so I'm sure it's fine."

Tida seemed to briefly think about the implications of that and decided to choose his own safety. "I don't think it's fine at all."

"At some point if it becomes a bad influence, I guess I'll go stop Kriss."

And so I had to keep my eye on her while I sparred with Tida.



"Eek! What was that, a bird? Don't scare me like that!"

I finally sneaked off without Tenma and the others noticing, but honestly, I was feeling a little scared. But I didn't know the way back, and if I returned now, Tida would just make fun of me.

"Ahh, now what is it?! Oh, Rocket? Is that you?"

Since he wasn't by Tenma's side, it was hard for me to tell the difference between Rocket and an ordinary slime at first glance. However, he immediately responded to my words by waving a handkerchief with Tenma's family crest on it. That let me know that it was definitely Rocket!

But...what was Rocket doing out here, anyway?

"Oh, I know! You didn't want to be by Tida and Kriss either, so you ran away too!" I said.

Rocket shook his body to the side. I thought that probably meant "yes." And since I was a nice girl, I wouldn't tell on him.

"C'mon, Rocket! Don't worry! I'll tell them we went for a walk together!"

Rocket must've been afraid of the forest too, because he turned around as if to go back. I picked him up and decided to continue exploring.

I walked around the forest carrying Rocket, but sometimes, it felt like he wanted to go off in another direction. At first I thought he was trying to go back to Tenma and the others, but it didn't exactly seem like that was the case. After a while, I realized he was trying to show me where the grass was shorter so it would be easier for me to walk. I thought that Tida could learn a lot from Rocket's kindness. He wasn't worthy of Amy right now, and if he wasn't careful,

Tenma might steal her away. Well, if that happened, it would serve him right!

“I’m sure Tida’s a huge pervert. Don’t you think so too, Rocket?”

Rocket was a kind slime, so he shook his body back and forth to deny it. Well, Tida was Grandfather’s grandson and Uncle Lyle’s nephew, so surely it was true!

“Not only that, but he always gets carried away without thinking of the consequences and ends up getting hurt!” I said.

Rocket shook his body no again. Well, this time it was a bit weaker, so I guess not even Rocket could *totally* stand up for him anymore.

“Oh, and he always brags about how good he is at school, but he’s actually pretty dumb!”

This time Rocket didn’t shake. That must’ve meant he agreed with me! Then, for some reason, he pulled a mirror out of his body and handed it to me.

“Oh, I have a leaf in my hair! Thanks for pointing that out, Rocket!”

That must be why he showed me the mirror. I plucked the leaf out, fixed my hair, and then my usual adorable reflection stared back at me.

“I’m a little tired. Let’s take a break. That would make a good chair over there.”

I handed the mirror back to Rocket and noticed a large rock nearby. Even though he was helping me find the easiest paths, I was still pretty weak. I wasn’t used to walking around in a forest for long periods of time. So it was totally time for a break!

“Thanks, Rocket! Oof...!”

I was just about to sit down, but suddenly, Rocket put some kind of fur blanket over the rock for me. You know, maybe Amy should just marry Rocket. Next, he took out a drink for me—a chilled fruit juice.

I kicked my legs as I sat on the rock and drank my juice, but then, one of my shoes flew off. “Aw, what a pain... Huh?”

I climbed down from the rock. When I leaned down to pick up my other shoe,

I saw something move by the side of the rock.

“What’s that? Hmm... Bwaaah!!!”

It was something round and blue that looked like a ball, so I picked it up. I thought it was odd because I was certain it had just been moving. When I took a closer look, all of a sudden, it split open and a bunch of squiggly things sprouted out and started moving all at once.

It was so gross that I threw it away. It rolled across the ground, bumped into a tree, and stopped. I watched it remain motionless at the base of the tree, but suddenly, it started moving again. It transformed into some kind of bug with rounded scales on it.

“Eek, disgusting! Get away from me!”

It started coming towards me, so I poked it with a stick. The bug curled up into a ball again and remained motionless.

“Take that! And that! And that!” Every time it tried to come closer to me, I poked it, and it curled back up again.

“On second thought, it might be kinda cute...” I said. “All right, I’ve decided. I’m bringing it home with me!”



If it kept wanting to come near me so much, that must mean it wanted me to adopt it! Plus, its shell made it look like it was wearing blue armor, so it would fit right in at home!

“Let’s see, what should I name you? You seem like a bug king, so I could name you King Bug? But that might be too on the nose... Maybe Insect Lord? No, that’s not very cute...”

Well, I could just name him later! But more importantly, what would I put him in?

Wow, thanks Rocket! Unlike Tida, Rocket was so considerate—he handed me a basket without me even having to ask.

“I’ll just put him in here... Hmm?”

I knelt down to pick up the bug, but then, I noticed there were more bugs just like him all over the ground and in the brush.

“I bet you want friends to live with, huh?”

I went ahead and picked up the other bugs and put them in the basket. I was able to fill the basket just with the bugs I found around the rock. Still, I could tell the one I found first apart from the others at a glance because it was much bigger. And because it was blue.

“I think this should be enough. Rocket, shall we go ba— Eek!”

I tried to stand up while holding the basket, but it was much heavier than I expected so I fell down. More than that, the basket overturned and about half the bugs spilled out.

“Oh no, I really did it this time... I need to pick them back up... Huh?”

I felt a little guilty that I overfilled the basket, but when I reached out to pick them back up again, something jumped out from the bushes.

“Hm? Aren’t you Tenma’s friend’s kitty?”

A kitty had jumped out from the bushes. I recognized it because it belonged to one of Tenma’s friends. That must’ve meant it was guarding the surrounding area along with the knights.

“Uh-oh, they’re onto me... Wait, were you in on it too, Rocket?”

I looked over at Rocket and he gave me a guilty look. That must’ve meant Tenma had known I’d sneaked away from the very beginning.

“Well, maybe only Tenma knows and Tida and Kriss haven’t noticed yet? Nah... That’s impossible...”

I started to imagine the consequences and began to feel a little scared. “Oh, well. I just need to pick up the bugs...” I decided to forget about my problems for now and started gathering the bugs.

“That’s the last one... Hey, give it back!”

The kitty was playing with one of the bugs that had rolled up into a ball. It was really batting it around, but I guess bugs were stronger than I thought they were because once the kitty let go, it started walking around like nothing had happened.

I put it back in the basket. I started to wonder how I would carry it, when Rocket came over to me. At the same time, the kitty’s fur stood on end, and suddenly, it started growling at something in the brush.

Something dangerous is over there! Then, I heard a rustling noise. Rocket jumped out in front of me and...

“Graaar!”

