

ISEKAI TENSEI: RECRUITED TO ANOTHER WORLD

3



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Prologue

I wonder if Tenma has reached Dungeon City yet, I thought as I worked. Just then, I heard a commotion from the library.

“Flute! There’s trouble!”

“What is it?”

The guild worker in charge of the library rushed over to me in a panic. It seemed as though there was some sort of emergency, but since there were adventurers present, I tried to be cautious about what was said. However, it was too late.

“The books in which we keep the maps are all messed up!”

“What did you say?!” I screamed, despite myself. And it was no wonder I reacted that way, for many of the maps we kept here at the guild were top secret. If the information contained in them was leaked to another country or to criminals, it would most certainly be used for evil purposes.

“Come over here. Now—was anything stolen? Or was it merely damaged?” Even though I was secretly imagining the worst, as the vice-guildmaster these were questions I still had to ask.

However, the worker replied, “No, nothing was stolen.”

“Huh? So then why are you in such a panic?” I was relieved to hear their answer, but at the same time rather angry that they’d put up such a fuss, which made my words come out harsher than I’d intended.

“They’re all out of order now. It’s like whoever did it took all the maps out, then put them back inside the books in a big hurry.”

“So the maps could have been copied...”

“I think it’s possible. Someone must’ve snuck into the library and quickly put things back after they’d finished copying the maps. I did make sure to check and see if the maps had been replaced altogether, but that didn’t seem to be what

happened.”

Having heard the worker’s hypothesis, it suddenly felt as though my vision went black for a moment.

“I think the reason they didn’t steal anything was to buy themselves time after copying the maps. Don’t speak a word about this to anyone. I’m going to notify the guildmaster about this right away. You haven’t told anyone else about this, have you?”

“Of course not.”

“Make sure it stays that way. Get back to work and make sure no other workers find out.”

“Yes, ma’am!”

I swore the worker to secrecy, then headed to go see the guildmaster.

“Guildmaster, I have to talk to you!” As I spoke, my gaze swung around the room to make sure that he was the only one present.

“You seem like you’re in quite a panic! Is there some kind of problem?” Although it didn’t show on his face, the guildmaster seemed clearly annoyed as he spoke to me in a businesslike tone.

“We think an intruder entered the library and copied the maps.”

“What?” He frowned, seeming slightly on edge. The strangeness of his reaction nagged at me a bit, but I continued with my report.

“One of the library workers came to me and said it seemed like the book we keep the maps in had been tampered with.” I filled him in on what the worker had told me, and the longer I spoke, the more color drained from his face. By the time I was finished he looked positively sick. “Guildmaster? Do you have any idea who’s behind this?”

“Urgh!”

That was it. At that moment, I became certain that the culprit was *the guildmaster himself*.

“To be honest, I was in the library not too long ago and accidentally dropped

the book of maps on the floor. They scattered all over the place. Then, while I was picking them up I heard someone else come in, so I hastily put them away, but...I couldn't remember what order they were supposed to go in. I'm sorry."

"You need to tell me these things! It's not great that you forgot, but it's a given that everyone makes mistakes."

"I'm sorry. I was just afraid of getting scolded," he said.

I was so beside myself to have learned that not only had it been an inside job, but the culprit hadn't meant any harm at all, that I thought I would collapse to the floor on the spot. "By the way," I asked, "when did this happen?"

"Hrm, let's see... About a week ago? Oh, I remember! It was the morning before Tenma left!"

"I see... The morning before Tenma left... Wait a minute!" I had a bad feeling about this. I ran all the way to the library to retrieve the book of maps, then called over the worker who had reported the incident to me, as well as the worker who had given Tenma his maps.

"Is something the matter?" said one.

"D-Did I make some kind of mistake?" asked the other.

When they were called over, they both realized something else must have occurred, and the worker who had drawn the map for Tenma (one who had just been hired, to boot) was terrified they'd made some kind of mistake and would be punished for it.

"First of all—there's no problem with the maps. The culprit of that incident was the guildmaster himself, and he meant no harm by it. And something else that's important for you both to know is that no mistakes were made. In fact, I'd like to applaud you for your careful work."

"Phew," both of them said in unison. Now that they knew they weren't in trouble, they breathed deep sighs of relief.

"The reason I called you here is because I wanted to ask you something. First of all, when you went to check the maps, which map was placed on page ten?"

"Um, let's see... Yes, it was this one here." He took out a map which was

precisely the one I'd expected it to be.

"Is this the map you made a copy of for Tenma?"

"Ah, yes. This is it," the worker confirmed.

My bad feeling had been right on the money. I didn't want to believe it, but...

"Thank you. You can get back to work now."

"Thank you..." Though they both seemed a bit bewildered by my sudden downturn in mood, they returned to their duties.

I, on the other hand, was trying desperately to suppress the anger that boiled up inside me as I stomped off towards the guildmaster's office once more.

"Guildmaster!"

"Wh-What may I help you with, Flute?" The moment he saw how angry I was, he shrank back in his chair and spoke to me in a deferential tone.

I leaned over his desk and said, "Because of *you*, many people have died! And even more might follow!" I thrust two maps before his eyes. "This was the map we were supposed to give Tenma, and this was the one which was copied for him. But because of *you*, he received a copy of the entirely wrong map! It's partly my responsibility for not checking, but if you had just come clean about your blunder in the library, none of this would have happened! I'm going to have to notify Duke Sanga about this!"

"Wha—?!" The color drained from the guildmaster's face and he looked positively aghast, which was unusual even for him.

"Don't worry, though. I'm not an evil person."

A look of relief came over his face—he seemed optimistic about what I would say next.

"Since I'm partly to blame, we can go and get scolded together."

"That's it?!" he exclaimed, slumping back over his desk.

I sent an urgent message on horseback to the duke, and a few days later we were both scolded together. As for the newly hired worker who'd copied the maps, and the person in charge of her, neither of them could ever have guessed this would happen, so they were both let off with a warning. In the first place,

I'd assigned that task to her in order to let her gain more experience. We all grew a few more wrinkles over the incident, although about ninety percent of them went to the guildmaster.

The duke was quite angry about things, and scarier than I ever could have imagined him based on his usual demeanor.

Chapter Three

Part One

Almost a week had passed since I'd left Gunjo City, yet strangely, I was lost. "How odd... I should have spotted the first village on the way to Dungeon City by now..."

I'd been traveling fairly slowly ever since I'd left, but if this map was correct, then I should have been more than halfway to my destination by now. And that meant I should already have arrived at the village that lay between Gunjo City and Dungeon City.

During this past week, I'd stopped by a forest I found, got some food at a river, and temporarily lost Shiromaru when he was swept away by the current.

Including Shiromaru's unfortunate incident—apparently when he'd been swept away, water got into his nose and he couldn't use his sense of smell to get back to me, so I had to use Detection to find him instead—various detours, and going down bad roads, I had traveled an average of about twenty kilometers per day. So by that calculation, I should have reached the village today.

I started to panic since the sun was about to set, and the village was nowhere in sight. I needed to stop my carriage in a place where I could rest and start making camp for the night. All I needed to do was cast a protective barrier around my carriage and fix some dinner, though.

I was using the same carriage I'd used before when I went hunting for boars (bandits, actually) with the triplets, but I had made a lot of modifications and improvements to it.

First of all, I'd reinforced the main part of the carriage with sheets of steel that I had used Boost magic on. I'd used the same kind of Time-Space magic on the interior as I would on a dimension bag. So although it looked as though it was only about the size of three tatami mats (about two meters wide and three

meters deep) with a height of 1.8 meters (though taking the wheels into account actually made it 2.5 meters tall) the floor plan had been expanded by about four times that, and the height to about three meters.

The modifications had cost about 300,000G. Most of that went towards purchasing the steel. Because it was now made of steel, it would have taken several normal horses to pull it. Of course, I used Boost magic and other magic to lighten it, but I had to charge up a whole day's worth of mana for that. So that meant it was now a carriage which could only be used by a magician. And of course I registered it to protect against theft, so in any case, I was the only one who could use it.

Anyway, I'd refitted it to my comfort, so that meant I didn't have to stay in any sketchy inns. I was currently trying to add a bathroom to the interior so it would be even more comfortable, though.

As I looked around, I reflected on my journey so far. All of a sudden, though, I heard someone yell, "Bandits!"

I used Detection in the area where I'd heard the voice and got a ping about a hundred meters up ahead, over a hill. It seemed there was a group of sixteen people being attacked by twenty bandits.

"That's not good..."

The bandits had launched a surprise attack on the group, and they were completely surrounded. I put away my carriage, took off Shiromaru's collar, and ordered him to attack from the opposite side. Meanwhile, I instructed Valley Wind to take me over the hill.

The group under attack comprised six adventurers, three hired merchants, and seven slaves.

While I confirmed the situation, I heard Shiromaru howling from the opposite side. I shot a Fireball off into the sky in response.

"What was that?" one of the bandits screamed, cautiously looking all around.

"Waaaah!"

"It's a wolf mons— *Cough!*"

“It’s huge and— *Argh!*”

Before they could even finish their sentences, Shiromaru attacked, completely confusing them. I charged in with Valley Wind so I could finish them off.

“I’ll back you up! Strengthen your defenses!” The bandits weren’t the only ones who were confused, but the adventurers quickly followed my instructions and assumed defensive stances. “Also, the wolf’s with me! Don’t lay a hand on him unless you’ve got a death wish!” I added. Shiromaru couldn’t tell enemies apart from allies. If one of the adventurers attacked him, he’d kill them without a doubt.

The bandits who attacked us were killed in a flash by me riding Valley Wind as well as Shiromaru.

“Whoa, that was amazing! Who is he?”

“We can ask questions later! He’s our ally, so we need to close in our ranks!”

“But there are only three bandits left. Wait, no—they’re all dead!”

The bandits were in the middle of launching coordinated attacks, but they hadn’t been prepared to handle an ambush of their own, so it was easy for me to defeat them.

“Come back, Shiromaru!” I called, and he came galloping towards me, tail wagging. I petted him on the head.

“Thanks for saving us, but are you really sure you’re on our side?” one of the adventurers asked from a short distance away.

“Well, I guess that depends on you. If you choose to fight me, I won’t go easy on you,” I said with hostility.

The adventurers looked hesitant but then threw down their weapons and held up their hands. “We don’t mean you any harm. As we said, we’re grateful.”

I had Shiromaru hang back as I approached the men. “Those guys were bandits, without a doubt. Since I defeated, let’s see...well, all of them, do you mind if I take them?”

“Of course we don’t mind. You and your wolf defeated them, after all.”

I instructed Shiromaru to recover the bandits' bodies. I'd told him beforehand not to rip them into pieces, so all of them were cleanly beheaded. I put the corpses into my bag.

"Thanks so much for saving us." A man who appeared to be a merchant came up to me. "I'm a slave trader. My name's Jaiman."

Name: Jaiman
Age: 43
Class: Human
Title: Slave Trader



I frowned slightly at the mention of his profession.

“You need not be alarmed,” the man went on. “I only go through perfectly legal routes. But I suppose just saying that isn’t proof. Please take a look at this.” The man produced a piece of paper which said “License to Buy and Sell Slaves” which, after a bunch of contract jargon, had the man’s name and then the words “Approved by Duke Alsace von Sanga.”

“I don’t know if this is authentic or not...but if this is truly the duke’s signature, then I suppose I’ll trust you.”

“Oh? Well, thank you! You can just call me Jaiman. Also, please pardon me, but—would you mind removing your mask so I can see your face?”

I only just remembered I was wearing a mask to disguise the bottom half of my face. I took it off, showing him and the other adventurers what I looked like, and they all seemed shocked.

“I had no idea you were so young! I mean, I knew you were a young man, but I didn’t think you’d be *this* young! Your name isn’t Tenma by any chance, is it?” Jaiman’s question raised my suspicions. “I’m sorry, I didn’t intend to startle you. Actually, I’m the one dealing with a slave named Guise, and I heard about you from the duke!”

Jaiman proceeded to tell me what he and the duke had discussed. This included the details of the contract I’d made with the duke, and what happened with the duel, so I relaxed, realizing that Jaiman must be telling the truth.

“But what are you doing out here, Tenma? I mean, of course we’re grateful you came along when you did, but I heard you were heading for Dungeon City. This isn’t the way there!”

I was surprised to hear that, and so I showed him the hand-drawn map I had received from the guild. “I just followed the map here, but apparently I must’ve taken a wrong turn somewhere...”

Once Jaiman saw the map, he said something shocking. “It certainly does look familiar, but I’m afraid this is a map of another domain. Whoever copied this for you must’ve confused your destination with someplace else.”

I let out a deep sigh. It seemed no matter how long I traveled, I wouldn't be reaching the village after all.

"But you're not too far off course out here. If you get out onto the correct road, you'll reach your destination. Actually, we happen to be headed to the same village that you are."

I could already tell what he was getting at. "All right. I'll go with you to your destination, but only if you give me information about Dungeon City. The only things I can offer you as payment are how I just defeated those bandits, and my protection until we get to the village. Do you agree?"

"You've got a deal! Thank you so much!" Jaiman stuck out his hand and we exchanged a hearty handshake. "We'll get to the village in a few hours if we keep going from here. We'd really like to arrive there by the end of the day. Is that all right with you?"

"It's fine, but aren't there some among you who are injured?" I asked one of the men behind Jaiman.

"There are, but luckily their wounds are shallow. We'll be fine with light Recovery magic and potions."

All they had to do was finish an inspection of their carriage and they were ready to depart. I didn't get my own carriage out, but instead pulled myself onto Valley Wind and instructed Shiromaru to stay fairly close, letting him scout up ahead and ward off monsters.

The adventurers looked surprised to see Valley Wind, but for some reason Jaiman wasn't. Apparently the duke had already told him about both Shiromaru and Valley Wind. Since Shiromaru had been covered in blood earlier, it took him some time to realize that we were working together.

Jaiman was right: we reached the village in about three hours. There were some monsters along the way, but Shiromaru took care of all of them, so we arrived at the village without incident.

"We're here. Thanks to you, we made it here safely." The adventurers Jaiman had hired got difficult looks on their faces as he said that, but it seemed they were prepared to accept any criticism after the incident. Thankfully I'd showed

up just in time to provide backup so no one had been seriously injured, including their client, but if Jaiman had been injured they might have had to suffer a very severe penalty. So a harsh word or two was letting them off easily.

“I’m sorry we got you into such a dangerous situation, Jaiman...” The leader of the adventurers apologized to him.

“No, it’s partly my fault as well. You warned me of the dangers before we left, but I’m the one who made the ultimate decision for us to leave. The payment isn’t much, but I can offer a little extra.” Now it seemed Jaiman was the one apologizing to them. “And of course I should thank you once again as well, Tenma. You really saved us back there.”

I sensed a little reserve in his voice, but he did seem to genuinely mean it. “It’s fine. It wasn’t much trouble for me and I’m glad nothing happened to you all. I’ve received enough payment,” I said casually.

“Ha ha ha! Yes, we certainly managed to come out of that unscathed. But if we’d been alone, several people would have died, I’m sure of it! The only reason we’re all still here is because of you.” He smiled at me. “Tenma, would you join us at the inn we’re staying at tonight? It’s too dangerous to set off again tonight. And I can give you your remaining compensation by tomorrow afternoon.”

“All right. I’d appreciate that.” I put Valley Wind away in my bag and followed behind Jaiman. It would have been generous to say the inn in question was top-notch, but for a mid-tier inn it was fairly clean. Jaiman was courteous enough to arrange for me to have a private room, so I was able to comfortably relax.

Unfortunately, it was raining the next day. I was sitting by the window watching the rain fall from the sky when I heard a knock at my door. “Come in.”