“Eeeek! Huh? Amur?”

But what appeared wasn’t a monster—it was Amur covered in mud and leaves. The kitty was about to attack her, but Rocket held it back.



“Amur! We’re still not done getting ready yet!”

Shut up, Blanca! I thought, but I knew if I said that out loud, he would lecture me even worse than this, so I bit my tongue. I was still mad though, so while Blanca was making tea, I decided to mix some chili pepper in it when he wasn’t looking.

“Can I have a minute, Blanca?”

I got ready while I fantasized about Blanca drinking the hot pepper tea, and just then, Gramps called him over. Apparently, Queen Maria wanted to ask him something about the SAR. Blanca told him he wouldn't reveal any confidential information about our homeland, and then went to Tenma's carriage to talk to them.

"This is my chance!"

We still had a few days remaining before we had to leave, so it wasn't like I was in some kind of big rush to get ready.

"Byeee..." I whispered as I ventured off to follow Tenma and the others. They didn't tell me exactly where they were going, but I knew they were headed to the forest. Surely I could figure it out once I got there.

"Tenmaaaa, where are you?"

I had come to the right forest, but I didn't know where everyone was. The guards at the gate wouldn't tell me either, but I asked at some food stalls in the town and the vendors told me the general direction the carriage had been traveling. I knew I was in the right forest.

"I guess I'll just walk around a bit and look for him."

I wandered around, figuring that at some point I'd pick up Tenma's scent.

"Guess it's not that simple..."

I had no idea this was such a huge forest, so I wasn't able to find Tenma. And since I'd run all the way here, I was all sweaty. I'd gone back and forth around the forest and ended up getting covered in sticky mud and leaves.

"Should I go back? Hm? I think I hear someone's voice..."

I started considering heading back to town when I heard a voice in the distance.

"Is that...Luna?"

I crept towards the sound and checked, just to make sure. As I thought, it was Luna. However, sneaking was the wrong decision because it put Rocket on

guard. And then, someone's hardlynx follower (I forget who it belonged to) suddenly started growling at me.

"Graaar!"

"Eeeek! Huh? Amur?"

The moment I jumped out from the bushes, the hardlynx was about to attack me. Luckily, Rocket moved quicker and held him back. *Thanks, Rocket!*

"What are you doing here, Amur?"

"Well, I got lost!" I told her the honest truth and she burst out laughing. "Hey, like you've got any room to talk! You got too greedy and fell over because you couldn't even lift the basket up! Talk about lame!"

"Argh!"

When I pointed that out, for some reason, Luna dramatically grabbed her chest and began staggering around.

"Is it just me or has Aura rubbed off on you?" I said.

"Huh?" Luna seemed more shocked by that than me calling her lame.

"Anyway, take me to Tenma," I said.

"Hmm..." Luna said, thinking it over. I thought maybe I had made a mistake by insulting her because I just now realized she was the kingdom's princess. I was just about to bow my head and apologize, but...

"Will you do me a favor first?" she asked.

I was a little wary. What kind of ridiculous thing would she ask of me? All it turned out to be was for me to tell everyone that we had agreed to meet each other in the forest beforehand.

Apparently, she was reluctant to go back because she'd sneaked away from Tenma and the others without saying anything. If she went back alone, she might get in trouble. She thought if she told them the reason she left was to meet up with me, and that she hadn't said a word because I'd told her not to, then they wouldn't be mad at her.

Honestly, if I just stayed here with Luna and yelled for Tenma, he'd show up

eventually. And I didn't think that I'd get scolded along with Luna.

But if Tenma knew, then that meant Kriss and Tida already knew too. I doubted they were angry. I decided to pretend to go along with Luna's request so I could meet up with Tenma faster and have a better chance of making a good impression on him.

"Okay," I said, agreeing to her request. I would carry the basket full of bugs she'd collected and maybe that'd help me gain even more points with Tenma. "How in the world did you manage to collect so many roly-polies? Most people think they're disgusting."

"Is that what they're called? Roly-polies? In that case, I'll name the blue one King Roly!"

I'm not sure which blue one she was talking about, but apparently she thought one of them was the king and was going to name him as such.

"Okay, now show me where Tenma is."

"It's this way!" she said.

I didn't despise bugs, but I didn't want them crawling all over my back while I was walking, so I made sure the lid of the basket was closed tightly as I let Luna lead me back to Tenma. She began cheerfully walking along, pointing to something deep in the forest, but Rocket stopped her. Apparently, she was trying to walk off in the opposite direction from where Tenma and the others were. Maybe I should've just asked Rocket in the first place instead of listening to Luna's annoying request...



Tenma was so amazing. His skills were on par with Dean's, and after all, he won the martial arts tournament, so I already knew he was the strongest person in the kingdom, but even Kriss recognized his talent.

I bet she was at least in the top five or maybe in the top ten strongest of the king's guard. I didn't think she'd lose to Tenma, but I figured she'd probably have a tough time fighting him. However, in the end, Tenma won easily. Well, it might be inappropriate to say he "won," considering he was holding back and giving her plenty of opportunities to win in order to remain constructive to his

audience...

Anyway, I took advantage of the situation to learn from Tenma's skills, but he said, "It's better for you to learn the more proper techniques that knights can use rather than learning how an adventurer would fight." I didn't agree, though. I could learn those things back at the castle anytime I wanted.

So I pushed back and said, "I need to learn techniques I can't learn from the knights at the castle too!" He agreed in a casual tone, but if he was so casual about it, why didn't he just say yes from the start? Maybe it was his way of being kind.

"Let's take a break, Tida."

After that, I asked him to train me, and he made me swing my sword continuously for close to an hour. And not only that, but they were quite unconventional swings that weren't in the proper form the knights would teach. The moment I heard the word "break," I collapsed on the ground, panting.

As I sat there trying to catch my breath, Kriss ran over in a panic.

"Tenma, we're in trouble! Princess Luna's gone!" she shouted.

"What? You're right! She's missing!" I looked around and realized my sister wasn't here. Amy went over to the trees and started calling for her as she peeked through the brush. A regular noble girl wouldn't be hiding in there, but this was Luna we were talking about. She'd probably come back covered in mud and leaves.

Kriss started searching through the brush too, occasionally poking it with a stick to see if Luna was there.

I pulled my exhausted body up to join Amy in her search, but then I saw Tenma in the corner of my vision, glancing at Kriss and stifling his laughter.

"Tenma?"

"Hmm? Oh, don't worry about Luna. I figured she'd get tired of playing with weapons and try to sneak off, so I sent Rocket along with her to guard her. The knights and Wright are already in the forest waiting for her. She's probably surrounded by the hardlynxes already and she has no clue."

I wished he would've told me something that important earlier, but knowing he'd already taken care of it made me feel so relieved that I collapsed to the ground again.



"I've never seen anyone fight so beautifully before!"

This was my first time watching a female knight in action like this, so when I saw Kriss sparring with Master, I was really struck by it. Although I'd seen female adventurers fight plenty of times, I had honestly never really understood the difference between them and male adventurers. But then again, I was never close enough to be able to pick out any details either.

But the way Kriss was fighting right in front of me wasn't about attacking with brute strength. Instead, she swiftly approached her opponent with fast movements and precise strikes. I'd seen male adventurers use similar fighting styles before, but most of the time they also shouted things like "Hiyah!" or "Take this!" or "Die!" loudly. Honestly, it was pretty scary. But Kriss just let out little grunts or noises like "Hmph!" or "Haa!" here and there, and they weren't scary at all. In fact, if I had to describe it, I'd say they sounded beautiful.

"I want to fight like that too! Please teach me!" I said, and Kriss kindly agreed.

However, she said it would take a lot of practice to fight just like her, which was impossible in my current state. But she *did* say she would teach me the methods she'd practiced so I could move like her, even if just a little bit.

"First, hold the sword like this. And your stance should be like this."

She physically took my hands and showed me how to grip the sword, followed by an example of the correct stance. I tried to imitate her, but I just couldn't get it right. It took a few adjustments.

"When you swing the sword, make sure to move it straight downward."

"Okay!"

I thought that would be simple, but it was surprisingly difficult.

"When you get attacked, parry it with your sword diagonally like this."

Kriss made it seem so easy, but that was tough too.

“I guess this is impossible unless you start when you’re really young,” I said.

“That’s not true at all! Many people start learning martial arts or swordsmanship after they enter the academy. Many of those become knights too!”

I was feeling discouraged because I couldn’t execute the things she showed me very well, so I wondered if it was pointless to continue unless you started as a child. Kriss was able to comfort me.

“Besides, you didn’t start using magic until you met Tenma, right? It’s the same thing!” she said.

“Really?”

“Sure! Oh, maybe you’re the type who improves the most with practical training. Should we try sparring?”

“There’s no way I could do that!”

Kriss suggested doing what she’d done with Master, but I couldn’t even imagine doing that. Not only that, but when I looked over at him and Tida, he kept making Tida roll on the ground helplessly. Obviously there was a difference in strength between Tida and Master, but the same would be true for me and Kriss. And to make matters worse, Tida had been training in swordsmanship since he was little. So if he *still* ended up like that, it would make matters even worse for me.

“Don’t worry, don’t worry!” Kriss said. “When you attack me, I’ll just parry. And when I do attack, I’ll tell you first. I’ll say, ‘I’m going to aim for your such-and-such,’ and I’ll only strike with enough power and speed for you to either parry or dodge.”

“But...”

“But what? Are you worried I might get injured if I hold back too much? That won’t happen.”

“Okay,” I said. “I’ll give it a try.”

Even though I knew she was right, her tone of voice irritated me a bit, so I

decided to give it a go.

“Here I go!”

First, I attempted the attack she’d taught me initially: a straight downward strike. She blocked it, so I aimed for her abdomen with a sideways attack instead. She blocked that too, so this time...

“I can’t land a hit at all!”

“That’s only natural,” she said. “There’s a huge difference in experience between us, Amy. Now it’s my turn. I’ll aim for your head and swing downward.”

She told me what she was going to do, just as she’d promised. She swung down her sword and I was easily able to defend myself.

“Next, I’ll aim for your abdomen with a sideways strike.”

This time it’d be a sideways attack.

Wait, Kriss seems to be doing the same attacks I did!

“How about you do it again, remembering what I just showed you?” she suggested.

I was right; Kriss mimicked my attacks, providing tips and pointing things out to me so she could better guide me.

However, about halfway through our session, her attacks became a bit more aggressive...

“You’re getting the hang of it! Looks like they’re taking a break over there, so should we take a break too?”

“Sure!”

Tida was sitting on the ground, panting. I guess Master had really given it to him good. Even though my training wasn’t as intense and I didn’t have to sit down, my arm muscles were aching a bit since I wasn’t used to this kind of activity.

“Kriss, thank y—”

“Huh? Oh, no...”

I was about to thank Kriss, but then she started looking around anxiously, seeming flustered.

“Tenma, we’re in trouble!” she said. “Princess Luna’s gone!”

Apparently, Luna had disappeared without anyone noticing and Kriss rushed over to Master. I started searching with Rocky and Birdie too, thinking she might just be hiding in the bushes, but we couldn’t find her. Kriss used a stick to poke through the bushes to search for Luna.

Tida went to go talk to Master, who said he’d noticed Luna went missing a while ago. He said he’d wanted to let her do as she pleased because he had thought she’d have a tantrum otherwise. However, he’d asked Rocket to go protect her and had also requested that Wright and the knights guard Luna to make sure she was safe.

Kriss looked surprised at Master’s explanation. Just then, Wright showed up to give his report, which seemed to reassure Kriss and she calmed down. Then, the knights came to give their report too, which reassured her even more, so she finally came back over to me. It seemed like she was feeling comfortable enough to continue our practice from earlier.

“Amy, this time I’ll teach you how to boost the effectiveness of the moves I taught you earlier.”

“Okay!”

Kriss was a good teacher, so I thought I’d be able to handle my weapon a bit more skillfully this time. I bowed my head and thanked her for teaching me.



Hmm, her talent with a sword is pretty average.

From what I’d seen so far, Amy didn’t display any sort of remarkable talent in swordsmanship. But since she was already quite gifted with magic and taming, if she were also good with a sword, it might cause quite a stir. It wasn’t that she had absolutely zero talent with a blade, though. With some effort at the academy, she might end up being better than average. After all, she was

surrounded by people gifted with a sword, like me!

Well, all jokes aside, if she were to enter the academy, I thought it was possible for her to score at the top of the class, even now. After all, she already knew the basics of magic thanks to Tenma, the basics of swordsmanship thanks to me, and she was studying regularly with the Tamers guild. Even the children of high-ranking nobles wouldn't be blessed with such an environment.

What worried me was that students at the academy were very proud. They might get jealous of Amy and try to do something to her. But if they did, it wouldn't end very well for them, in more ways than one. Tenma was very protective, Tida appeared interested in Amy, and Princess Luna also seemed fond of her. But most of all, it looked like Queen Maria had her eye on Amy too. She might've been trying to strengthen her relationship with Tenma in the process, but the fact that the queen was taking notice of Amy meant that she was a very important figure now.