“Excuse me,” Jaiman said as he entered. “Tenma, I’ve obtained a map to Dungeon City for you.” He unrolled the piece of parchment he held in his hand and showed me, explaining the drawing. “Please accept it.”

He handed me a separate piece of parchment, which was an even more detailed map.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, of course. It’s the same map, and although it’s not an exact copy, it’s still very accurate. So I don’t think you’ll have any problems getting to your destination.”

“Thank you.” I went ahead and put it in my bag.

“If you do happen to get lost again, wait until just after sunset. The first two stars you see will be in the direction heading straight for Dungeon City.”

“I see... Thank you.”

“Unfortunately it’s cloudy today... When do you think you’ll leave? As long as you stay in the village, you’re under contract with us, so we can take care of your lodging fees.”

I thought about it for a moment. “That’s generous of you, but I think I’ll be fine in the rain. I’ll leave a little after noon.” According to the map he’d given me, from here on out it was mostly plains, which shouldn’t be a problem for my carriage.

“Is that so? Well, you can still use this room until sunset, so if you change your mind please let me know,” Jaiman said, and then left the room.

I had a light breakfast and then asked the innkeeper where the nearest guild was. I borrowed an umbrella from him and then set out. It was about a fifteen-minute walk from the inn. The building was much smaller than the one in Gunjo City.

“I defeated some bandits and I’d like to get paid for it,” I told the lady sitting at the front desk. The man in charge came out and showed me to a back room.

“So you have twenty corpses in your bag? Could you please take them out and show me?”

I did as he said, placing the bodies of the bandits in the designated spot.

The man didn’t seem to have much of a reaction when he saw the bodies. He said, “Hm, let’s see... These three had bounties on their heads. This one’s is 100,000G, and these two’s are 80,000G. None of the others have bounties on them. But since you defeated all of them, and that task just happened to be on our job listing, I’ll count this as mission completed.”

He transferred the corpses over to a magic bag belonging to the guild, took me back to the front desk, and then gave me my payment. “The payment for the bounties is 260,000G. The commission for the completed job is 150,000G, for a grand total of 410,000G. Please go ahead and confirm the amount.”

I looked through the money and put it in my bag. Then I asked where the nearest shop was, because I wanted to see if there was anything there I’d be interested in. As soon as I arrived, I looked around to see if anything caught my interest, but nothing did. I proceeded to the shopkeeper and inquired about the specific item I was after.

“You want a large cask? Wait right here,” she said, and brought me back a cask that was about fifty centimeters tall. “If you’re going to use it for storage, this one ought to be big enough.”

“Oh... I think that’s a bit on the small side. I need something much bigger,” I said.

The shopkeeper pondered this. “Oh! I know just the thing!” She took me around to a storage room outside. “How about this? It’s a wine cask. Surely this will be big enough?”

This one was about 1.2 meters high, with a diameter of a meter. “Yes, that’s exactly what I’m looking for. How much is it?”

“Oh, I’ll just charge you a restocking fee for it.”

The fee turned out to be 500G. I paid, put the cask in my bag, and left the shop in high spirits.

*Obtained the essential item for this former Japanese person, **Substitute Wooden Bathtub!***

I was so incredibly excited I forgot to use my umbrella on the way back to the inn, so by the time I got there I was completely soaked. Not only that, but I didn’t realize this until I stepped into the inn and received a stern glare from the innkeeper.



“All right, time to leave!”

Since I'd taken care of all my errands, I visited Jaiman's room and told him I was leaving.

"Oh? Well, I often go to Dungeon City for my business, so we might meet again someday. Until then, safe travels!" We shook hands and promised to meet again. At first I wasn't too sure about the guy when I'd heard he was a slave trader, but once I got used to him it didn't bother me too much. The adventurers who were accompanying him as bodyguards told me that although Jaiman was a licensed slave trader, he also did other kinds of business, and he never treated anyone poorly. They said he was a highly trustworthy slave trader. I suppose now that I thought about it, the duke wouldn't give someone a license if they were a bad guy.

Speaking of slaves, Guise and the others had become slaves, but at this point I told myself it was foolish to care about it too much.

And so I set out, this time determined not to get lost.



I soon got my first chance to use what was perhaps my greatest find so far on my journey: the wooden cask, aka my new bathtub. "Let's try this baby out!"

I put the cask in the space I'd cleared for it inside the carriage and removed the lid. I was so excited, but what awaited me was...

"Ughh! Disgusting! What is that stench?!" The moment I lifted the lid, a smell so foul it burned my eyes wafted upwards. I quickly put the lid back on it, returned it to my bag, then went about ventilating the carriage.

"Damn it—they tricked me. I should've known the inside would be rotten!" For a moment, I was about to give up on the idea of having a bath, at least until I reached Dungeon City. But I had been craving one so much! After all, as a Japanese person—formerly, at least—it was basically an instinct, so I just couldn't let this one go.

"Didn't somebody famous once say, 'If you don't have a bath, you should just build one,' or something like that?" Maybe that rotten smell had momentarily rotted my brain. Now that I thought about it, of course no one had actually said such a thing, but I had imagined some fictional Roman character making that

declaration.

Putting that matter aside, I set the barrel down some ways from my carriage, opened the lid, and then bolted. I created a golem and instructed him to wash it out from afar. However, golems weren't very good at precise tasks, so I had to use magic from a distance to manipulate it.

First, I discarded the leftover wine that was inside. Next, I used Water magic to rinse out the interior. After I'd repeated this process several times, the water finally ran clear. After that, I took a rag from my bag and rubbed soap on it, scrubbing the inside of the barrel.

Finally, I filled it with boiling water to sanitize it. Just in case, I let that water sit in there for an hour. And then...

"All right! The smell's not bad anymore!" *I did it!* Now I could take my long-awaited bath inside the carriage. I quickly brought it back in and filled it up.

"Ahhh, this is paradise." I submerged myself in the steamy water up to my shoulders and enjoyed the first bath I'd had in quite some time. I stayed in there for a while, so I just lay around in a towel afterwards to cool off.

Honestly, I wanted to go completely naked, but the towel kind of added to the experience. "Time for post-bath relaxation!" I took out some ice-cold milk from my dimension bag. I'd used magic to chill it and stored it in there. "Here we go!" I put a hand on my hip, puffed out my chest, and drank the milk. "Wowee! That's the stuff!"

Some people liked an ice-cold beer after a bath, but in my opinion there was nothing better than milk. I'd drink beer if I had it, of course, but my abnormal constitution meant I probably couldn't get drunk anyway. Most of all, since I knew how beer tasted in the other world, all the beer in this world, which was technically called ale, tasted gross to me.

The ale itself wasn't gross—it just seemed that way to me. Ale was quite popular in this world. On the other hand, I thought that milk tasted way better here than it did in my old world, since it didn't have to be sterilized with heat. Most of the milk sold there had to be heated to 130 degrees Celsius to be sterilized. That, along with being stored in plastic jugs, took away a lot of its taste. Here, they either purified it with magic to kill the bacteria or heated it at

a lower temperature. Either way, it was delicious. And if anything did happen, there was Recovery magic in this world, so there was very little risk of dying from bad milk. Besides, if you were so far gone that not even Recovery magic could help, you'd just have to prepare yourself to die.

Anyway, I digress. That was all a very long way of explaining why I loved a glass of ice-cold milk after a bath. However, there was just one problem. I was starting to run out of milk. I needed to hurry to Dungeon City! I had to protect the enjoyment of my beloved baths!

I spent the rest of the night having ridiculous thoughts like these.

Part Two

I finally arrived at Dungeon City five days after I parted ways with Jaiman. Sagan, which was the formal name of the city, had seen rapid growth since the dungeon was first discovered twenty years ago. Its population was roughly 160,000, with a third of those being adventurers or guild members.

Since most of the time, adventurers were the catalyst for the expansion of dungeon cities, high-ranking adventurers had a lot of influence and were greatly respected. On the flip side, weaker adventurers were disrespected and even taunted by children. This sort of thing also happened in Sagan. Like everywhere else, if you were strong you could gain money and power; if you were weak you would be ridiculed. That was Dungeon City.

The city of Sagan was surrounded by a wall. There were gates on all four sides of the city, with guards stationed there twenty-four seven. I arrived at the city's southern gate. There were about a hundred people waiting in line to complete paperwork in order to enter.

If I just got in line, it would take me forever to get in. Still, I had a trick up my sleeve as an adventurer. "Excuse me, guard. Here's my adventurers' guild card."

"Let's see here... Rank C Adventurer Tenma. Looks legit to me. This way, please."

Everyone around me looked annoyed to see me jumping the line, but hearing I was a Rank C adventurer shut them up. In fact, I even caught some cheers. Rank C adventurers and above had priority admittance to dungeon cities. I could also skip the paperwork and just give a brief rundown of the missions I'd completed thus far. I told them about slaying the ogres and the various groups of bandits I'd defeated, including Banza and his cronies. The Sagan guild confirmed both of my stories and so my admittance into the city went very smoothly.

Once that was finished, I received citizenship in the town for a limited time. This was a system held in lieu of adventurers paying taxes—it cost 10,000G every six months to renew your citizenship card. If you didn't pay, you would

get thrown out of town, and in the worst-case scenario, you could even be made a slave.

You had to pay 10,000G on the spot for the card, but those who couldn't afford it could get a loan at the guild. The loan was low interest, but if you skipped out on paying it you'd be making an enemy out of all the guilds on the continent, so not many people did that.

By the way, the only ones eligible for this service were adventurers. I paid my 10,000G and then received my identification paperwork.

“Welcome to Dungeon City Sagan!”

And so I stepped foot into a dungeon city for the very first time in my life. The structure of Sagan resembled that of Place Charles de Gaulle in Paris. The entrance of the dungeon was in the city center, with roads coming out of it. The city stretched about thirty kilometers across at its widest point; it was a fairly large city. Since the city was designed in this way, there were natural divisions in residential areas. Most of the affluent residents lived in the northern part of Sagan. Citizens with average incomes lived to the south. The west was where you could find the slums, and it wasn't a very safe place to be. The east was where people who worked in factories and the like generally lived. All the most expensive shops were located in the northern part of the city.

The knights' headquarters, adventurers' guild, regular shops, inns, and restaurants were mainly located in the central part of the city near the entrance to the dungeon.

First off, I decided to go check out the entrance to the dungeon. It was surrounded by a high wall, with no large buildings around it.

“I guess that makes sense,” I said to myself. “It would be too dangerous if there was a cave-in.” There were many examples of cave-ins and collapses of smaller dungeons. But when a dungeon was this large, the dungeon itself was said to be a monster, and like its own little world. That was because the dungeon's core absorbed all the mana emitted by monsters and adventurers inside to boost and regenerate the dungeon. That was what made large dungeons strong. And the monsters that existed within could survive without sustenance from the outside, and would even breed. Because of that, they

would sometimes overflow to the outside world, causing great casualties and calamities.

Many scholars had studied the nature of dungeons over the years, but none had ever been able to explain their existence.

“I’ll have to ask the gods next time,” I said, but I didn’t actually mean that. I was certain they knew something, but just as certain that they wouldn’t tell me. If they did, surely other people who had gotten reincarnated would’ve leaked that information by now.

There were people outside the dungeon recruiting party members or looking for jobs, and some who offered healing services for money. But the ones who stood out to me the most were the children, who certainly didn’t seem like they belonged there.

I asked another adventurer nearby about them.

“What, this your first time coming to a dungeon? They’re slum kids. You can hire them to haul around your equipment. Pretty common sight in a dungeon city.”

In other cities, these children would be out hunting, but apparently here in Sagan you could hire them to do work for you inside dungeons. The reason for this was that the hunting locations outside Dungeon City were used solely by adventurers who were unable to make a living in the dungeons, and those kinds of adventurers tended to be violent people who had no qualms about doing things that were illegal. They didn’t want children going out and earning money with those people, so instead they were hired to help inside the dungeons. It was surprisingly cheap to hire them, but if they got lucky with a kindhearted adventurer who was willing to take pity on them, they usually made a lot more and were fed as well. Anyway, it was good for them to get used to the dungeons now, because in the long run, once they got registered with the adventurers’ guild they could make more money.

I thanked the adventurer, tipping him a silver coin for his information. “Thanks!” the man said, and headed towards the entrance himself. After I watched him leave, the children all scrambled after him, but he entered the building without them. Apparently the children weren’t allowed inside.

The building's interior was fairly plain. There was a large bulletin board where jobs and other notices were posted. There were five reception desks where one could register to enter the dungeon, a rest area, and a service desk where one could ask for advice. I approached the service desk and told them I wanted to use the dungeon. The person told me there would be a 1,000G registration fee.

After that, they explained that I would bear personal responsibility for whatever happened inside the dungeon, and that I had to notify them if I wanted to take a party larger than ten inside. I was allowed to hire the children waiting outside, but I had to also take responsibility for them. I signed a contract agreeing to all these things.

Then they recommended I buy a special item.

"What is it?" I asked.

"This is a warp card you may use inside this dungeon."

To put it simply, it was an item with a save function. There were paths inside the dungeon that led directly outside. Before they had these cards, if you accidentally went down one of these paths and ended up outside, you'd have to return to the entrance and start over from the beginning, no matter how far you'd previously made it in the dungeon.

But ever since this item had been developed, it would record the places that led outside, so they were no longer one-way paths. It reminded me of the Anywhere Door, used by a certain blue cat robot.

There were no rules about the warp points within the dungeon; some floors might have many, and some might have zero. However, all warp points returned you to the one at the entrance. So if you wanted to travel to a different warp point inside the dungeon, you had to first return to the entrance, then use the reentry warp point.

"But doesn't this just make it easier for people to get down to the bottom floor?" I asked.

The answer they gave me was that it didn't prevent that from happening, but adventurers who did things like that were ostracized by other adventurers. Most importantly, when it came time for those adventurers to depend on their

actual abilities elsewhere, some ended up losing their lives. Also, in order to use this easy way out, you had to have some part of your body pressed against your party members' bodies to travel through the warp spots. Most people held hands, but some people got trauma just from seeing big, tough adventurers holding hands.

The warp card cost 100,000G, which was pretty pricey, but also worth it. I wasn't short on money, so I decided to just buy it. Each warp card had to be registered to the owner to prevent theft, so a spell was cast on it. I thought this was a pretty fancy magical item, but after I bought it I found out it could only be used in the Sagan dungeon, and if you went to another dungeon you had to buy a separate warp card there.

After that, I checked the notices and the jobs posted on the board, and then headed to the guild. It was about a five-hundred-meter walk straight from the gate. This guild was several times larger than the one in Gunjo City.

I decided to go inside to gather information, but...

"This is no place for a kid! Go home!"

...it looked like trouble was already starting. The man who accosted me seemed to be fairly drunk. Just your typical adventurer. I didn't feel like dealing with a drunk right now, so I ignored him.

"Hey, did you hear me, ya brat? I'm a Rank C adventurer, so you'd better listen to me!" he clamored.

"Oh, you're a Rank C adventurer? Since you're drunk at this hour, I figured you were a Rank D and out of work!" I yelled, trying to sound surprised. I heard laughter around us. Not only was this guy bragging that he was a Rank C, but he was also making fun of a kid.

"You little brat!" The man grabbed for the axe that hung from his hip.

"Watch out. That's dangerous." Before the man could swing it, I held a knife to his throat. "Don't move. If I see even your finger twitch, you'll be in trouble."

The man didn't seem to understand what had happened at first, so when he moved slightly, I pressed the knife into his neck—once he felt the pain of it cutting into his flesh he got the point.

“Good. Now that you understand, how ’bout you let go of your axe? Because if you don’t, I’m gonna slit your throat.”

The man lifted up both hands.