And since Marquis Sammons was a member of the Tamers guild, it seemed he had his eye on her too. So, right now, Amy might've ranked third in terms of commoners in the kingdom who had the most influence with the royal family. Tenma was first in that ranking and Master Merlin second.

If someone were to attack Amy right now, it would be the equivalent of declaring war against the royal family. In the worst-case case scenario, that could even lead to the downfall of that person's entire family. And if they were a noble, they could have their title stripped to boot.

"I really need to tell her to be careful about who she associates with..."

As I pondered this, I realized that Amy seemed down for some reason. Apparently, she was discouraged that she couldn't execute the moves I taught her perfectly. But from my perspective, it made sense for her to struggle a bit on the first day. She was having trouble accepting that though, probably because she was surrounded by so many advanced swordsmen all the time.

In times like these, it might've been more effective to intentionally hold back and fight in a manner that would boost her confidence. I could treat it like an introduction match. At the very least, I could hold back enough to match her level.

Even though it was more like playing around, I thought that if Amy sparred with me, an active member of the king's guard, it would boost her confidence. She seemed hesitant to do that, so I decided to provoke her a little. I thought of what I might say to prompt Prince Tida or Princess Luna to join in, but I wasn't sure if that would be effective against her.

Luckily, she fell for the bait.

"Here I come!"

Amy followed through with the attacks I'd taught her. And for her first attempt, I thought she was pretty good, but she seemed to still feel dissatisfied.

"I can't land a hit at all!"

After I parried several of her attacks, she was disappointed that her attempts weren't landing. It was more a sense of resignation than defiance, though—she was just realizing it wasn't working out.

Since her attitude was tipping towards the negative, I decided to switch to an offense-defense rotation in an attempt to cheer her up. If she felt down after I blocked her attacks, maybe letting her block some of my attacks would help lift her spirits.

"That's only natural. There's a huge difference in experience between us, Amy. Now it's my turn. I'll aim for your head and swing downward."

Amy seemed a bit flustered, but once I warned her where I would strike, she seemed to handle it well and was relieved. I continued attacking her by slashing, thrusting, and striking—those same methods she had practiced.

Halfway through, it seemed like she realized the attacks I was executing were the same ones she had done before. She was able to prepare herself to defend slightly earlier than I attacked.

Once I was done, it was her turn to counter.

Amy's second round was better than her first once she had seen how I'd gone about it. When it was my turn again, instead of repeating her same pattern, I decided to switch it up to prevent her from getting used to a set pattern. I caught her anticipating an overhead attack and she panicked upon realizing I

was coming at her with a sideways one. She barely managed to defend against it, and it seemed like she wanted to say something, but I continued attacking her before she could.

We went on like this for several rounds, and she seemed satisfied after successfully blocking all my blows.

“Next, I’ll attack without warning you first.”

“O-Okay!”

Although she looked anxious about guessing where the next attack would come from, she seemed to be a bit more confident after successfully defending so many and readied herself without any complaints. And, somehow, she managed to block the attack I’d delivered without any warning.

“You’re getting the hang of it!” I said. “Looks like they’re taking a break over there, so should we take a break too?”

“Sure!” Amy replied.

I glanced over at Tenma and the others. Prince Tida was covered in dirt and was in a state I’d never seen him before.

I’ve definitely seen Princess Luna get that dirty before, but not Tida... Wait, where’s Princess Luna?!

I realized my grave mistake. I had forgotten all about a very important person here and quickly scanned my surroundings only to find her missing.

“Tenma, we’re in trouble!” I yelled. “Princess Luna’s gone!”

I hurried over to him, but his reaction wasn’t what I expected. Maybe he thought everything would be fine since the knights were around here, guarding the forest.

Unlike the unreliable Tenma, I looked around and saw Amy peering into the bushes to search for Princess Luna. I followed her lead and poked a stick in the bushes as well, pulling them apart to check them thoroughly. She might’ve been trying to camouflage herself by hiding under the leaves and brush.

“She’s not in the bushes...”

In that case, we had to search the forest! But then, Tenma informed me that he had asked Wright and the knights in advance to protect Luna in case she went off into the forest. Hearing that, I made an uncharacteristically high-pitched noise, but I couldn't worry about that right now. My mind went completely blank. He started going on about Wright and the knights, and Rocket too, but I couldn't believe that the knights were all in cahoots with Tenma. Had they turned against me?

Just as my thoughts went to dark places, a man who I'd *thought* was my subordinate arrived with his own report. According to him, Princess Luna was in no danger. That being the case, it would be fine for me to continue sparring with Amy.

"Come here!" Since the knight was laughing behind my back, I grabbed him and dragged him over to Amy, ordering him to stay still. "Amy, this time I'll teach you how to boost the effectiveness of the moves I taught you earlier."

Amy responded enthusiastically and I felt my heart getting slightly lighter, but that wasn't enough to make me forgive this man's sins.

"First, let's talk about the head. The easiest place to target is the eyes. Even if you don't directly poke someone in the eyes, you can throw sand at them. And you can do that from a distance too. And if you manage to land an attack on your opponent's mouth or throat, most of them will be done for! And don't overthink it. If you smash 'em on the nose like you're slapping them, it'll also attack their eyes at the same time. I recommend aiming for that."

Every time I demonstrated how to poke the knight's eyes or slap him, he tried to dodge me, so I glared at him so he'd keep still.

"If you're fighting with a sword, aim for the inner side of a joint. There are thick blood vessels in those spots but fewer muscles, which makes it easy to inflict damage even if you can't slice all the way through. The armpits are good targets too, although they're harder to aim for."

I took off the knight's gauntlets and firmly dragged my nails along the inside of his wrist. Each time I saw the frightened look on his face, I felt my heart grow a little lighter.

"Imagine there's a despicable guy trying to grab you from behind and drag

you away,” I said to Amy. I then ordered the knight to stand behind me and put his hands on my shoulders. “First, you want to stomp on the guy’s feet, like this!”

I stomped on the knight’s foot with my heel. I didn’t put all my weight on it, and I didn’t use much force either. He was wearing armor too, so I thought it wouldn’t hurt him much, but the knight was so surprised he let go of me and stepped back.

“Most opponents will be startled and let go due to the pain, so that’s when you can make your escape. But if you have the chance, you can kick him in the shin for good measure!” I said as I demonstrated that on the knight.

Even though he was wearing shin guards, he dramatically recoiled and looked at me. The expression on his face helped me come to a decision.

“And finally,” I began, “the most effective way to defeat a man is...this!”

I aimed for the epitome of male weakness and swung my foot back to kick with all my might, but Tenma stopped me just before it reached the knight’s crotch. And he stopped me from doing that by pressing his heel down on *my* shin, which was very cruel.

“Arrrghhh!”

As I writhed in pain on the ground, Tenma looked down at me. “Kriss, you’re going too far. You need to think about that and calm down.”

I endured the pain and followed his gaze. I saw Amy practicing the groin kick with earnest seriousness.

“Take that! And that! And that!” she cried out.

Although the knights and Prince Tida looked pale as they watched the sharpness of her kicks, I couldn’t help but smile at her sincerity. My shin was still throbbing, though...

“What about it?” I asked Tenma.

He sighed as if he were making fun of me. “Kriss, Amy’s my student. Don’t you think I have every right to be angry if you influence her to start behaving badly?”

Although he was smiling, upon closer inspection, I noticed his eyes were *not* smiling. It was quite scary.

“Also, just in case you’ve forgotten, Queen Maria has her eyes on Amy and is trying to get her to enroll in the academy,” he added. “Do you think she’d approve if she found out someone was teaching her weird techniques? And don’t forget Prince Tida is infatuated with her too.”

It wasn’t until I heard the queen’s name that I realized the gravity of my mistake. And now the prince glared at me too...

“I’m so sorry!” I got down on my hands and knees and bowed with such force it felt like I was slamming my forehead into the ground.

Thankfully, Amy seemed oblivious to me groveling as the knight had taken her to a spot a little farther away. He was teaching her the basics of weapon handling. I prayed they’d continue practicing until Tenma and Prince Tida’s lecture was over...

“Honestly, Kriss, lately you’re...”

“I understand, Prince Tida, Tenma. I know that you’re lecturing me right now, but what about Princess Luna?”

Their lecture continued for about a half hour, so just when it seemed like Prince Tida was going to start it all over again, I brought up Princess Luna. I thought they might’ve forgotten about her. I swear it wasn’t to distract them; it was out of genuine concern for Princess Luna!

“During Prince Tida’s lecture, we received a report that Princess Luna was heading this way. She might be nearby now, right? Maybe she’s feeling timid and doesn’t want to come out on her own.”

Either because he’d forgotten his sister or he was genuinely concerned, Prince Tida glanced at Tenma with a worried expression. However, Tenma wasn’t concerned at all. Instead, he seemed to be predicting Princess Luna’s current location based on reports from the knights and Wright.

“W-We should go and meet her, then! I’ll go check on her for a moment!” I suggested and headed in the direction Tenma had pointed out without waiting

for a response. Surprisingly, Prince Tida didn't stop me.

"Maybe he's forgiven me?" I wondered, and just as I was about to pass by the bushes...

"Raaawwr!"

"Aaahhh!"

All of a sudden, something jumped out of the bushes, startling me and making me scream. I ended up falling flat on my rear end. Not only that, but because the ground I fell on was muddy, mud soaked right through my clothes to my underwear!



“Gotcha!”

“Pathetic.”

The two culprits were Princess Luna and Amur. And to add insult to injury, Princess Luna then said, “Tenma noticed us coming right away, but Kriss didn’t.”

“What?!”

I looked over at Tenma in surprise, and he immediately averted his gaze. However, even though I couldn’t see his face, I saw his shoulders shaking slightly, which meant he was laughing at me. And beside him, Prince Tida was laughing too, covering his mouth. And behind *them*, the knight I’d used in practice was laughing and covering Amy’s eyes while quickly escorting her away. Even though I couldn’t see anyone else, I was sure Wright and the other knights who were guarding Luna were probably laughing too.

It was then that I realized I’d been set up by Tenma. In the end, it’d been my fault, so I couldn’t be angry. All I could do was glare silently at him.



“At any rate, welcome back, Luna.”

“Thank you...?”

I helped Kriss up and walked over to Luna as I felt Kriss glaring at me. Luna didn’t seem to express any remorse, but she did seem to sense that something bad was about to happen since she was grabbed by the scruff of her neck in the middle of her sentence. She didn’t resist and let me carry her off. Amur silently followed behind me and Luna.

I brought her over to Tida, who immediately began to scold her.

“Luna! Why did you go off on your own like that?!”

But all Luna did was repeat, “Because I promised to meet Amur,” over and over again.

Amur had the same answer and that only made Tida angrier.

“Tida, that’s enough. Getting angry now will only make Luna more stubborn. Let me report this matter to Queen Maria instead. I think that’ll be more

effective.”

“What?!”

Tida contemplated that and quickly agreed. Meanwhile, Luna seemed surprised, probably not expecting the incident would be reported to her grandmother.

“Tenma! Tenma, if you report this to Grandmother, you’ll get scolded too! Let’s not do that, okay?”

Apparently, Luna thought that would deter me from reporting this to the queen. She thought I’d be afraid of getting in trouble.

“Luna, even if Tenma doesn’t report this to Grandmother, I will. So either way, you’re going to get in trouble.”

“You don’t care what happens to Tenma?!” Luna asked.

I almost laughed at her way of threatening him, but Tida remained serious.

“Tenma’s not going to get in trouble,” he said. “Besides, this wasn’t a formal request. He was just forced to go along with your foolishness. The only ones who will get scolded are you and Kriss.”

“Huh?!” Luna exclaimed in surprise when she heard I wouldn’t have any consequences, but Kriss looked equally surprised when she learned she would be scolded too.

“But as the leader, shouldn’t I be held responsible?” Wright asked.

Tida explained that since Wright acted under my command, he probably wouldn’t be punished. “Kriss didn’t notice Luna was gone at all, so it becomes an issue of her responsibility as a bodyguard. But in Tenma’s case, he noticed her about to slip away, assigned Rocket to guard her, and even coordinated with the knights and Wright to make sure she was safe. So his punishment won’t be that severe. As for the knights cooperating with Tenma, they won’t get reprimanded that much either.”

Luna and Kriss must’ve been imagining being scolded by Queen Maria because they both sighed in unison.

“Shall we head back soon? Wait... Amur, what’s in that basket on your back?

I've been hearing weird squirming noises ever since you showed up."

I could certainly use Identify to figure out what was in it without asking Amur, but just in case it was a creature similar to ro*ches, I didn't necessarily want to know that way, so I decided to ask her directly. Oh, and I'd been gradually inching my way backward this whole time, just in case she accidentally spilled the basket.

Suddenly, Kriss charged and tackled me around the waist. I had been so preoccupied with Amur's basket that I hadn't noticed her.