“I’m glad you got the point. Now try not to drink too much in the future.” Having said this, I went up to the desk. Most of the adventurers around us looked stunned by what had happened, but a few didn’t look surprised at all. In fact, they seemed as if this kind of thing happened all the time, which made me curious.

“Excuse me. I’d like information about the dungeon.”

“Information about the dungeon, correct? Maps are only public down to the tenth floor. After that, please refer to the above examples for the sorts of monsters you’ll encounter.”

Apparently, from floors one through ten, most of the monsters were the same. There were goblins, slimes, skeletons, and the occasional orc. But starting at floor eleven, more bug-type monsters appeared. Most people formed parties at this point. A lot of bug-type monsters were pretty stubborn. They weren’t suitable for eating, but their materials could be used for weapons and armor.

Starting at level twenty, most of the monsters were Rank C, and that was all the information they gave me. That wasn’t their being stingy—it was just that after that point, the types of monsters which would appear were irregular. So giving the public inaccurate information would just be putting them in danger. Because of this, more adventurers who were challenging themselves by venturing to the twentieth level came back alive than adventurers who were used to it.

Plus, the guild would receive complaints from adventurers about the maps, and if they released too much information, people would be reckless. Therefore, it was safer to only publicize information until the tenth floor.

When I told the person at the gate about Shiromaru and Rocket and asked what I could get to prove that they were my followers, I was told all I needed to do was register them at the guild and that nothing else was needed. But if I did need to prove they belonged to me at any point, I needed to produce evidence for each follower. In other words, I could just use the collars that they always

wore.

Finally, I asked for recommendations on a good inn and restaurant around here, and then I left the guild. As expected, several men followed me as soon as I left the guild. They seemed to be the buddies of the Rank C drunkard from before. I went down a back alley to lure them in...

“Hey! Where’d the kid go? Is he hidin’ somewhere?”

And I hid. Well, to be more specific, I used my Fly magic to jump up on top of the roof. Although they figured I was a pretty strong kid, they probably had no idea I could fly. While they started searching every nook and cranny for me, I traveled from rooftop to rooftop looking for the inn they’d told me about at the guild.

“I’m sorry, but we’ve been all booked up for several days now.” The first stop was a bust. I had a feeling that would happen. On to the next one!

“I apologize, but our last room was just booked.”

Second one was also a bust. Seemed like I’d missed my chance by just a hair. Time to try the next one!

“We’re booked up solid for quite a while.”

The third one was a bust. Things were starting to get hairy. Surely the next one would work!

“Oh, are you a cute little boy? If you don’t mind, you could stay in my own private bedroom...”

I wasn’t getting anywhere near the fourth one! That innkeeper definitely wasn’t my cup of tea, nor would I be staying in his bedroom with him! Why would the guild even have this on their list?! Next, next!

“Unfortunately, we only allow female guests to stay here.”

The fifth one was also a bust. Seriously, why even tell me about that one?! There was only one place left on the list. Please, gods—er, well, never mind. They were never that helpful anyway.

“Sorry, but you gotta try somewhere else.”

And...the last one didn't work either. *Sigh, now what am I gonna do?*

Every single inn on the list was full. Well, despite the two weird options mixed into the lot that were never a possibility anyway. Worst-case scenario, I'd have to find some empty space to park my carriage and sleep in there. That seemed like it would just be asking for trouble, though.

"Ow!" All of a sudden I felt someone run into my back, a yelp in a cute little voice, and then the sound of something rolling.

I quickly turned around to see a little girl younger than I was rolling on the ground along with some firewood.

"You okay?" I held my hand out to her.

"I-I'm so sorry! I wasn't paying attention and I ran right into you!" She looked pretty scared as she apologized. "Are you angry?" she asked as she hesitantly held out her hand. I gently grabbed hold of it so as not to scare her, and helped her up.

"It takes a lot more than that to get me angry. Also, it's my fault for just standing in the middle of the road spacing out," I said as I picked up her firewood.

"I'm sorry! I'll pick that up!" But by the time she said that, I'd picked up most of it already, and the only thing left to do was bundle it back together. "Ahhh, I'm sorry! I caused you so much trouble..." She seemed down, but perked up a bit once I handed her the bundle of firewood.

"Well, be careful," I said.

The little girl started walking in the opposite direction.

"Found him! There's the brat!" Those guys really were stubborn. *What a pain,* I thought as I turned around. "Get outta the way!" one of them yelled.

"Eeeek!"

And I saw one of the men push the little girl out of his way.

"You bastard! How dare y— Oof!" I landed a hard punch right in the man's gut before he could finish his sentence.

“What are y—? Argh!” The man next to him got to eat my right uppercut.

“That’s my line! What the hell are you doing, raising a hand against an innocent little girl?!”

I heard screams from the people around me who had witnessed the whole scene unfold. There were two other men who were friends of the drunk, but they were so bewildered from the pressure of the crowd that they started to run away. But...

“If you two call yourselves adventurers, then you need to take responsibility for this!” a large, muscular man appeared from behind them suddenly and yelled.

“Hey! That’s Rank A Jin! Jin Geed!”

“Oh, yeah! I heard rumors he might reach Rank S soon!”

I heard several voices from the crowd around me. It seemed like this guy was pretty well-known in Sagan.

Name: Jin Geed
Age: 32
Class: Human
Title: Honorary Baronet, First-Class Adventurer

HP: 25000
MP: 10000
Strength: A+
Defense: A+
Agility: B+
Magic: C+
Mind: B-
Growth: B
Luck: B+

I took a look at his skills, finding that they surpassed even Dad’s. This was definitely a guy you put on the front lines. I let this Jin guy take care of the men

while I ran over to the little girl they'd pushed.

"It's all right now. Are you hurt? Ah, you skinned your knee. Stay still, okay?" I covered her knee and used Recovery magic on it. At first she seemed afraid, but once she saw that the magic had closed her wound, she began to calm down.

"Thank you. I'm fine now."

"I'm really sorry. It seems they were after me, but it's my fault that you got involved. I'm sorry."

She smiled at me, but then when she looked over my shoulder at Jin, she shrieked with fright.

"Hey, you two kids. Whaddya want me to do with these guys?" Jin was holding the two men who had tried to flee by their collars. Their feet dangled in the air as he walked over to us.

No wonder the little girl was afraid of him—he could pick up a grown man in each hand. That kind of strength was something you could only dream about.

The men seemed to be unconscious because their limbs hung limply at their sides and swayed loosely every time Jin moved. That seemed to scare the little girl even more.

I covered her eyes with my hands before she burst into tears and said, "They're a nuisance, so just toss them over there somewhere. She's afraid."

"Got it." Jin started walking towards a back alley. "And...hup!" With a small noise of effort, he tossed the two men into the alley. He brushed his hands off, then said, "Now what about those two?" He pointed at the men who were already unconscious on the ground.

I silently went over to them and cast just enough Recovery magic on them so they'd be able to speak.

"I'm sorry... Please forgive me," one said.

"Who asked you to apologize to me? She's the one you should be saying sorry to." I pointed to the girl.

"S-Sor..."

“Louder!”

“I-I’m sorry!”

“Now say it like you mean it!”

“Eeek! I’m very sorry! I’ll never do it again! Please forgive me!”

Now I turned back towards the girl. “Well, you heard him. What do you think?”

She looked dumbfounded, so I answered for her. “She won’t forgive you.”

“Please! Please forgive me! Please! Please!” The man got down on his hands and knees on the dirt.

“Th-That’s enough! My cut is healed so it doesn’t hurt anymore!” she hastily piped up.

“Good for you, she forgave you! But you better not ever raise a hand against an ordinary citizen—especially a child—ever again. You’d better be careful next time.” *If there is a next time*, I added quietly, so only the man could hear me.

“Oh, and make sure not to forget your friends out back in the alleyway.”

The man timidly dragged the friend lying next to him away, then disappeared into the alleyway. It seemed like they were all pretty afraid of me and Jin, but they should have been even more afraid of the Sagan residents’ stares. Now that they’d attracted all this attention, the rumor mill would be running wild in no time. And I had a feeling they didn’t have the skills to make up for those rumors. In other words, their days as adventurers in Sagan were numbered. This was a prime example of why relationships with the town residents were important, especially in a dungeon city like this one.

“Allow me to apologize too, little lady.” Jin apologized on behalf of the adventurers and did his best to put a kind smile on his face.

But when the girl looked at him, she shrieked.

His smile was still pretty scary, so she quickly ran behind me and hid. Jin looked really dejected when he saw that. It was no one’s fault, but I guess you could just say he had bad luck. I bet if he were better looking, the little girl would’ve admired him.

“Bwa ha ha!”

“Pfft!”

Despite Jin’s apparent disappointment, I heard two people laughing in the crowd.

“What’s so funny, huh?! I heard that, Mennas and Galatt!” Apparently Jin knew exactly who was laughing, and called them out by name.

“I can’t help it! I mean, your face...!” said a woman.

“You look like a villain! Who just found his latest victim!” another woman agreed.

Name: Mennas

Age: 28

Class: Human

Title: First-Class Adventurer

HP: 15000

MP: 14000

Strength: B

Defense: B-

Agility: A+

Magic: B+

Mind: B-

Growth: B-

Luck: C+

Name: Galatt

Age: 30

Class: Demi-human (Felid)

Title: First-Class Adventurer

HP: 21000

MP: 10000

Strength: A-

Defense: B-

Agility: A-

Magic: C-

Mind: A-

Growth: B

Luck: B+

They definitely had enough power to be worthy of the title of first-class adventurers. I had a feeling they were in a party together. I realized now that they were the people I'd seen at the inn who didn't seem surprised by my strength.

"You were just in the guild, weren't you? Wasn't there another one of you?"

The three of them abruptly stopped talking, serious expressions coming over their faces. "Oh, so you spotted us? Not that I should be surprised, I suppose."

"You're not an ordinary kid, are you?"

"It's no wonder."

It seemed like the three of them knew about me. Well, I didn't know *where* they'd heard about me, though, so it would probably be best if I were cautious.

Jin picked up on my hesitation right away and scratched his head, a guilty look on his face. "You don't gotta be wary of us, kid. We've seen you fight in Gunjo City." He explained that they'd been on their way home from a mission when they stopped by Gunjo City, and they'd watched my duel with Regir. "We made a bundle on you! We were a bit anxious when we saw he'd come in with a whole group, but anyway, that's how we know ya."

While he was talking, I heard a faint voice calling, "Jiin! Mennaaaas! Galaaaatt! Where aaare you?"

"We're over here, Leena!" Mennas called back.

A small woman with a gentle demeanor appeared soon after.

Name: Leena

Age: 21
Class: Human
Title: Apprentice Cleric, Viscount's Daughter
HP: 6000
MP: 15000
Strength: C-
Defense: C+
Agility: C+
Magic: A+
Mind: B-
Growth: A+
Luck: A+

Her magic-related stats were quite high, but the rest were pretty average. I decided to check her skills, just in case.

Name: Leena

Skills

Light Magic: 8
Water Magic: 7
Wind Magic: 6
Rod: 6
Cooking: 6
Magic Manipulation: 4
Fire Magic: 5
Endurance: 5
Lightning Magic: 5
Magic Boost: 5
Debuff Resistance: 5
Instant Kill Resistance: 5
Recovery Boost: 4
Omni-Elemental: 3
Skill Acquisition Boost: 2

Growth Boost: 2

Gifts

Protection of the Goddess of Fertility

Protection of the Goddess of Love

She had a lot of skills and seemed to have a lot of potential for future growth. Just another lesson to never judge a person by their appearance! Yep!

“There you are! Honestly, where did you go?” She was so mad I could almost see the cartoon bubble representing anger beside her head. I thought she was a little bit too old for a tantrum like this, but then again it suited her looks, so it was fine in the end.

After she gave them a good lecture, she spotted me behind the group. “Oh! You’re Primera’s friend! What was your name, again?”

Apparently, this girl and Primera were fellow airhead buddies. I had a feeling Primera was the one who’d told her about me, but although she remembered my face she couldn’t remember my name.

“Oh, you know Primera? It’s nice to meet you. I’m Tenma.”

“Ohhh, right. That’s your name...” She nodded.

I decided to ignore the slight and said, “Anyway, what are you guys doing here, Mr. Geed?”

“Oh, just Jin is fine. We were headed to the tavern when we saw those hotheads running off, and I decided to chase after them.”

Apparently he’d been worried about me.

“That was a close one. Y’know, they were just about beyond the point of no return!”

...Or not.

“That’s not true. All I needed to do was have a good talk with them and they straightened up!” I said.

“Yeah? I heard you had a lot of those kinds of ‘talks’ back in Gunjo City.”

Well, I couldn't deny that.

"At least they're still alive."

Jin and the others nodded. "You *are* an adventurer, after all."

"Well, putting all jokes aside, if they *did* get past the point of no return, the provost guard would come and take you away for questioning. And that's a pain, y'know?"

"That's true... Thank you."

As Jin and I talked, all of a sudden the little girl behind me tugged on my sleeve. "Excuse me."

"Oh, sorry. Where do you live? I can take you home. See ya later, Jin."

"Yeah, see ya!"

I called him by his first name since he'd given me permission, and he truly didn't seem to mind, so I figured I'd go ahead and do that from now on.

I grabbed the bundle of firewood the girl was about to pick up.

"Oh, you don't have to do that for me!" she said hesitantly.

"It's my fault you got involved in this in the first place. It's the least I can do," I insisted, and had the little girl lead me to her home.



Jin and his party members exchanged glances.

"Hey, Jin. Are you sure you don't mind that kid calling you by your first name?" Galatt asked.

"Galatt, Tenma isn't some ordinary kid. You know that. I wouldn't let some weakling do it, but I don't mind it if they're strong."

"How strong do you think he is?" Mennas asked, and Jin pondered this.

"Well, I don't know for certain. But if he brought out that equipment he used during the duel, we'd all have to fight with everything we've got or we'd be in trouble. Otherwise, it'd be about equal one-on-one."

"Ah, Jin! Primera said Tenma's really good at magic! And that he can control

dozens of golems at once! She also said he wasn't even fighting at his true power during that duel!"

"Seriously?!" the other three chorused at once in response to Leena.

They'd heard about Primera when they dropped by Gunjo City, and she wasn't the type to lie.

"Sorry, Mennas, Galatt. I was wrong. I wouldn't even wanna take him on with the whole party, much less one-on-one!"

"Yeah, it was about the smartest decision you could've made to treat him like an equal and stop those idiots before they got into too much trouble."

"Yeah... Let's make sure we don't make an enemy out of him. We should tell everyone else we know too."

Everyone else agreed with him, and then muttered, "*Jeez, is he some kind of monster?*" under their breath.



After I parted ways with Jin, I was completely oblivious to the fact that the strongest party in Sagan had just called me a monster. Meanwhile, I was taking the little girl home. She told me her name was Amy and that she lived near here. We walked for about ten minutes and then she announced, "Here it is. This is where I live."

"An apartment building?" I murmured to myself. The building reminded me of apartment complexes from my previous world. I'd never seen a building like this here before.

"I know it looks strange, but it's an inn. That's my house over there, though."

She explained that many adventurers who came to Dungeon City stayed here for extended periods of time and so they wanted to stay at an inn where their rooms felt like home. To do that, they could rent out an apartment in this building. In other words, they could pay rent for as little or as long as they liked.

The advantages to running an inn like this were that you didn't need to worry about feeding your guests, and you had a steady source of income from your long-term residents.

The disadvantages were that the rooms were only large enough to accommodate two to three adventurers, so adventurers who were in a party tended to avoid these buildings. There were about four or five of these kinds of inns in Sagan.

There was a two-story house next to the apartment where Amy's family lived.

"Where in the world were you, Amy? It's late!"

As we approached Amy's house, a woman emerged from it.

"Mom! I was walking in the street and..." Amy explained the situation to her mother. Once she was finished, the woman came over to me.

"Not only did you take care of my daughter, but you healed her injuries too..." She bowed her head to me.

"Please, it was all my fault. I'm so sorry I put her in danger." I bowed my head in return. I really did feel that it was my fault, and I felt bad that Amy's mother was thanking me, so I told her as much.

"That's enough! Can't you see you're putting the boy on the spot?" All of a sudden an old woman, who I assumed was Amy's grandmother, came out of the house and chided the mother. "I'm sorry. I'm Amy's grandmother. My name is Arie. And this is her mother..."

"I'm Karina. I'm sorry, I was just so flustered..."

"I'm Tenma. I'm an adventurer. I'm really sorry for getting Amy involved in all of this." I bowed my head again.

But Karina said, "Oh, it's fine. If Amy had just been more careful, she wouldn't have gotten involved."

Just then I remembered something. "Um... This might be a strange question, but do you have any free rooms?"

I explained how I was having trouble finding anywhere to stay.

"Yes, we have vacant rooms, but most of the time we require at least a month's stay. Is that all right with you?"

"That's fine. Also, I have other friends who will be staying with me..." I took

Shiromaru and Rocket out of my bag.

“Goodness! That startled me!”

I suppose any ordinary person *would* be startled if someone suddenly pulled a wolf and a slime out of their bag.

“I don’t mind them staying, but that does mean I’ll have to charge you a separate insurance fee in case they break or damage anything. Is that all right?”

“That’s fine! How much will it be?”

“The room will be 7,000G up front for a month. And if you overstay your contract by one week, we have the right to dispose of your personal items.”

“That’s fine. Let’s do two months, then.”

“I’ll go get you a contract.”

The contract was pretty straightforward. I showed her my guild card, wrote down my name and the amount I was going to pay, and then received an invoice.

“Here’s the key. Your room is right at the front on the first floor, Tenma.”

I went ahead to my room. “Hm, this place looks pretty comfortable.” The room was the size of about six tatami mats, with a bedroom, a kitchen, a bathroom, and a closet. It really reminded me of an apartment from my previous life.

“It’s a pretty unusual layout, right? But this is normal here in Sagan!” Amy said as she showed me around. “You can eat at any of the restaurants nearby, and there’s a bathhouse in the area too.”

I decided to go to the bathhouse right away. Meanwhile, Shiromaru looked very content with Amy petting him, so she said I could leave him with her. Once I returned from the baths, Shiromaru and Amy were waiting for me outside my room.

“Welcome back, Tenma. I gave Shiromaru a snack, but he wouldn’t eat it...”

“Oh, that’s because I’ve trained him not to accept food from anyone but me. Shiromaru, you can take food from Amy,” I said, and Shiromaru woofed in

response.

“You’re so lucky... I wish I had a follower...” Amy said enviously.

“You know, this is just a hunch, but I think you *might* be able to get one.” Just as I’d said, this was a hunch, but Shiromaru very rarely warmed up to someone he’d just met.

“Really?!” she exclaimed. “Do you mean it?!”

“I’m not certain, but it’s incredibly rare for Shiromaru to be fond of someone he’s just met, so I think there’s a chance.” I said this a bit uncertainly, but Amy didn’t seem to notice that.

“So then I can become an adventurer someday!” she said excitedly.

“Ha ha ha. Well, you’ll have to ask your mother about that...”

I secretly wondered if I had put a strange idea in her head, but later on I found out that Amy’s dad was an adventurer, and right now he was exploring a dungeon. He wasn’t a very high-ranking adventurer, so he mainly stuck to the top floors of dungeons.

After that, I decided to prepare for my own expedition to the dungeon tomorrow, and began packing preserved food and things that were simple to eat. First, I decided to make biscuits with a simple dough of flour, sugar, and butter. I folded some chopped nuts and dried fruit into the dough and baked them.

Next was meat. This was mainly for Shiromaru, so I’d need a considerable amount. First I packed jerky, then salted some large cuts of meat, dried them with magic, and put them in my bag. Then I grilled some meat—I wasn’t really sure if you could call it barbecued meat, though—and put all of it into individual packs in my bag. That way I could just pull out a meal when I wanted one. Long live the magic bag! Now if I just bought some bacon and raw meat, I’d be set in the meat department.

Now it was time for fruits and vegetables. I just shoved those in my bag whole. I did peel or cook the ones that were harder to eat raw, though.

As for what to do about drinks... I could always drink water using magic, so I’d

be fine as long as I packed two to three canteens.

Next, I needed a variety of spices and seasonings. The first thing I packed was my homemade miso and soy sauce. It didn't taste nearly as good as the real thing, of course, but it was better than nothing. I brought some dried herbs, and salt and sugar too. As long as I had salt, sugar, and water, I could survive for many days without food...hopefully!

As for the salt, I'd made it by breaking rock salt and grinding it down. I packed brown sugar and white sugar, both in cube form and in plain bags.

There wasn't really anything else I needed to buy, but I did decide to get a bunch of cloth. I could disinfect it and store it—surely it'd turn out useful for something.

Unable to think of anything else to do, I decided to use my free time to improve the adamantium armor and muffers I'd bought in Gunjo City. The insides of the muffers weren't rusted, so I could just use a knife to scrape off the rust on the outside. Then I took an oiled cloth to polish them.

Just then, I noticed something unfortunate, but decided to ignore it. The armor had shoulder reinforcements, so I thought maybe it had once been a full suit of armor, but for some reason the bottom, head, and arms were missing. Still, I thought I'd be able to use it. There was rust on the inside of this armor, so I removed as much of it as I could, then polished it like I did with the muffers.

"Looks like I wasn't mistaken after all..." I noticed the same unfortunate thing about the armor that I'd seen on the muffers. And that was... "This is a noble's crest." The crest was of a boar and a *dragon*. "It's a bit different from the royal family's crest that I saw before, but I wonder if it belongs to an archduke..."

It might become problematic if I handed it directly to an archduke, so if I ever came across the king or his guards again, I thought I should give it to them instead. *If* I ever saw them again, that is. I thought I probably would, though, since I had been meaning to travel to the capital at some point.

I decided not to let anyone see those two pieces of armor and sealed them away in my bag. Thankfully, none of the other armor had that crest on it, and no one would notice if I used it while I was working alone. And if anyone *did* become suspicious, I was sure I could just cover it up somehow. For example, if

someone showed up claiming to be the owner, it would still belong to me as long as they didn't have any proof.

I went through the rest of my equipment for tomorrow. I decided to use the leather armor I'd bought from the nearby weapons shop, my usual boots, a mythril short sword, and an orichalcum knife. Sagan sold a lot more armor than I'd expected. I browsed for a while, but couldn't find anything better than what I'd been using. This would be my first time in a dungeon, but I was planning on going as far as I could. Nevertheless, I told myself this first time was just to check things out, so there was no reason to push myself. At any rate, I decided to go to bed for the night.

Part Three

Ah, a new morning has arrived! I'm not sure if it's a hopeful one, but it is one to remember! I thought as I looked outside.

And it was raining cats and dogs. The inclement weather immediately dampened my motivation and I was close to just giving up and crawling back to bed.

"No... Surely this has nothing to do with the conditions *inside* the dungeon. At least, I hope not..." I strengthened my resolve and folded up my blanket. My first order of business was breakfast. All I had to do was warm up the food I'd made the day before, though.

After I finished eating, I opened up an umbrella and headed for the dungeon. There was a surprising amount of adventurers and merchants walking around nearby. I ignored them and headed for the entrance.

"Well, if it isn't Tenma! How about you join our party, huh?" My one and only acquaintance in this town called out to me.

"Sorry, Jin. This is my first foray into a dungeon, so I'd like to do it alone." I heard the other adventurers nearby whisper to each other when I turned him down.

"I see. That's a shame. I bet we could go at least one or two floors farther if we had you with us today."

The whispers around us grew louder.

"Well, I'm heading in now," I said. "Oh, that's right. I was just wondering, but what's the deepest you've gone in this dungeon?"

"Currently, the sixty-fourth floor, and that's taken me eight years. I don't go down there every day, though."

I heard voices of agreement from around us.

"Hm. I guess that's just how it is, huh?"

Someone laughed, saying I didn't know what I was talking about. "You act like

it's not that big of a deal, but did you know the deepest anyone's ever gone is the seventy-eighth floor? That took a party of the highest-class adventurers at the time—and it took them fifteen years to get to that point!”

“Yeah, but maybe if you got serious about it and actually went down every day, you'd set a new record.”

Jin looked at me, flabbergasted. “It's not that easy, kid. Plus, I don't have a very balanced party.”

I wasn't sure if he was being humble or serious, but he started complaining about his party members.

“Okay. Anyway, I gotta go.” I raised a hand to wave, then ran away. Jin looked like he wanted to say something else, but I ignored him and headed for the entrance of the dungeon.

Sagan's dungeon was sealed with a thick door, guarded by two muscular men. I showed one of them my guild card and he silently opened the door for me.

This was my first time in a dungeon. I noticed how dim it was, and how the air had a somewhat musty, unique smell to it. There was a set of stairs right by the entrance, so I descended them only to find another door. This time, there were no guards so I opened it myself. Then there was *another* door and *another* set of stairs.

In the end, I went through four doors and descended four sets of stairs. Then I finally saw a corridor.

“I guess it's to prevent monsters from getting out, but man, what a pain!” I muttered. And thus began my first-ever exploration into a dungeon.



“Shiromaru! Destroy them!” I commanded my wolf, who growled and reared up on his hind legs.

“Grarr!” Shiromaru defeated several of the goblins approaching us at once, tearing them apart with one hit.

“Good boy, Shiromaru! You’ve gotten a lot better at that!”

He had used the same attack he’d used on the crocodile sharks. I had officially named it Slash Claw, but just called it Slash for convenience’s sake. Ever since he’d first used it, I’d made sure to have him practice. And apparently that had been worth the trouble, because in the past he had only been using brute strength, but now he was able to control the attack much better. The impact traveled farther, and now he could use his hind legs as well.

Honestly, the previous version of it had been unwieldy. Other magic spells were more effective, and it was also too inaccurate. But now that he had practiced, he’d gotten the hang of it.

There were now three versions of the attack. First, he could use his claws to attack his enemy directly at close range. Second, he could use a weapon—a blade—to attack from a middle distance. Finally, he could use the aforementioned methods to attack from long range.

Shiromaru had quickly learned how to use this attack, and his skill in battle had skyrocketed.

In all honesty, these goblins were so weak he didn’t even have to resort to using this skill on them...

“Shiromaru! You can ignore the ones that are running away!”

I took the magic cores out of the goblins, then burned their bodies. In dungeons, you didn’t get paid for defeating monsters other than ones that had been specially designated and their subspecies. For example, while orc meat could be sold, the only thing worth taking from goblins was their magic cores; everything else was discarded.

It was acceptable to just leave their bodies in the dungeon, but once they decayed it could cause disease, or they could turn into undead monsters which

would attack other adventurers. Thus, it was encouraged to at least bury or burn them if you had the opportunity.

“The stairs should be up ahead. Let’s go, Shiromaru!”

My first foray into a dungeon was going pretty smoothly. I made it to the tenth floor in about two hours. To put that into perspective, under normal circumstances a novice adventurer would probably get to about the third floor in two hours. But in my case, I had Shiromaru’s nose and my Detection skill to speed up my progress.

This is a bit of a digression, but I’d made a decision to not allow Rocket to fight against his own species. And it wasn’t because I felt guilty about it, but more because it was gross to watch. Physically speaking, in a fight between two slimes, they usually try to swallow the other whole and absorb them into their bodies. Out of pure curiosity, I had Rocket do it once. Rocket’s whole body undulated while he was preparing to swallow the other slime, and the other slime responded in kind. The sight of both of their bodies quivering at once made me incredibly motion sick.

So I decided to never let him have another duel(?) with a slime again. However, after Rocket ate the other slime he defeated, he learned Fire Magic from it. At first I thought maybe he had just stolen its magic type, but he had eaten plenty of monsters who’d possessed magic before with no results. I came to the conclusion that slimes were able to steal magic only from other slimes. And slimes that possessed magic powers were quite rare. There might have been other conditions necessary for it to happen, but maybe it was actually a good idea to let Rocket only attack those rare slimes. Then it was just a matter of whether or not I’d be able to keep down my lunch...

At any rate, I decided to stop thinking about complicated things and focus on the dungeon.

I was now at the eleventh floor, which was the first floor to not have a publicly released map. The only thing I knew about it was that it contained bug-type monsters. A novice adventurer would have a tough time switching gears after finally getting used to fighting goblins, because bug-type monsters moved in a completely different way. The eleventh floor was seen as their first major

obstacle.

“That thing is fast. Looks like a caterpillar.” I used Identify and, sure enough, it told me the monster was a green caterpillar. It was fast, but it didn’t seem to have a very high attack power. However, it *was* venomous.

“Wait, Shiromaru!” I called out to Shiromaru, who was about to charge. I picked up a palm-sized rock from the ground and raised my physical abilities with Boost magic. I wound up like a pitcher on a baseball team and launched it. “Take this!” My ball—er, I mean rock—hit its target and blew the caterpillar to smithereens. “Disgusting! And *wow*, was that thing weak!” I probably shouldn’t have boosted my physical strength at all, because the caterpillar’s bodily fluids splattered everywhere when it died.

“Next time I’ll just use magic to defeat them...”

I must have cursed myself, because the eleventh floor was crawling with so many caterpillars I wanted to scream, “Isn’t there anything other than caterpillars around here?!”

I continued fighting nothing but caterpillars. Just as I started to get mentally exhausted and wanted to take a break, I came to a dead end. Normally I would take breaks at locations from which I could easily escape, or places that provided good hiding spots, but instead I went into the dead end and sealed off the entrance to it with Earth magic to make a sort of private room. I made sure no monsters were hiding inside, of course.

This method was simple, and pretty handy. If you used Boost magic on the earthen wall, not many monsters could bust through it. And even if there was a monster on the other side who had a sharp sense of smell, it probably wouldn’t think that there was someone resting on the other side of the wall. That gave me plenty of time to formulate a plan in case something did try to break through. The biggest advantage was that I could rest as much as I wanted without having to be on guard.

And since I could use many kinds of magic, not to mention the fact I had plenty of food, water, and a carriage I could use for a house, I could live inside this dungeon for as long as my supplies held out. Still, despite how long I *could* last in here, if I got too cocky and stayed cooped up in this dungeon for too

long, it might start affecting my physical and mental health. That was why I had searched for an inn aboveground where I could rest my bones.

“I should probably eat.” I had Shiromaru and Rocket take turns standing watch while I ate and took a rest. I fed them too, of course. If I didn’t, the solo performance of the sounds coming from Shiromaru’s stomach would’ve kept me awake.

I lay down and slept for about thirty minutes after eating. Good thing I had put a cot inside my bag. Sleeping on it was completely different from sleeping on the ground. It reminded me of something people said back in my old world: “When you get the chance to lie down, take it.” Even just a short nap could do wonders for both mental and physical stress. Though the journey here had not been difficult, apparently I was carrying a lot of unconscious stress.

“Let’s go, Shiromaru,” I called to him as he slept by my feet. I picked up the cot and put it away. Shiromaru seemed to be feeling refreshed as well. He yawned and stretched. Meanwhile, Rocket slunk inside the dimension bag to get some rest.

I was just about to break down the earthen wall to resume my adventures when all of a sudden I felt a slight breeze blowing in from behind me. “Where’s that coming from?” I wouldn’t have thought anything of it had the wind been coming from in front of me, but I thought it strange that there would be a breeze coming from the direction of a wall.

“Is this it?” I noticed a hole in the corner of the wall about the size of my fist. I used Earth magic to expand the hole and saw that there was a deep trench tunnel inside.