"Why didn't you tell me about it? If you'd just told me that Princess Luna had run away, then I wouldn't have to be scolded by the queen!" she yelled. "Why? Do you hate me? Did you start hating your big sister?" Kriss continued to shout, gradually raising her arms from my waist to my neck. She had some sort of adrenaline-fueled strength like a firefighter at an active fire or something because I couldn't break free from her grip.

"Why?! Why are you doing this? Eek! Hm?"

But as Kriss reached for my neck, Amur sneaked up behind her.

"Kriss. You're too close. Get away from him." Amur then kneed Kriss, took something blue out of the basket she was holding, and pressed it against Kriss's face.

"Ahh!" Luna cried out in surprise, so I looked over at her and noticed an awkward expression on her face.

"Hm? Huh? Ah? Oh..."

Kriss peeled the blue object off her face, squinted at it, and gradually moved it farther away to see what it was. And then...

"Kyaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!!!"

Once she realized what it was, she immediately threw it away from her. It drew a perfect arc in the air and landed right on Amy's arm.

"This is pretty big... Is it a roly-poly?"

I looked inside the basket and saw over a hundred roly-polies there, all wriggling away.

“One roly-poly isn’t bad, but seeing this many at once is a bit creepy...”

“More importantly, Tenma! Water! Give me water! Hurry!” Kriss begged me with her eyes closed. It seemed like she wanted to wash her face right away, but she had turned in the completely wrong direction.

“Here, here. Just put your hands out and I’ll make you some.”

I used magic to create an aqua sphere, and she quickly thrust her hands forward and splashed her face with the water.

“You don’t mind roly-polies, Amy? You don’t think they’re creepy?”

“Huh? No, not really. They’re cute, compared to the crushed caterpillars I feed to Rocky and Birdie...”

“That’s amazing! I think the undersides of them are really creepy...”

Tida ignored Kriss, who was frantically washing her face, and talked to Amy about the roly-polies instead.

“Amur!”

“Yuck!”

Tida tried to have a flirty moment with Amy right in front of me while Kriss and Amur were chasing each other behind them. To a bystander, this might’ve looked like some kind of funny cat and mouse, but Kriss had a devilish expression on her face.

“Amur got away... Oh, well. Hey, could you carry this since she’s gone?” Luna asked a nearby knight to carry the basket that Amur had been carrying, but the knight refused after seeing what was inside. I couldn’t blame him either. Some people were afraid of bugs and even those who weren’t might refuse the job.

After being rejected by that knight, Luna looked at me hopefully. I refused as well, so she reluctantly tried to pick up the basket herself, but it was too heavy for her to carry.

“Luna, are you even sure you can take care of these bugs if you bring them back? And don’t you think it might not be a good idea to upset Queen Maria even further?” I asked.

“But...”

“No buts! Luna, even if you bring those back, I’m absolutely not going to help you take care of them. I’ll tell the other servants not to help you either!” Tida said.

“Ugh, okay,” Luna said. “Sorry, everyone. Because my brother is a big meanie head, I can’t stay with you any longer...”

“Luna!”

Apparently, Luna had been planning on having the castle maid take care of the roly-polies. But once Tida made it clear that she was prohibited from doing so, Luna tearfully began to release them into the bushes. Tida protested in response, but she pretended not to hear him.

“Goodbye, Un. Goodbye, Deux. And Trois. Eins, Zwei, and Drei. Uno, Dos, Tres... Yi, Er, San. Unit-00, Unit-01, Unit-02... Number 1, Number 2, V3, and, um...”

I could tell that Luna had learned some of those names from a certain gigantic fish, but no one said anything. We all waited for her to call the next name, but...

“Bye-bye, roly-polies. Take care.” Luna concluded her list with a general goodbye—it seemed like she couldn’t come up with any other names.

“If you didn’t even name them, you shouldn’t have taken them in the first place,” Tida muttered in response to Luna’s sarcastic attitude towards him.

“That’s not true! I was planning to take care of them, so I gave them names!” she protested, raising her arms like a praying mantis.

I caught two roly-polies that had caught my eye for some reason. “What are the names of these two roly-polies, then?” I asked Luna.

She had a flustered expression on her face, but confidently said, “That’s, uh...Uno and Duo!”

“Nope. There *was* an Uno, but there was never a Duo. Anyway, these ones are actually Number 1 and Number 2.”

“Huh?!”

I'd considered covering for her if she'd at least said "Dos" instead of "Duo," but since she'd clearly made those names up on the spot, there was no way I could. By the way, the reason I was eyeing them was because I was thinking about something only Namitaro and I would understand.

"Kamen Rider 1 probably would've been stronger if he *hadn't* transformed..." I mumbled to myself.

"Hah... Tenma, there's no need to cover for her. Anyway, Luna, there's one more left."

Tida pointed to the blue roly-poly Amy was holding and Luna went to get it from her.

"No!" Tida snatched away before she could.

"Give it back! Give King Roly back, Tida!" Luna yelled. "I absolutely must take this one home!"

"You've never properly taken care of any living thing before, Luna! Even when you get flowers, I'm the one who ends up watering them!"

Luna frantically tried to retrieve the roly-poly named King Roly, but since Tida was taller, he held it over his head and she couldn't reach it.

"Give it, give it, give it, give it baaaack! Huh?"

I sensed a dangerous vibe from Luna, just like when Kriss had been dealing with that knight, so I quickly grabbed her by the scruff of her neck and pulled her away just in time to avoid her kicking Tida in the groin.

"Luna, if you agree to never use that move on Tida again, I'll get King Roly back for you."

"I promise!" Luna declared firmly, so I retrieved King Roly from Tida and handed him to Luna. Once she took him from me, she cradled him in her arms and fled back to the carriage.

"Tenma, why did you give it to her?! She absolutely won't take care of it!" Tida complained.

"Luna wouldn't agree to return home if I didn't let her have it, right? Plus, when roly-polies are sick, their bodies turn blue. That bug is going to die soon."

Since the lifespan of a roly-poly was three to five years, and judging by how big King Roly already was, he probably didn't have long to live.

"In that case, it might be a good learning experience for her..." Tida said, and he decided to let the queen make the final decision.

However, I didn't tell Tida that the average lifespan of the roly-polies I'd said was based on the ones from my previous life. Those only grew to about a centimeter in size, not ten times that size like this one.

At any rate, I kept that a secret for now and waited for Kriss and Amur, who were still playing tag. Once I realized they had gone deeper into the forest, I decided to just leave them behind.



"So Kriss isn't here... Well, when we return to the capital, I'll need to have Dean and Jean train her rigorously. Perhaps she needs to start from square one and train with the rookies again. Oh, and aside from Kriss, the other knights didn't cause any issues because they did their jobs properly. Tenma, perhaps you should have informed Kriss in advance. Also, was it...Wright? Give that man a reward separately from his payment. You can pay him, Tenma."

Queen Maria's conclusion was that it was Kriss's fault for not noticing Luna's escape. Initially, I was supposed to call Wright to this meeting as well, but he told me that he might be so nervous in front of the queen that his heart might stop, so I decided I'd give him his reward tomorrow.

As we were talking, Luna obediently stood still as the queen grabbed the back of her collar.

"Well then, I'll go take Amy home," I said.

Amy's house was nearby, but I decided to take her home, just in case. However, on the way back from here, an incident occurred.

"Noooooooo!"

I heard a woman's scream echoing from inside the carriage. I hurried back inside to find King Roly stuck to Queen Maria's dress. She was flailing about so wildly trying to get it off that Gramps couldn't seem to help.

“Watch out, King Roly!”

However, now that Luna was free, she threw her arms around the queen to rescue King Roly. Then, she barricaded herself in the bathroom.

“Luna, come out this instant!” Queen Maria banged on the bathroom door and tried to ask about King Roly.

Luna wouldn’t budge. “I’ll only come out if you promise I can keep King Roly!”

“Actually, Grandmother...”

Tida then hesitantly relayed what I’d told him about King Roly’s lifespan.

Gramps chimed in too. “Yes, I feel like I’ve heard that somewhere before...”

In the end, the queen reluctantly agreed.

“Thank you, Grandmother!” Once the queen had given Luna permission to keep King Roly, she emerged from the bathroom with a huge smile.

“Luna, you can use this for King Roly’s habitat for now.”

I handed over the basket she’d been using so far, and Luna immediately placed King Roly inside.

“Tenma, you’ll have to take care of King Roly for a while,” Queen Maria said.

Luna was confused. “Huh? Grandmother?”

“I gave you permission to keep him, but that doesn’t mean you won’t get a lecture.”

And so Luna was taken to the corner of the carriage to receive a lecture.

Then...

“Leaving us behind was really mean!”

Kriss had finally returned. Apparently, she’d chased after the carriage when we left but hadn’t been able to catch up.

“You couldn’t even leave my horse behind?!” she whined.

“Even your horse wanted to come back. I’m sure you heard it whinnying, and that’s how you knew we were leaving, right? Plus, no matter how safe this area is, wolves could always show up, so leaving it behind would’ve been too cruel,” I

said. "More importantly, someone has been waiting for you to return."

"Huh...? Eek!" Kriss's gaze fell on Queen Maria, who was grinning widely at her.

After that, Kriss ended up being lectured alongside Luna. And during the lecture, I heard Kriss start to say, "But Tenma..." At that point, Queen Maria's voice grew even louder.

"Hey, Tida. Do you think Kriss will get fired?" I asked.

"Well, she makes a lot of mistakes, but her skill as a knight is genuine," he said. "And most of all, female knights are really valuable. Many famous female knights retire early due to marriage..."

So, for those reasons, Kriss was an indispensable member of the royal guard.

"Ha ha! Kriss, you're so pathetic!"

I turned and saw Amur standing in the doorway holding her stomach as she laughed. I suppose now that Kriss had returned, it only made sense that Amur was here too. But I wondered why she hadn't come in with Kriss.

"Why are you standing there?"

"I'm hiding from Blanca," she said.

Apparently, Amur had been looking for Blanca all this time, but the sight of Kriss being scolded had been too much for her to bear and she had burst out laughing.

"Blanca isn't in here," I said.

"Phew, that's a relief," Amur sighed upon learning that.

But just because I said Blanca wasn't *in* here didn't mean he wasn't *around*. That was because attacking Amur from behind while she was inside the carriage was much more effective than attacking her from the inside. In other words, he was going to ambush her from behind.

"Where were you going, Amur?" And with a face that shouldn't be shown to children or those with weak hearts, Blanca appeared and bonked Amur on the head.

Amur was completely taken off guard and tried to flee upon hearing his voice, but thanks to the hit, she couldn't even stand up properly. She was then dragged back to the apartment by the ferocious tiger.

"Well, since the lecture doesn't seem to be ending anytime soon, should we eat?" I asked Tida.

"Oh, right," he said.

"I'll be back in a bit, so please keep watch here." I let the knights know that we were leaving, and then Tida and I escaped from the carriage.

"I know a place where commoners and adventurers go to eat—would that be okay?"

"Yes! Thank you!" Tida seemed excited by the prospect. "I've never been to such a place before! I'm looking forward to it."

Queen Maria's lecture was still going on when we returned from dinner. It sounded like she was bringing up the same points as when we had left, so she was apparently repeating herself.

I handed out sandwiches and side dishes I'd brought here as gifts for the knights. Tida told them to take turns resting.

"Oh, Tida! Tenma! You're back," Queen Maria called out. "Tenma, I'm sorry to trouble you, but could I use your bath? I've gotten a bit sweaty scolding these two, and I'm feeling slightly nauseous..."

I quickly prepared the bath for the queen. Once I was done, Queen Maria had Rocket stand guard over her. She had chosen Rocket for guard duty because she couldn't choose a man for the job—she was going to bathe. Although I referred to Rocket as a male, since he was a slime, his gender was technically ambiguous, which was probably why Queen Maria asked him to stand guard.

"Both of you sit right there on your knees until I'm done," she told Kriss and Luna, both of whom seemed to be on the verge of despair. It seemed like she had no intention of letting the two of them go yet.

It seemed like Queen Maria had considered asking me to watch over Kriss and

Luna, but she was afraid I would go easy on them.

The girls thought the queen's lecture would end with her bath, but their despair was renewed when it resumed afterward.

And as for King Roly, he was still alive and kicking when I returned from the Southern Autonomous Region, eating plenty of food. Tida kept pestering me saying, "King Roly doesn't show any signs of dying at all! Is he really sick?" putting me in quite a predicament.

Not only that, but he continued to enjoy an energetic life way beyond the average lifespan of a roly-poly. In commemoration of surpassing that milestone, he was officially recognized as a new species named "King Roly-Poly," which was coined by Luna, of course.

Afterword

Thank you so much for reading volume 7 of *Isekai Tensei: Recruited to Another World*. This is Kenichi, and unlike last year, I managed to avoid being hospitalized this year.

This time, Tenma had intended to resume his dungeon diving activities in Sagan after his adventures in the royal capital had concluded. Though, to be precise, this volume began with our heroes saying goodbye to Namitaro. I'm honestly quite fond of Namitaro, so I wanted to prolong their goodbyes for a bit longer.

Since I'm afraid I might go off on a tangent here, let's briefly put Namitaro's departure aside...