“A hidden room, maybe? I don’t know where it leads, but I have a feeling there’s a treasure in there,” I muttered to myself as I made Shiromaru get inside the bag. I used flying magic to slowly lower myself into the tunnel.

I sealed up the opening of the tunnel behind me so that even if another adventurer broke through my earthen wall, they probably wouldn’t notice the tunnel. I descended for about ten minutes. The diameter of the tunnel was probably about four meters, but sometimes the walls on either side would encroach to make it narrower. I used magic to widen the passage when that

happened as I descended. I felt like I had only traveled about a hundred meters deep at this point.

After descending for another ten minutes, I finally began to see the end of the tunnel. Upon landing, I saw another hole big enough for a person to fit through, and felt a breeze flowing through there. I stooped over and carefully made my way through the tunnel. Not five minutes passed before I came out into a large space. I could feel a thick concentration of magical energy in this place—more than normal—and I had a bad feeling all of a sudden, so I hid myself in the shadow of a rock.

I couldn't see any monsters, but I used Detection just in case, and got a pretty large magical ping from the back of the room. Strangely, nothing came up when I used Identify except some weird, bugged-out text. I had a feeling that whatever this monster was, it either possessed the Conceal skill, or had a powerful magical item that canceled out the effects of my Identify skill.

I'd never come across anything like this before, so I slowly, stealthily made my way towards the response. There, I saw a rock shaped like a dragon.

"A dragon...?"

It was about four meters large, in the shape of a dragon curled up asleep. This piqued my curiosity and, forgetting the fact that I'd gotten a magical ping from it, I approached it.

The dragon-shaped rock sensed my presence and its eyes flashed red as it rose to a standing position.

"What?! It's a golem!" Panicking inwardly, I quickly put distance between the dragon golem and myself. Having immediately recognized me as an enemy, it took an offensive stance. I pulled the strongest weapon I had—an adamantium sword—out of my bag, and brandished it at the golem.

I could have chosen to run away, but I was way too interested in the core that made this golem move, so I figured I might as well fight it.

It whipped its tail around and swiped its legs in my direction, but luckily it didn't seem to have a breath attack. As long as I kept more than a stone's throw away from it, it couldn't attack me.

“Still... It doesn’t seem like the adamantium sword is doing much damage to it.” If I kept going without changing my strategy, I wouldn’t lose, but I didn’t see myself defeating it either. I decided to stop being cautious, and cast Boost magic on my adamantium sword, then charged in close.

As expected, it swiped its leg at me to try to knock me over, but there wasn’t much force behind the blow. I took that opportunity to use Earth magic to turn the ground beneath its feet to dust to knock it off-balance, and also created walls to block its attacks and lessen their force. And of course, while I dodged the golem’s attacks, I delivered some of my own. I focused them on the base of its right front leg, and gradually I was able to chip away at the rock that was its body.

At first I used magic attacks, but it seemed like this golem had a certain amount of magical resistance. Once I figured that out, I realized physical attacks would be more effective, so currently I was using my boosted sword and Earth magic to create clods of earth with which to attack it.

Honestly, I had magical attacks that I thought would do damage even to this golem, but they were too powerful and therefore dangerous to use in a closed space like this; there was a possibility they could injure me as well.

At any rate, thanks to my focused attacks, a crack had appeared in the golem’s front leg. I put a considerable amount of distance between us, then used Earth magic to slam into the crack, successfully breaking the leg off. But I couldn’t let my guard down yet. Most golems had regenerative abilities, and sure enough, its damaged front leg was slowly starting to come back together.

“Not so fast!” I used Fire magic to stop the golem as I attacked it. Now that I had come up with a pretty good system, I was able to destroy its left front leg much quicker than its other one. I destroyed its back legs too, just in case, but I was still in the range of its tail, so I still had to be careful.

Now that I had destroyed all four of its limbs, I had before me a dragon golem with no legs. There was still its head and tail to worry about, so I began attacking its head before it could regenerate its other parts.

After I had attacked it for about five minutes, I managed to shatter its head. However, it was still alive.

“Jeez... I know it’s only a golem, but this is pretty grotesque.” As I said these words, I broke off its neck. Next, I destroyed its tail. At this point, the only thing left was its torso. One quick glance and you’d have thought it was just an ordinary rock.

I proceeded to destroy its body, and was just about to take out the core when I heard a metallic noise. All of a sudden my boosted adamantium sword shattered spectacularly.

“Whooooa!” I let out a weird noise, but that was because the sword had shattered with such force that my hand was throbbing. I’d let my guard down and was quite shaken. “Oww... What the heck was that?!” I looked at the spot where I’d struck last, and saw something white there. I carefully tapped around it, and another object came out—this one round, and also white.

“What is this—an egg?” Once I removed the object from its body, the golem finally stopped moving and collapsed. “Ahh, so this is its core!” Deprived of its core, the golem could no longer function and was just an ordinary rock now. For now, I just placed the object in my bag. I was about to leave the room when I noticed something metallic inside the former golem.

I used Identify on what I saw; it said “mythril.” I gathered all of the pieces of mythril up. They varied in size; the large ones were about the size of my thumbnail, the small ones half the size of my pinky nail. Mythril was a very rare material, so even the tiny pieces would fetch a high price.

“No wonder that thing was so tough and so difficult to defeat,” I muttered to myself. I used Earth magic on the golem’s remnants to turn it into sand. It seemed the reason this hadn’t worked the previous time I tried it was because of the mythril. It was just a pain to gather up all the pieces, though.

All in all, I obtained ten kilograms’ worth of mythril shards. Even at market price, that would net me at least 5,000,000G. It was worth the same as gold. However, mythril could be processed in various ways, and depending on the method used, the result could be worth more than five times as much as unprocessed mythril. Since mythril was such a tough substance, it was very difficult to process, so the extra value accounted for the time and effort spent doing so.

I searched my surroundings to make sure there wasn't any other mythril lying around. Although I located about twenty kilograms' worth of silver, I didn't find any more mythril. The silver was probably worth about 100,000 or 200,000G.

I was just about to call it a day when I noticed a spot at the edge of the room that seemed warped somehow. "I wonder if this is the thing they were talking about that leads to the outside?" Adventurers called it a "warp point." I wondered if someone who had been reincarnated had named it.

I was a bit nervous since it was my first time using one, but I steeled myself and entered the warp point, and found myself in another space.

There was a door just up ahead, so I opened it and found myself emerging into the open air through the door I'd entered earlier this morning.

"Oh, Tenma's back too!" I turned in the direction of the voice and saw that it was Jin.

"Yeah—I had my fill for the day and made some good progress."

Jin perked up at that. "Oh? How far did you get?" he asked with curiosity. I could tell he was hoping I'd tell him, so I took a small portion of my spoils out from my bag and laid it out on a nearby table. "H-Hey! Just how deep did you go?!"

I had taken out twenty kilograms of silver—having used alchemy to transform them into one-kilogram ingots—and two hundred magic cores.

Upon seeing it all, Jin and his party members began to freak out. Some people gathered around to get a closer look, but I glared at them and they backed away.

"I won't tell you exactly where I got them, but it's somewhere around the twelfth floor, maybe? There was a hidden room."

Several adventurers ran over to the entrance of the dungeon. *Hey now, I'm not lying, okay?*

Jin and his party gave me a suspicious look, but when they saw my expression hadn't changed, they didn't pursue it. Jin placed his hands on my shoulders and said, "Just don't send them too far astray..."

I nodded vaguely and replied, “Adventurers bear responsibility for themselves.”

He gave me a rueful chuckle.

“You gonna sell this silver to the guild?” Mennas asked. I said that was my plan. “This stuff is really high quality. You should sell it directly to a shop instead of the guild. They’ll give you more for it.”

“Where would you recommend?” I wasn’t that familiar with Sagan yet.

Mennas thought about it for a while. “Most of the shops in the north will buy this stuff, but I’m not sure which one would be best.”

For now, I put the ingots away in my magic bag.

“Hey, since you’re here—why don’t you join us for dinner?”

“Sure, that’s fine.” I decided to get to know them better, but I also had an ulterior motive—if I got closer to Jin and his party, it would keep them and others in check. I was sure they had a feeling that was part of my motivation, but they didn’t mention it. Maybe they thought they were doing me a favor since I was a “novice.”

“So where to?”

“There’s a good restaurant around here. They have a lot of options and the booze is decent too.” They told me it was near the guild.

“In that case, I’m going to drop by the guild to sell these magic cores,” I said, having decided to take a detour.

I received about 3,000G for the magic cores. They were mostly goblin and caterpillar cores—pretty low-level stuff for dungeons—so they were only worth about 30G apiece.

“If a beginner tried to gather that many magic cores, it would take them the better part of the day! I can’t believe you got all that in just four hours.”

After that, we arrived at the restaurant and ordered our food. Over the course of our conversation, I learned that the name of Jin’s party was “Dawnsword.” It used to be just three members, but their party became more stable once Leena joined, and nowadays word of them had spread even to the

capital.

“When you were in the capital, did you happen to hear any rumors about Kukuri Village?” I asked.

“Nope, can’t say I did... But the last time I was there was about three years ago, so it wasn’t very long after the incident at Kukuri. Why do you ask?”

Although it seemed like Jin knew about Kukuri Village, I didn’t intend to tell him any details, so I just gave him the same vague explanation I’d given Duke Sanga.

“I see... Well, I hope you hear word of them soon.”

He didn’t seem suspicious of my story at all. I asked about Margrave Haust, and it seemed that he had been shamed greatly by the incident at Kukuri Village. After all, it was he who had sent the soldiers there, and because they’d ended up fleeing, the village was destroyed. He was even unluckier because all the villagers were either former adventurers or had ties to adventurers, and every single survivor had turned their back on him, spreading the word about what he had done.

Apparently, due to this situation Margrave Haust’s domain had temporarily lost nearly half of its adventurer population. Recently the population had rebounded to what it once was, but there were significantly fewer veterans.

“By the way, I heard you’re pretty good at making desserts,” Leena said, blushing. I wondered whether her blush was from the alcohol, and also how she knew that in the first place. “Primera boasted about it to me. She said she’d eaten desserts that were better than what you could get in the capital.”

Apparently, her source of information was the airheaded daughter of Duke Sanga.

“I’m not sure if they’re tastier than the desserts in the capital, but I did give Primera some several times,” I said.

“Please make some for me too! It’s not fair that only Primera gets to experience them!” She leaned forward, pleading with me.

I wondered what had gotten into her. Mennas explained. “She goes crazy

over sweets. But...if you're gonna make some, I'd like to try them too!"

Apparently the magic of sweets even extended to Sagan. Jin and Galatt gave me sympathetic looks. I turned to them for help, but they just laughed and glanced away.

"That's fine, but it'll cost you."

Leena said, "Not a problem!" and handed me a gold coin.

"That's way too much! Two silvers is enough!"

She gave me a puzzled look, taking two silvers out of her bag instead. "Please give me something not even Primera has tasted!" she requested.

I thought about it for a while, then said, "I'll make you two different kinds of sweets. Come to the guild the day after tomorrow, around lunchtime."

Excited, Leena exclaimed, "You got it! I'll be there!"

We finished our meal and then dispersed once it got dark outside. The reason for that was because Leena had had too much to drink and was falling down drunk.

I brought my leftovers back to Shiromaru and Rocket, fed them their dinner, and then decided to go to sleep.

Part Four

“Hey, Tenma! Wake up!” Even though I was supposed to be alone in my room, a familiar voice woke me. I sat up sleepily, rubbing my eyes.

“Oh! You’re finally up! Sorry I barged in like this!”

I blinked. Before me were the gods of magic and skill. “Hey, I thought you weren’t supposed to contact me again for decades?”

The god of magic shrugged. “Eh, we pulled some strings with the god of creation.”

I stared at them, dumbfounded. The god of skill piped up and said, “Anyway, we don’t have as much time as before, so we’ll get straight to the point! First, we need to take care of some business. You got yourself some mythril, right? Well, I came here to tell you how to forge it! Mythril’s a basic substance, but it’s hard to process. Now, if you put some silver into the mixture, imbue it with mana, then mix it together little by little, it’ll become softer! Then shape it into the desired form, heat it up, and hammer it. Like this, you can gradually beat the silver out of it, and all that’ll be left is pure mythril. Understand? You can use the same process for orichalcum too!”

“Got it.”

“Also, I have a message for you from the god of beasts! Y’know that egg you found? Well, if you keep infusing it with lots of mana, you can hatch it! And once the monster is born, it’ll become your follower. That’s all!”

I nodded.

“Now it’s my turn. About your slime... Rocket, was it? Well, it seems to be a subspecies—but a new variety of one. It has the special ability to absorb skills from other slimes. I’ll be adding things to Rocket’s status soon. By the way, it seems it’ll be easier for him to absorb abilities from other slimes if you capture them alive. Really interesting stuff.”

I was a bit creeped out by the god of magic, who was chuckling ominously. He sounded like the protagonist of a certain TV drama.

“Ah, crap! Looks like our time is up! See ya later, Tenma!”

“Bye-bye, Tenma!”

Their figures began to grow foggy, and then I woke up for real. It was actually still the middle of the night, though, so I decided to go back to sleep.



“What to do...?”

When I woke up, I did just as the god of magic had instructed me in my dream; I began trying to infuse the egg with mana. However, I realized I’d forgotten to ask a very important question, so everything I tried failed miserably.

At any rate, I decided to treat it as though I were attempting to enchant something, and gave it another try. “Ah! It moved!” I wasn’t sure whether that was a good thing, but regardless I decided to continue pouring mana into the egg. If I *was* doing it wrong, I figured one of the gods would let me know...though the god of creation would probably get in trouble again.

Even though I had just begun my adventure of dungeon diving, I decided to take a break from that for a while to concentrate on feeding the egg mana. I modified a cloth bag to make it look like a rucksack, and slung it over my back. With the egg inside, I went about my schedule.

On today’s agenda was buying the ingredients for the desserts I’d promised Leena. I still had some ingredients left in my bag, but I wasn’t sure they would be enough, so I decided to take this opportunity to buy more.

First, I checked out what they were selling nearby, but the ingredients at the general store didn’t look very good, at which point I asked a townspeople walking by where I could find a bigger market. The sign outside the place they directed me to said “J Market,” which reminded me of a certain someone, but I ignored the thought and went inside anyway.

“Welcome! How may I help you?” an employee asked. I told her I was looking for ingredients to make desserts, and she directed me to where I could find those items. It seemed like they had quite the selection. I was browsing the herbs and spices when something caught my eye.

“Excuse me. What is this?” I pointed to a jar on the shelf that looked like it contained some kind of dried tree branch.

The employee looked over at the bottle. “Oh, that’s a vanilla pod. You can use it to flavor liquor. Now, we call it a pod, but it’s really the seed of the vanilla plant.”

I uncorked the bottle and took a sniff. It smelled exactly like vanilla beans. “I’ll take this.”

I paid for my items up at the front of the store. Although the fragrance of the vanilla was weaker than it was in what you could get back home, smelling it made me crave vanilla ice cream. Because of this, I picked up some ingredients to make ice cream, as well as the necessary tools.



Back in my room at the inn, I quickly prepped the ingredients for vanilla ice cream. I scraped out the contents of the vanilla pods and dissolved them in warm milk. Then I took a rockbird egg out of my bag and separated the yolk from the egg white.

I had some eggs left after using some of them as ingredients, so I took two more out and decided to try infusing them with mana as I had done with the other egg. I had Rocket sit on them to keep them warm. I know how ridiculous that sounds, but he knew Fire magic, so he was able to use magic on himself to keep his body warm. That made him the perfect incubator. I told him to keep himself about as warm as my own body temperature. Birds had a low body temperature, but rockbirds seemed a little warmer, or at least that was the impression I’d gotten when hunting them before. It wouldn’t hurt to conduct some experiments—I was going about all of this quite casually.

The eggs would have to be flipped occasionally, but I let Rocket do that at his discretion. Another one of the variables in my experiment was the type of magic used for the infusion; rockbirds were Wind types, but I’d decided to alternate infusing the egg on my back with Non-Elemental magic and Light magic.

After I was done checking on the eggs, the fragrance of vanilla seeping into the milk reached my nostrils, and I got to work. First, I added egg yolk, sugar,

the vanilla milk, and melted butter to a bowl and mixed it all up. Once the mixture thickened, I added sugar and continued mixing well. Next, I whipped the egg white to make a meringue. Once there were stiff peaks, I added in the rest of the ingredients. I carefully poured the mixture into the mold, trying not to ruin the meringue.

I was using metal cups for the mold, which I had greased with butter. I poured in the batter and banged it on the table to get all the air out, and now all that was left was to bake it! However, I didn't have an oven here, so I used a pizza oven I had constructed during my travels instead. I heated the inside of the pizza oven with Fire magic for about ten minutes, then placed the cups inside. They only had to bake for about twenty minutes.

I got started on my next task as I waited for them to bake. I had set some meringue aside for this purpose. I added milk and honey to a bowl, then a bunch of flour, and mixed it all together to form a batter. Just as before, I made sure not to destroy the meringue. I greased a square metallic pan, poured the batter in, and got the air bubbles out, and then I was all done!

By that time, my first batch had finished baking, so I took them out of the oven and stuck a skewer in one of them. "Nice—it's baked through!" Just in case, though, I rearranged the cups in the oven and baked them for another two minutes. Then I took them out, let them cool a bit, and placed them into my bag.

Now that I'd taken out the desserts, the oven had cooled off a little, so I used Fire magic to raise the temperature once more. When it was ready, I placed the square pan inside. This one had to bake for thirty minutes, and I had to rotate the pan halfway through. After it was done, I let it cool, and then put it in my bag too.

Just as I was finishing up the desserts, I felt the egg on my back start to move. I looked at it quickly, but it didn't seem to be hatching. It *was* moving, though, so I thought it would probably hatch soon. Since I'd been cooped up in my room making desserts, I opened up the window to get some fresh air...

"Ah..."

...and came face-to-face with Amy, who was peeking into my room.

“I’m sorry!” she cried. “It’s just... I smelled something really yummy!”

I joined her outside and realized she was right—there was a sweet aroma wafting out from my room. I took out one of the desserts that I had been saving for myself (well, for Shiromaru, really) and gave it to Amy instead. Then I invited her up to my room to get the rest of the desserts ready, when suddenly...

“Tenma! The egg!”

I glanced over at my bed and saw that the rockbird egg had hatched.

“That was fast! I only started warming it up today!” I was shocked at how quickly it’d happened, but I had little time to waste on being surprised. After all, there were now two baby rockbird chicks in my room. “I need to get rid of the shell and make them a place to sleep...”

The chicks were about twenty centimeters long, so I got a wooden box out of my bag that was about fifty centimeters long, and stuffed a piece of fabric inside. “Hey, Amy, what do you think about these chicks?”

“I think they’re adorable!” she replied enthusiastically—but that wasn’t what I was hoping she’d say. Perhaps I had phrased my question poorly.

“No—that’s not what I mean. Do you feel like they’re magical at all?”

She gave me a puzzled look and said, “Well, I feel something warm coming from them...” Her words once again made me think that she might have a Tamer’s disposition. When I told her as much, she looked thrilled and asked me how to register as one.

“You need to go ask your mother first.”

At this, she ran off down to her house. Meanwhile, I straightened up my room (though really I just chucked everything that was lying around into my bag) and waited for her to return. After a while, she came back with Karina and Arie in tow.

“Do you really think she can be a Tamer?” Karina asked.

It wasn’t as if I were a master Tamer myself, though—at least, not to the point where I could give her a very concrete answer. “As long as Amy really feels what she says she does, I think she is one, yes.”

If she experienced the same sensations and feelings that I did, then that was sufficient for her to be a Tamer. In order to be a Tamer, one had to have the ability to tame monsters, as well as the magic necessary to enter into contracts with them. You also needed to be compatible with the particular monster you were trying to tame. With all of those three conditions satisfied, you could turn a monster into your follower.

After I explained all of that, I added, “However, I’m not sure that Amy would be able to keep rockbirds under her control.”

Amy had never been trained to keep her magic in check nor learned how to control it, so it was unclear whether she would be able to get followers to obey her commands.

When she heard this, her shoulders slumped in dejection.

“But that doesn’t mean it’s impossible,” I went on.

“What do you mean?” Arie asked.

“Have you ever heard of imprinting?”

“Is that like when a baby goose thinks the first thing it sees is its mother?” Karina asked.

“Yes, exactly. I’m not sure if imprinting works on rockbirds, though.” All three of them looked at me expectantly, not understanding yet. “What I’m trying to say is that starting right now, Amy needs to raise the chicks on her own and try to make them imprint on her—she needs to make them think they need her. If she feeds them, disciplines them, and infuses mana into them when they’re this little, the chicks will begin to think that Amy is their mother.”

Hopefully their birdlike instincts would kick in and the imprinting would work. If it didn’t, we’d have to make them recognize her as their ultimate mistress through a second round of imprinting—in other words, by making them her followers.

“Of course she’ll need practice to learn how to give them mana, but luckily Amy is still young, so her mana is still growing and developing. Rockbirds themselves aren’t that strong of monsters, and if she has the ability to be a Tamer, that means she must have some predisposition for magic. I’m sure there

won't be a problem."

Amy's face brightened at this, but both Karina and Arie looked thoughtful.

"Can you tell us how to train her in magic?" Karina asked anxiously.

"I won't be able to train her completely, but I can look after her until she's learned the basics. I'll be training her in the same way that I was trained starting when I was four years old, so it's not very dangerous. If she accidentally uses too much mana, the worst that can happen will be that she passes out."

The two women looked a bit uneasy to hear that, but Amy said, "Please train me, Tenma!" She was so excited about it that her mother and grandmother reluctantly agreed.

"Amy, just so you know, I'm only planning on teaching you the basics. I can't take responsibility for anything beyond that. Also, just because you've learned the basics of magic doesn't mean you can go out and pretend to be an adventurer. If you don't follow my rules, I won't teach you," I said firmly. Being an adventurer meant that you alone were responsible for your life and death. But if I taught a young child the basics of magic and she went out and got herself killed, then it would be hard to say I didn't bear some of that responsibility. That was why I was laying down a rule that she couldn't go out and act like an adventurer or else I wouldn't teach her, and I made sure to say it in front of her mother and grandmother too.

"Okay. But when I get bigger, I'm gonna become an adventurer and go exploring the dungeons with Dad!" Amy said.

At this point, I asked Karina and Arie if they were sure it was all right.

"I suppose there's no helping it. I'd rather let her do it than try to stop her. Plus, if she's with her father then it won't be as dangerous as if she were alone..." Karina relented, giving her permission. "But make sure you tell your father that yourself!" she said.

"Also, just so you know—if Amy gives up or can't learn how to control her magic, these chicks will end up as meat on my plate."

"What...?" Amy gave me a mystified look, but I continued, unbothered.

“Think about it. It’s sad, but I don’t need a rockbird for a follower. And if you can’t control them, then they’ll be nothing more than monsters. I just happened to hatch them, so in that case I should take responsibility and get rid of them before they have the chance to hurt anyone.”

It might have seemed a little cruel, but I wanted to make it clear to Amy what I was prepared to do. If it came to that, I was sure she would hate me. Then I probably wouldn’t be able to stay in this apartment anymore, because things would just be too uncomfortable.

“So you need to train keeping all that in mind,” I said, fully prepared for her to make an enemy out of me.

“Okay! I promise I won’t let you kill these babies!” she vowed.

“Let’s get started, then. I have to go run an errand first, so while I’m gone, change into something you don’t mind getting dirty. And put some water in a barrel while you’re waiting for me to get back.”

I rushed off to the guild so I could give Leena her desserts. I was actually supposed to deliver them tomorrow, but since I was about to teach Amy magic, I wanted to get this errand out of the way so as not to be interrupted later.

But of course, things didn’t go as smoothly as I’d hoped—for Leena wasn’t at the guild. I checked the entrance of the dungeon just in case, and by a stroke of luck I happened to catch her and her party, about to go exploring.

“Heeey, Leena!” I jogged over, not caring about the other adventurers who turned to stare at me.

“What’s up, Tenma?” Galatt spoke up first.

I told them why I was here, and was just about to give Leena the desserts when all of a sudden she said, “Oops, sorry! I just remembered some business I have to attend to! If you’ll excuse me!” and started trying to drag me away.

“Hang on just one minute!” Mennas said, grabbing her by the collar. I thought I caught a faint “Argh!” but pretended not to hear it. “What’s more important to you? Dungeon diving or desserts?”

“Desserts, of course!” Leena blurted out, before immediately realizing her

mistake. “Ah...!”

“You hear that, everyone? Take a seat, Leena.”

“Um, but the floor here is stone...” Leena protested.

“*Sit down!*” Mennas yelled. Tearfully, Leena obeyed. This didn’t have anything to do with me, so I gave Mennas the desserts. Since they were a top-class adventuring party, they all had magic bags.

“Well, I delivered them as promised. See ya!” I waved, then rushed away.

I could hear Leena calling from behind me, “You coward! You traitor! I’ll curse you!” But then I heard a loud *crack*, and all was silent.

Rest in peace, Leena. (Note: she didn’t actually die.) I offered up a silent prayer and then left the dungeon.

Now that I had fulfilled my promise, I returned home to find Amy waiting there excitedly.

“Let’s get started!”

Amy rolled up her sleeves and tied a bandana around her head. She looked pretty motivated.

“All right, here we go,” I said. I waved my arm above the barrel, which was filled with water, and created waves on the surface of the water with my magic. “This is what happens when you do it correctly. Now you try.”

She looked a bit confused, but immediately began waving her arms and grunting.

“Ayyy!”

Thirty minutes later...

“Yaaah!”

One hour later...

“Arrrgh!”

Two hours later...

“Nyaaah!”

Three hours later...

“Why?! Why isn’t anything happening?!”

“Because it’s just water.”

“That’s not what I mean!” She got angry at my joke. Her frustration had made her emotional. She glared at me and said, “Why won’t you teach me how?!”

“Because you didn’t ask me to,” I said plainly.

Karina and Arie were there watching as well, and they looked mystified by my answer.

“When you don’t understand something, you need to tell me or else I won’t know that you don’t understand.” I knew that I was being pedantic. But I wanted to discourage Amy from trying to learn magic on her own. It was important that she realize how important it was to have a teacher.

Back when I was a kid and just learning magic, I had tried skipping steps and learning on my own. But Gramps got mad at me and told me, “That’s a good way to get yourself killed!”

Although Amy’s circumstances and abilities were different from my own, it was still important that I made the necessity of having a teacher clear to her.

“I don’t know what to do. Please teach me,” Amy said. It seemed like she was finally ready to stand at my starting line.

I decided I would start by teaching her the same things my master, Gramps, had taught me. She would learn sooner or later to ask when she needed help. “Go ahead and sit down in that chair.”

Amy obeyed, plopping down. I circled around her and placed both hands on her shoulders. “Take a deep breath in and then exhale...” She did as she was told. I waited until she was finished exhaling and then—

“Eek!”

I poured mana into her—not enchanting magic, but a kind of electrical mana.

“Wh-What are you doing?!” Amy shrieked with surprise.

“Remember how that just felt, and wave your hand across the water again,” I

instructed her, ignoring her indignant response.

“Jeez, what’s your problem...?” she muttered, but waved her hand over the barrel. This time, the surface of the water rippled, ever so slightly. “W-Wait, I think it moved!” she exclaimed excitedly, forgetting about the shock I had just given her. She was so excited, in fact, that Karina and Arie, who had returned home briefly, came racing back into the room with surprise. As for Amy, she was so excited she didn’t even notice them.

“Tenma, what happened?” Karina asked. I told her that Amy had shown signs of magical ability. It seemed the two of them hadn’t been expecting to see results so quickly, and they were both rendered speechless.

Finally, Amy realized they were there and excitedly started explaining what had happened. But she was a bit *too* excited.

“Amy, look at this.” I manipulated the water in the barrel, making it curl like a ribbon. Amy stared at it in shock and then went back over to the barrel. “What you did was about the most basic level of magic possible. Lower than the basics, really. So don’t get too excited,” I told her firmly.

“Yes, Master!”

I wasn’t sure why she was calling me that all of a sudden, but at least she didn’t think of me as an enemy anymore; she actually respected me. There was something in her eyes that I thought was familiar. I thought about it for a while before figuring it out. “Ah! Your eyes look just like Primera’s!” I blurted out.

Amy gave me a puzzled look, so I shook my head and told her not to worry about it. *Hm? Does that mean that Primera respected me? But why?* I found myself dwelling on it.

Amy’s voice brought me back to reality.

“Um, Master? What should I do next?”

It seemed like I had been successful at training her so far. That was what I thought at the time, but I didn’t realize that Jin and his party would later say, “You know, most people call that brainwashing.”

“Right now I just want you to practice that same thing over and over again.

It's important to get used to the feeling of it."

"Okay! I understand, Master!"

It didn't feel *bad* to be called that, but it did make me feel a little strange.

"Um, Amy? Can you please not call me that?"

"Huh? But you're training me, right? So you're my master."

Just a little while ago she had been calling me Tenma! I wanted to say that, but held back. "Fine, but make sure you only call me that when we're training!" I warned. I couldn't have a little girl yelling "Master!" at me in the middle of town, after all. But if she wouldn't stop calling me that entirely, then this would have to be our compromise.

"Uhh, okay, I guess." She didn't seem convinced, but she did agree.

"Anyway, right now we're just practicing. Once you get used to this, we'll take the next step. That's all for today."

"What?! Already?!" Amy seemed to want to continue.

"Your body is more easily exhausted than you realize at the moment. So you don't want to overdo it." I told her this gently, and she didn't say another word. I had a feeling she had suddenly realized just how tired she was. She had more talent than I'd expected, and I had a feeling that if things proceeded like this, she would have no problem keeping the two rockbirds.

I gave Amy some of the desserts I'd made to help her recover some stamina. She perked up a bit at the sweet aroma. Shiromaru looked like he wanted some too, so I cut him a piece. I had only turned away for a second when Amy, already on her way back home, tripped over a rock and stumbled. I quickly grabbed her so she didn't fall, but all of a sudden a man angrily ran up behind me.

"What the hell do you think you're doing to Amy?!"

He was so hostile that I quickly pulled the water from the barrel, whipping it around the man before freezing it. He banged against the ice to try to escape, but with all my magical energy flowing through it, it didn't break easily. Next, he tried to run to break free of the ice, but lost his balance and fell instead.

“Dad! What are you doing?!” Judging by those words, this was apparently Amy’s father. I had a feeling that was the case.

The two of them caused such a commotion that Karina and Arie came running out again.

“What has this stupid son of mine done now?!” Arie whapped the man over the head with her broom.

Karina gave them both a sidelong glance and bowed her head to me. “I’m so sorry. That’s my husband, Rick...”

So apparently he thought I was bullying his daughter or something? That made me angry. But Shiromaru was even angrier. *Such a loyal pup*, I thought, until I noticed that Shiromaru’s dessert was lying on the ground by his feet. He’d been so startled by the ruckus that he must’ve dropped it. *Huh? So you value food more than your owner?* Shiromaru must have sensed my train of thought because he quickly shifted gears and began to growl at Rick, slowly making his way towards him.