The focus of this volume included not only creatures Tenma fought or befriended like bicorns, a giant octopus, and Goldie and Silvie, but also creatures like unicorns, flame tigers, and rock turtles. I had no trouble coming up with characters. However, as a result, I struggled when it came to thinking about what to write along with the new content, so I just ended up settling on roly-polies.

There were about thirty thousand characters of new content in this volume compared to the web novel. That's roughly equivalent to about three episodes there. And honestly, it was quite a struggle...

Actually, when I sent in the manuscript, I thought, *Hm, it's a bit short. Oh well, I'm sure it'll work out.* But then my editor replied and said, "It's about thirty thousand words too short! Please add more!" followed by "We want Kriss on the cover, so please make up a story about Kriss and Tenma," and other such conditions.

When I read the reply, I thought, *"All right, I'll do it!"* (in a rather dramatic fashion) and I began coming up with the plot. But I gave up quickly, thinking that it was impossible to reach thirty thousand characters with just Tenma and Kriss, so instead, I told the same story from the perspectives of several different

characters.


I looked back on the finished story and thought about it. *“Didn’t I feature the roly-polies a bit more than Kriss?”* I realized I might’ve been a bit too biased towards the bugs. That was because I’d gotten hooked on roly-poly toys from gacha machines. They’re quite realistic. They’re creepy, but at the same time kind of cute. I’m rather obsessed with them right now, so every time I go to an arcade, I can’t help but try to aim for a roly-poly plushie if I see one.

Anyway, let’s end the afterword with some discussion about upcoming volumes. Volume 8 will feature the adventurers in the Southern Autonomous Region, or SAR for short. There will be many stories about Amur’s family coming up, and the tale of the first Bandit King will make a brief appearance. Some troublemakers who are even more troublesome than Amur will appear too, and there will be other small incidents here and there.

Then, in volumes 9 and 10, Tenma will turn eighteen—the editor and I call it the third major arc—and because of that, there will be exciting new developments! I hope you’re looking forward to it!

Finally, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to all my readers and everyone at the company publishing this. You know, at one time, I was worried if I would even get to publish a second volume, but now, I’m close to double-digit volumes for this series! So I deeply appreciate it. Thank you very much.

— Kenichi



"Its name
is Spidey!"

"Hm, okay.
How about
I name these
ones Goldie
and Silvie?"

ISEKAI TENSEI:
RECRUITED TO
ANOTHER WORLD

7



"I burned
myself,
Tida!"

"Master,
the fire's
out of
control!"

Bonus Short Story

Peas in a Pod

“Hah...”

“Why are you sighing, Kriss? Did you eat too much today? Or maybe you drank too much?”

We were back in the capital, but the moment my hands were idle, my mind kept drifting back to what had happened in Sagan. Whenever that happened, I just needed to calm down in a quiet place...but for some reason, Princess Luna would always find me in those places. It almost seemed like she was targeting me.

“It’s nothing,” I said. “I’ve just got a lot of pent-up exhaustion lately. Well, if you’ll excuse me...”

I tried to make my escape, but once Princess Luna set her sights on her prey, she wasn’t the type to let go.

Princess Luna shot off question after question. “Oh, you mean how you taught Amy something naughty in Sagan, and then Grandmother and Tida got angry at you, and because of that, Dean’s going harder on you now during training? Or is it just because you’re old?”

“I’m still very young!” I blurted out.

Whoops. The moment I blurted out that thought, I realized it was too late. Princess Luna’s eyes lit up in response, knowing she’d learned a very interesting tidbit.

“Well, you got lectured and they said, ‘Why were you teaching a child that?!’ And not just Dean—Jean got really mad too,” she said. “Maybe you’ll get fired from the royal guard? Oh, but don’t worry, Kriss. Even if you got fired, I’d hire you! I don’t pay much, though.”

I supposed that if you only looked at how strict the captain and Jean were

being towards me, it might've seemed like I was one step away from getting let go. But I didn't think that either of them had any weird obsessions with teasing someone who was about to be fired anyway...at least, I hoped not!

I should be okay...I think!

"Don't worry," I told her. "They wouldn't pay that much attention to someone who was about to be fired—they'd just throw them out. And even if I *did* get fired, I could find a way better place to work than under you."

There had been an edge in my voice when I spoke, and Princess Luna looked surprised.

"What? I really don't think anyone in this kingdom is twisted enough to marry you, Kriss!" she exclaimed. "Oh, whoops! That's not what you meant, huh?"

And the very moment she said that, I felt my blood pressure go through the roof.

You're dealing with a member of the royal family! And not only that, but an oblivious child! I reminded myself, but that still didn't quell my anger.

"Princess Luna! That was way too cruel! As a member of the royal family, you should be more considerate of people's feelings! Do you understand, *Princess Luna*? Answer me, *Princess Luna*! Can you hear me, *Princess Luna*? Princess Luna! Princess Luna!!!" I shouted her name loudly several times.

"Shh, Kriss! Be quiet! Father will hear you!"

Aha. Just as I'd expected, she had come here because she'd run away from Prince Caesar.

"What was that, *Princess Luna*? I can't hear you, *Princess Luna*! Could you say that again, *Princess Luna*?!"

"Kriss! Please be quiet!"

I shouted her name several more times for good measure.

"That's where you were!" someone cried out. "Father! Mother! I found Luna!"

Prince Tida had shown up, and now he was calling for reinforcements.

Princess Luna was toast.

“Kriss! You plotted this, Kriss!” Princess Luna yelled.

And with that, Prince Tida dragged Princess Luna away, kicking and screaming.

“Finally, a moment of quiet. Now I can relax...”

“You really think so?”

Just as I was about to sit back down, I suddenly felt a presence. I turned around to see Jean standing there with a wicked look on his face.

“Don’t give me that look like you’re surprised to see me!” he said. “Who wouldn’t find you here after all that shouting? I might’ve never guessed you were here if you hadn’t been so loud, you know!”

“Ugh...”

He had a point. It was only natural that someone would come looking if they heard such a commotion in the castle. I was so preoccupied with getting Princess Luna to go away that I’d completely forgotten about that.

“All right, let’s go. Captain’s been waiting for you to show up. It seems like the most promising members of the royal guard have all volunteered to spar with you today! Must be tough being so popular, huh?” Jean said.

“Nooo! The volunteers are just there to torture me! I don’t want this kind of popularity!” I screamed as loud as I could, but I was no match for Jean’s strength.

I ended up getting dragged off to the training room, just like how Princess Luna had been dragged away herself.



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Isekai Tensei: Recruited to Another World Volume 7

by Kenichi

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