“Ahh! Get away from me!” Again, Rick tried to flee, but he was still tied up by the frozen rope, so he could only crawl about as fast as a caterpillar wriggling. Finally, Shiromaru got right up in front of him and batted at Rick’s head just like a cat would do to a mouse. Even though he was holding back, he was still a very large monster, so it looked painful. After Shiromaru poked him a few times, he seemed satisfied and trotted back over to me. He wagged his tail, and I pointed at the dessert that lay on the ground.

“Weren’t you mad about that? Aren’t you concerned about *me*?” I asked. He rolled over onto his back and showed me his belly, then whined. I sighed and gave up. “Sorry, I don’t have any more.” Shiromaru looked shocked, then glared again at Rick, who was currently being lectured by Amy, Karina, and Arie.

“What?! *That’s* Tenma? The monster all the rumors...” I could only hear bits and pieces of their conversation.

I walked slowly over to Rick and smiled. “I’m sorry, but can you speak a little louder so I can hear you?”

Rick had his back turned to me, so he was startled when I suddenly addressed

him. What was really funny about that, though, was that since he couldn't see me, the ones most scared of my smile were Amy, Karina, and Arie.

"What? Er, um..."

I snapped my fingers and the ice which entrapped Rick immediately melted. Even though he was now free, he didn't dare to move. A few minutes passed and he remained sitting on the ground, so I leaned over and lowered myself to his eye level. "Now, tell me about these rumors."

I tried to say this in as gentle a voice as possible, but the color still drained from Rick's face. He didn't answer.

At this point, I wasn't sure how to proceed, when suddenly I heard a voice. "Hey, what's going on, Tenma? Did Rick do something to you?"

It was Jin, passing by with the other members of the Dawnsword party. For some reason, Rick perked up when he saw Jin and the others.

"No," I said, "but I heard him say that there are rumors that I'm a monster, so I was just about to have a little chat with him."

The moment Jin heard that, he exclaimed, "Oh! Hey, we're in a hurry, Tenma! See ya later!" He waved then turned quickly to leave.

"Hang on a second... The person who spread the rumors isn't the same person you were talking about earlier, is it?" I fielded this question, trying to fish around to see whether it was the airheaded daughter of a certain noble. Everyone except for Leena tried to run for it. "You're not getting away!" I cried, using magic to stop them as I summoned three golems at the same time. Jin and the others failed in their escape attempts, and thanks to my magic were stuck like bagworms. I had the golems carry them all over to me.

Amy and her family, and all the adventurers who were walking by, were dumbfounded by this chain of events, but I pretended I didn't notice.

"Let's talk, then," I said, before burying them in the garden with only their heads above ground. *If only I had a sharpened sword, this would be perfect*, I thought, and as I remembered a manga from my past life, a smile naturally appeared on my face.

“Please wait! I can explain!”

“Just calm down first!”

“Yeah! Please listen to us!”

Jin, Galatt, and Mennas pleaded with me in turn. I wasn’t evil or anything, so I decided to hear them out.

“Actually...”

“Jin started it!” Galatt interrupted.

“That’s right! Jin made us do it!” Mennas agreed.

“Hey! Hang on, you guys! I did it for your own good! You said yourselves that Tenma was trouble! That he’d turn us into mincemeat if we provoked him! Even the nobles bowed down to him in Gunjo City! *You’re* the ones who told me that!”

He was really digging himself deeper with every word.

I grinned and said “Stun,” hitting them all with an electrical attack—Lightning magic. If this were a rerun of an old anime I’d watched as a kid, their flesh would’ve dissolved and their bones would’ve been exposed, leaving nothing behind but charred remains and smoke. Keeping that image in mind, I made sure not to kill them or leave any other lasting effects.

Regardless, by the next day word had spread among the adventurers like wildfire, and everyone who knew the members of Dawnsword whispered in terror, “The rumors were true!”

I ignored the three sad sacks who were passed out, still buried in the ground, and turned my attention to Rick. “It’s nice to meet you, Rick. I’ve been staying at your place for a few days. My name is Tenma. I’m also Amy’s new magic teacher. I’m looking forward to getting to know you better.”

“Y-Yeah...”

Even though I introduced myself politely, his reaction wasn’t that great. Perhaps he was tired from dungeon diving. As a sign of goodwill, I gave him a multi-potion care package which included five stamina recovery potions, five magic potions, and five healing potions.

“Th-Thanks. Um, about Jin...”

“Oh, they’re fine. They’re not dead!” I told him brightly.

“Is that right...?” he replied, before withdrawing into his house with Amy, Karina, and Arie. Everyone seemed a little tired though, because they were all walking very slowly.

“Leena, I’m gonna make some tea to go along with the desserts. Would you like to join me?” I asked Leena, who was checking on Jin and the others.

“I’d love to!” She jogged up next to me. We returned to my room and I prepared a cup of tea and some dessert for myself, along with four other portions.

“What’s this one called?” she asked, at which point I realized I had forgotten to provide explanations.

“The square one is a castella, and the one in the cup is a chiffon cake,” I told her. I’d put a lot of effort into the chiffon cake, which had freshly whipped cream and fruit on top—strawberries, grapes, and oranges. Since the whipped cream was sweet, I made the tea slightly stronger than usual.

“I can’t wait to try it!” Leena said brightly. I was surprised to see that she was a very tidy eater. No wonder she was the daughter of a noble. She ate fast, though, and was done with her castella when I’d only eaten about half of mine, before starting on her chiffon cake. But Shiromaru was an even faster eater: he pretty much swallowed his food whole, in one bite.

Rocket was the complete opposite. He liked to savor his food and eat it slowly. He stretched out part of his body until it looked like an antenna, then formed a fork with it. He used the fork to cut small pieces of the cake and then put them inside his mouth-slash-body.

What I mean to say is, Rocket was the neatest eater out of all of us, even though he was a slime. I thought about maybe getting my hands on a book about table manners and studying it sometime.

After that, Leena and I chatted for a while. Rocket excused himself from the room and went outside several times. He always came back after a few minutes, so I didn’t think much of it. After about an hour had passed, Leena

said, “Oh, it’s almost dinnertime. I should be going home,” and started getting ready to leave. She kept a firm grip on the container which held the whipped cream so that Shiromaru wouldn’t get ahold of it.

I walked her to the front door, but as soon as she closed it I heard a scream. *What in the world was that?!* I wondered and ran outside, then saw that Jin and the others were still passed out cold, buried in the ground from the neck down. “Oh, crap! I forgot!”

I quickly dug them up and checked on them—they were just unconscious, not dead. I used Recovery magic on them, finally realizing that the reason Rocket had kept going outside before was so he could check on them.

A few minutes later, they began to come to.

“Nngh...” Jin woke up first. It seemed the Recovery magic had worked on him. “Hm? Why am I lying out here?”

Next, Galatt and Mennas also woke up. It seemed like they couldn’t remember what had happened that clearly, only that I had used some kind of magic on them, so I quickly glanced over at Leena and asked, “Do you think they’re okay? I didn’t think they’d pass out from something so slight!”

“I know! They must’ve been really tired from all that dungeon diving!” She quickly went along with my plan.

The three of them looked confused.

“I’m so glad that they woke up *right away*, huh, Leena?”

“I agree, Tenma! I’m so glad they woke up basically immediately!”

We both glossed over the situation well. Honestly, they’d been out cold for over an hour and I’d completely forgotten about them, but they didn’t seem to know that (and they wouldn’t either!).

“It’s almost dinnertime soon, right? If you don’t hurry, you won’t have anywhere to sit!”

The three of them still seemed confused, so Leena jumped in and agreed. “Yeah! I’m starving, by the way! Let’s hurry up and go! Thanks for the dessert, Tenma!”

Then the three of them wandered off to go get dinner. However, a few days later, some other adventurers told them what had really happened and they came to my place to complain.

“You hurt my feelings when you called me a monster!” I snapped, adding that I’d experienced such psychological pain from this that I had lashed out physically. “I figured that if you all think I’m a monster, I might as well act like one!”

The three of them apologized profusely after this. Soon, a rumor spread that if you tried to pick a fight with me, not only would you get buried in the ground, but you’d be forced to become my slave.

The following day, I decided to explore the dungeon. I didn’t take Amy with me, of course. I had something specific in mind as my goal for today, so I wasn’t focusing on clearing floors, but instead on taking on the bug-type monsters on the eleventh floor and below. There were many different types of bug monsters—everything from earthworms, caterpillars like you’d see in Nausicaä but slightly smaller, spiders, praying mantises, and grasshoppers... There were even monsters that I knew were very delicious, as I’d had them before in Kukuri Village.

Personally, I’d recommend the earthworms—the cousins of caterpillars and spiders. They might have looked grotesque on the outside, but once you fried ’em up they were like gourmet food. It wasn’t too uncommon in this world, although of course everyone had their own tastes.

What was the most surprising was that the insides of the spiders were crunchy. Dad used to hunt them a lot and eat both them and caterpillars while he was drinking.

As I reminisced about the past, I got down to the sixteenth floor, when suddenly the landscape changed. Until now, the dungeon had been made of bare rock, but now the walls were made of wood, with lush, leafy plants growing along the sides, all the way up to the ceiling. The pathways were a lot wider here too.

I continued cautiously, and suddenly a small monster attacked me. It was camouflaged to look like branches and leaves. Even though it was a monster, it

was no bigger than fifty centimeters long, so one punch was enough to defeat it. It looked edible, so I put it into my bag along with the spiders and caterpillars I'd collected.

As I kept exploring the sixteenth floor, I began to notice more and more rotted trees. I broke through them and found what I was looking for. It was a caterpillar about ten centimeters long, called an albino caterpillar. Its body was white and it was very nutritious and delicious. Mom didn't like how they looked, but Dad and I ate them often. I'd heard at the guild that you could find these guys on the sixteenth floor, so I thought they'd be perfect food for the rockbird chicks. I'd come here to catch them.

I dug out a considerable amount of the caterpillars and put them in an empty container, which I stowed away in my magic bag. I found a lot, and in no time I had over fifty of them in my container.

I put some little twigs in the container alongside them and then closed the lid, tying it off with string. I'd found a lot of earthworms as well, so I put those in a separate container along with a piece of damp bark.

I'd gotten what I'd come here for, but it had taken quite a bit of time, so I headed for the nearest warp point and warped to the place where I'd found that egg. It was basically my private room now, because I had covered up the entrance to the tunnel. Of course it would've been too much of a pain to fill it in completely, so I'd only filled it about ten meters from the bottom. That way, even if someone did happen to find it, they wouldn't realize that a room lay beyond.

I had plans to make the closed-off room my secret base. I'd begun constructing a furnace, anvil, fire bed, and counter space that I could use for forging. It all looked very amateurish, though, and I'm sure if a professional saw any of it they'd say that it was poorly made. I was just going to make up for its deficits with magic, like when I'd made the *kogarasumaru*.

It took quite a lot of time to get all of this made, so I decided to go home for the day. The sun was setting by the time I made it back to my apartment, and I saw Amy waiting for me outside my door.

"Master! What took you so long?!"

We hadn't promised to meet or anything, but apparently she'd thought I was going to give her a lesson today. "It's too late for a lesson today, Amy, but there is something I want to give you." I handed her the containers of earthworms and caterpillars. "This is food for the chicks, about a week's worth. Feed it to them with their other food."

I had left the chicks in Amy's care so that they would imprint on her, but I told her if she went ahead and registered them without my permission, I would never teach her magic again.

She listened to me seriously, so I trusted that she understood. I didn't want to startle her, so that was why I'd told her the contents of the containers beforehand. I also told her to add a bit of water to them every day so that they didn't dry out, and to keep the lid on while it was stored in a cool place.

By the way, I kept some caterpillars for myself.

"Um, Master? I understand how to feed them earthworms, but how am I going to feed them these caterpillars?" she asked.

"Crush them up and make them eat them!" I told her. I thought about how penguins fed their young; they would partially chew up some food and then feed their chicks from their own mouths. Frankly speaking, it was like giving them their own p*ke. But obviously if I told her to do that she'd p*ke herself (and honestly I wouldn't want to do that either), so I told her to crush them up first.

Amy didn't seem to like that idea, but I told her that caterpillars were very high in nutrition (though I wasn't sure what the exact numbers were) and tasty, and asked if she'd like to try some.

"No, thank you! I don't even want to touch them!" she declined.

I supposed girls just really don't like caterpillars.

"Oh? That's a shame...because if the chicks don't get enough to eat, they'll end up as meat..."

"I'll do it!" she exclaimed immediately.

Next, I taught her how to prepare the food. The recipe was as follows:

Cut off the caterpillar's head.

Put it in a mortar and crush it well.

Open up the chick's mouth and feed it with a spoon.

"Pretty simple, right?" I asked.

"I...suppose..." she replied awkwardly. I made her do it, and even though she had her face turned to the side, she did do it. As for the chicks, they seemed to enjoy it. At first, she had to open their mouths for them, but on the second round they had their mouths wide open waiting for her. "I'm not sure how I feel about this..." she said as she watched the chicks devour the crushed caterpillars.

"All right, well, make sure you feed them again like this tomorrow, okay?"

She laughed dryly in response. I waited until she'd gone back home, then decided to fix myself some dinner.

Tonight's menu: simmered spiders, grilled caterpillars in butter sauce, caterpillar soup, and fried earthworms.

Now, you might have thought that sounds quite bizarre, but I assure you that I'd prepared all the ingredients properly. For example, I cut off the spiders' heads and took out their guts, then rubbed them with salt to remove any offending odors. As for the buttered caterpillars, I washed them first, of course. For the soup, I meticulously grated and pureed the caterpillars, seasoned them with salt, pepper, butter, and a splash of milk, then grated some vegetables to mix into them.

I brushed the dirt off the earthworms, split them open with a knife, carefully washed them in a saltwater mixture, then fried them at a high temperature to get the smell off.

A bizarre menu, perhaps, but it was delicious. By the way, Dad and Gramps both loved all these dishes, but Mom didn't care for them so much.

I gave Shiromaru some raw meat I had stored up, and Rocket seemed to be very happy with the spiders' heads and guts. I felt a little sorry giving them to him, but he went happily into the trashcan to dispose of them. Of course, later

on I shared some of my food with him as well.

I finished my dinner, feeling nostalgic about eating caterpillars for the first time in a long while.

Part Five

As Tenma waxed nostalgic while dining on caterpillar soup, a certain man received a letter. And once he'd read it, all the color drained from his face. He immediately headed to the manor of an acquaintance. It was a lavish house, one only a noble of certain status would be able to afford, but since the owner was experiencing some difficulties, the garden was overgrown and cracks had appeared here and there in the mansion's walls.

However, this person sometimes hired people to clean the mansion, at least, so it hadn't deteriorated into a haunted house quite yet.

The man went through the gate with familiarity and then inside the mansion. There was a guest there, but since he had already met that person several times, he just bowed before rushing to see the lord of the manor. The guest saw how frantic the man seemed, and also knew of his relationship to the owner of the place, so they didn't try to stop him.

The man opened the door to the owner's room and screamed, "Th-There's urgent news! It's Tenma! He's alive!"

There were two men inside the room. The one who wore fancier clothes exclaimed, "Is this true?!" He grabbed the first man by both of his shoulders and shook him.

"Y-Your Majesty!" the first man cried. "Please, forgive my rude interruption!"

The man in the fancy clothes was the monarch of this kingdom, Alex. The man who had burst into the room and was now on the floor was Mark, and Alex helped him to his feet before turning towards the lord of this mansion, Merlin. (By the way, the guest Mark had seen on his way in was Jean, but since Jean came to do repairs on the mansion from time to time, and Mark was in such a panic, he hadn't even considered the possibility that Alex might also be present.)

Truth be told, Merlin had suffered from depression after losing his family, and had also been recuperating for a long time. Lately, he had become half-senile due to those factors. Even now, he didn't really react to Mark's announcement.

Alex shook him by the shoulders and said, “Master Merlin! Tenma’s alive!” He repeated this loudly into Merlin’s ear over and over again.

“Ten...ma... Tenma, Tenma... Tenma? Tenma’s alive?” All of a sudden, Merlin shouted and rose from his chair, peppering Mark with questions. “Where is Tenma? Where is he?” He grabbed Mark by the collar and tried to lift him off the ground by it.

Cruyff and Jean had come as the king’s attendants, and they both rushed into the room, getting between Merlin and Mark.

“Please calm down, Master Merlin. Mark won’t be able to speak if you’re choking him!”

“That’s right, Master Merlin! Jeez, talk about strong! Are you really an old man?”

It took both of the men to pry Merlin off Mark. Only then did it seem that Merlin had finally come to his senses. “Hrm? Why are you all here? I thought I heard something about Tenma...” He looked around in confusion.

Now that Mark was finally free, he took a few moments to catch his breath before showing Merlin the letter. “I just got this letter from an old friend of mine. They said a young man named Tenma is staying in their inn, along with a big silver wolf. The place is called Gunjo City!”

The letter was dated one month prior, and was written as a reply to a letter Mark had sent after he had relocated to the capital from Kukuri Village.

“Gunjo City, you say? I’m going there right now!” Merlin didn’t seem to even want to take the time to dress. He stripped off his pajamas until he was in nothing but his underwear, then threw a robe over that. Afterwards, he was about to jump out the window.

“Master Merlin, please wait!” The men panicked and ran over to him, physically pulling him away from the window, but Merlin fervently resisted.

“Please listen, Master Merlin! If you meet Master Tenma looking like that, he’ll want nothing to do with you!” Cruyff pleaded with him, at which point Merlin finally calmed down.

“I understand how you feel, Master Merlin. I want to go see Tenma right away too. But it will be nightfall soon, and very dangerous. I’ll have people from the castle make preparations today, and you can set out tomorrow morning. Until then, you should get ready. And please wear an outfit that Tenma can be proud of once he sees you!” Alex said. He was unabashedly using Tenma’s sensibilities as an excuse to try to persuade Merlin not to act too rashly.

Merlin was reluctant, but agreed to do so for Tenma’s sake. Alex ordered Mark to go pack as well, for he would be accompanying the sage as his guardian.

Cruyff went ahead to the palace to make the necessary preparations. Alex, being intrigued by the information that Tenma was alive, had also tried to pack, but the people around him were strongly opposed so he had to give up on this plan.

“Just you wait, Tenma! Gramps is comin’ for you!” Merlin’s howling declaration could be heard through the night in the royal capital.



The following morning, several people gathered outside Merlin’s mansion. The people who would be going to find Tenma were Merlin, Mark, Kriss, Edgar, and six knights. There were more knights, but once Merlin saw them he said, “I don’t need that many! If we get into danger, I’ll use my magic to destroy the enemy!” He seemed quite determined to also destroy anyone who got in his way, but finally relented, agreeing to be accompanied by ten knights.

There were others gathered there too: Alex, Cruyff, Jean, Mark’s wife Martha, and many more who had moved to the capital from Kukuri Village. They were all overjoyed to hear that Tenma was alive, and urged Merlin to hurry and go see him, handing him food and other supplies for his journey.

It was finally time to depart, and Merlin got into the carriage. It was pulled by two horses and had a seat for passengers in the front, along with room for supplies in the back. There were four other horses, which the knights would switch off riding while the others stayed on foot, being alert to any possible dangers. They would also switch out which horses pulled the carriage. The plan was for Mark and the knights to take shifts driving the carriage.

Edgar was put in charge of this regiment of knights, and Kriss was the vice-captain.

“Master Merlin, I’d like to stop by Sagan on the way there to replenish our supplies. Is that all right with you?” Edgar asked, referring to the city about two hundred kilometers away.

“If we take this road, we’ll get there sooner.” Merlin pointed out a direct route to Gunjo City on a map.

“Taking that route might be difficult, as it’s known to be more dangerous.”

“I don’t care! I’ll help with my magic, so there’ll be no problem at all!” Merlin stubbornly insisted.

“All right. If we have your help, then I’m sure there will be no danger.” At once, Edgar changed their plans, following Merlin’s instructions. To be honest, that particular route was full of bandits and strong Rank B monsters, but it was true that having Merlin along would reduce the danger.

“Let’s go.”

And so the party set off for Gunjo City, completely oblivious to the fact that Tenma was no longer there...

Two weeks later, a letter arrived at Mark’s house from Dozle, the owner of the Full Belly Inn, informing him that he was feeling quite down lately because Tenma had set off on a journey...



I was up early this morning giving Amy a magic lesson. Her magical abilities were getting better and better by the day, and at this rate she would be able to control the rockbird chicks with no problem.

However, I didn’t tell Amy that, because she still hadn’t mastered the foundations of magic. I didn’t want her to get overly cocky. You could never be too safe, after all. Another reason was because I wasn’t exactly sure what the normal range of ability was for someone her age. After all, my abilities were powered up thanks to the gods, and the only other magic users I knew were Gramps and other advanced magicians. I wasn’t sure how much training I

should give her. In the end, I simply decided that the stronger she was, the better.

“Master! I want to move onto the next step!”

It seemed like Amy had grown tired of our current training regimen, though. Right now, we were on the second phase of her training—learning how to make a pillar with water magic. She was now capable of making one about fifty centimeters high. And she could do it fairly consistently, so she thought she was ready to move on.

After thinking about it for a bit, I agreed that she was ready, so I began preparing for the next phase of her training. I set two barrels up next to each other, and filled one with water. Her task was to move the water from one barrel to the other. First, I showed her how it was done. After I’d demonstrated several times, I showed off a little and shaped the water into the figure of a fish, which I made jump to the other barrel.

At first Amy looked overjoyed, but gradually her face darkened. “Master... Do I have to do what you just did?” she asked uneasily. I realized I’d gone a little too far, and went back to doing it with just the columns.

Since the level of difficulty had jumped so swiftly, Amy was able to make the column of water, but not transfer it to the other barrel. She was so focused on trying to move it that her water column kept losing its form.

“Don’t try to rush and move the column to the other barrel so soon. First just focus on moving it at all.”

“Okay!” she replied enthusiastically, but it seemed that it would still take her more time. Meanwhile, I continued infusing the egg in my backpack with magical power. All of a sudden I heard *crack, crrraaack, crack!* and the egg split. I quickly put the bag down and checked inside.

“Squeak!” I heard an adorable little noise coming from a tiny white *dragon*.

“It’s a dragon!” Amy exclaimed as she peeked into the bag. “Ahh, it’s so cute!” She reached out her hand to touch it.

“Squeak!” But the dragon didn’t like that. It seemed to be cautious of Amy. However, when I tried to pet it, it happily nuzzled against my hand.

Immediately, I decided to adopt it as my follower. I gave it more magical energy and felt it give me some in return. It was a sensation of connection.

“All right. I’m going to name you Solomon!”

“Squeak!” Solomon appeared to like his name, and made a happy noise. Hearing this, Shiromaru emerged from my bag and approached Solomon. “Squeak!” the little dragon said again, and hopped onto Shiromaru’s head, then crawled onto his back.

Shiromaru didn’t seem to mind this at all, and walked around with the baby dragon on his back. Solomon had wings on his back, but since he was a newborn, apparently he couldn’t fly yet.



Name: Solomon
Age: 0
Class: Dragon
Title: Tenma's Follower
HP: 1000
MP: 2000
Strength: E-
Defense: D-
Agility: D+
Magic: B
Mind: D-
Growth: S
Luck: A

Skills
Debuff Resistance: 5
Light Magic: 8
Magic Manipulation: 4
Destruction Boost: 3
Fire Magic: 5
Water Magic: 7
Wind Magic: 6
Lightning Magic: 5
Magic Boost: 5
Recovery Boost: 4
Nightvision: 2

Gifts
Protection of the God of Beasts

He had pretty good stats for a newborn. That was a dragon for you, I guess. It seemed Solomon was very fond of Shiromaru, because he clung onto his back and stayed balanced there. The feeling was mutual, because when Solomon was about to lose his balance, Shiromaru would shift himself so that the baby dragon wouldn't fall off.

I wondered what Rocket would think of him, so I brought Solomon over, and found that they had no problems getting along. But since Solomon couldn't ride on Rocket's back, he tried to go back over to Shiromaru. On the way there, he found the bag his egg had been in and dragged it over to me, then got inside. "Squeak, squeak!" He seemed to be pleading with me to carry him on my back again. I did as he wanted, and he poked his little face out from my bag, looking satisfied.

"Master! Can I touch him yet?" Amy hadn't given up yet. I told Solomon about Amy and asked if it was okay for her to touch him.

"Squee...squeak!" Apparently he gave his permission. This time, when Amy petted his head, he didn't seem threatened. Amy was quite excited, but meanwhile I was impressed with how smart Solomon was. After all, I'd spoken to him thinking he wouldn't understand, since he was a newborn. But not only did he understand, he responded as well. On the other hand, it had taken Shiromaru at least six months before he really understood what I was saying to him.

Rocket understood me from the moment he became my follower. Even though he was a rare subtype of slime, he was still the lowest of all monsterkind. So perhaps out of all my followers, he was the most mysterious.



Meanwhile, a group of knights surrounded a carriage as it made its way through a mountain pass far from Sagan. Suddenly, one of the horses in the front ran back towards the carriage, carrying a knight on its back. One of the knights guarding the carriage instructed him to fall in line. The knight in question had just returned from scouting. The fact that he'd returned without subsequently sending someone out in his place meant that there was something up ahead.

The knight who'd received the report from the scout was Edgar, and he approached the carriage. "Master Merlin, there is a group of ogres up ahead fighting around twenty orcs. What should we do?" he asked, waiting for instructions.

Edgar was the captain of this group, and he was charged with protecting

Merlin. However, the old sage had more experience and was more powerful, so Edgar thought it was best to ask his advice first.

“Isn’t it obvious?” said Merlin. “We charge! We’ll have no problem beating the orcs with ogres around, but you can never be too safe!”

Edgar let the scout lead the way. “Everyone, full speed ahead!”

“Yes, sir!” they all replied in unison. Still, even though they picked up speed, the terrain was rough so the carriage wasn’t really going much faster than before. They had no choice but to control their pace so that they wouldn’t leave the carriage behind.

The ogres were fighting some twenty kilometers ahead. It took Merlin and the others about eight minutes to get there. By the time they arrived, the orcs had already lost more than half their numbers, but then a new group of ten emerged from the nearby forest.

The knights were about to charge towards them, but Merlin cast magic at the orcs, who were about a hundred meters ahead of him. “Air Bullet!”

The orc reinforcements were obliterated by the spell. Seeing this, Edgar said, “Head towards the orcs! Make sure not to approach the ogres!”

The ogres were protecting a carriage with a familiar noble crest on it, and Edgar thought the noble was a friend of theirs, but since he couldn’t see them, he couldn’t be sure of this. So instead, he simply had the knights target the orcs as a sign of solidarity with the noble.

Merlin’s onslaught was a one-sided attack. Orcs were simple and weak creatures, and the ogres were quite efficient at attacking them. If the ogres were fighting in allegiance with the person in the carriage, then they might have killed off all the orcs before Merlin and the others arrived. Meanwhile, the knights fighting for the unfamiliar nobles showed no injuries. Knights were strong, of course, but most of all, the ogres were the ones who were drawing the orcs in so they could weather their attacks.

The battle ended in no time, with the bodies of thirty-four orcs lying on the ground. Merlin’s guards investigated the area to be sure there were no more orcs lurking around, just in case. Now, the only ones left on the battlefield were

Merlin and Mark inside the carriage, Edgar, Kriss, the five knights guarding Merlin's carriage, the ogres, and five knights on the other side.

The ogres seemed cautious of Merlin and the others, but didn't seem to view them as enemies. After a while, the door to the carriage opened, and two men emerged, possibly a father and son. The older man had a gentle expression on his face, but Merlin and the others regarded him cautiously. The boy looked to be around sixteen or seventeen and a bit cheeky.

"Thank you for your help. I am Marquis Carlos von Sammons. And who might you be?" he asked Edgar.

"I am Edgar van Valentine, a member of the king's guard. I am currently serving as the sage Merlin's guard by order of His Majesty!"

Merlin emerged from the carriage. As soon as Carlos saw him, he said, "Ooh! So you are the famous sage, Master Merlin! I have heard much about you! But whatever are you doing in a place like this?"

"I have urgent business in Gunjo City, and we are taking this road to arrive as soon as possible."

This marquis must have had great respect for Merlin, because he was speaking and acting very politely to him. However, the young man behind him did not look impressed. He must have been one of those haughty nobles. He was uninterested in the conversation, perhaps because he didn't know of Merlin.

Merlin sensed this and said, "Ho ho, Marquis Sammons. Terribly sorry, but I'm in a hurry, so if you will excuse me. Ah, you know, those ogres are quite something! Not only are they strong, but they're clever and faithful. You must be quite the Tamer."

The marquis didn't seem pleased by Merlin's compliment, but then he realized the sage was being considerate of his son, and a happy yet embarrassed look crossed his face.

Merlin noticed this but didn't touch on it; instead, he went back inside the carriage. Edgar and the others bowed to the marquis, then met up with the other knights and returned to the carriage.

They were headed to the village that was halfway to Gunjo City—the city where Tenma had parted ways with Jaiman.

“All right, let’s go! Let’s head for the village!”

And so they set off once more. Once Merlin and the others were out of sight, the marquis reprimanded his son for his behavior, explaining to him that Merlin was a famous and very skilled wizard.



I was lost in thought today. My mind was on Amy. Right now, she was obeying everything I said. Her magical abilities were steadily increasing, and although she might not have been a genius compared to her peers, she was definitely talented.

So I began considering whether she was ready to formally take the rockbird chicks on as her followers. One of my weaknesses, which I was aware of, was that I didn’t have very many friends my own age. I didn’t have many friends period, so that was why I was uncertain as to whether I had an accurate measure of her talents.

I didn’t think it was too soon for her to become a Tamer, but I wasn’t sure whether she’d be able to control them yet.

For that reason, I was avoiding discussion of the birds at any cost.

“Well, I really have no idea, so there’s no point in trying to come up with an answer on my own.” I decided to ask my acquaintances for their opinions.



Acquaintance Number One: Jin

“No matter how much ya think about it, you’ll never come up with the right answer. All ya can do is give her the chicks and see what happens.”



Acquaintance Number Two: Galatt

“Why are you asking me? Isn’t it up to her? I don’t think it’s your responsibility what happens from now on, anyway.”

Acquaintance Number Three: Mennas

“That’s a tough one. But I think it’s up to how much you ultimately trust Amy, isn’t it?”

Acquaintance Number Four: Leena

“I’m sure it’s fine to let her register them as her followers. If she’s been serious about it, let her have the reward of the chicks as her followers, and make sure she raises them responsibly. If you’re the only point of reference you have, then she’ll never be ready to have a follower.”

Acquaintance Number Five: Karina

“You don’t have to feel so responsible for our daughter, Tenma. No matter how it came about, Amy was the one who decided she wanted you to teach her. I was surprised she had that kind of talent, but in the end, she must take responsibility for it, not you. Plus, if anything happens, we—her family—will be accountable for her and support her.”

Acquaintance Number Six: Arie

“That’s right. This is what Amy wanted, so she’s ultimately responsible for it. A very skilled magician is teaching her for free, so we couldn’t ask you to also take responsibility for all that.”

Acquaintance Number Seven: Rick

“Under normal circumstances, I would be teaching her since I’m her father. So I can’t ask you to be responsible.”

Now that I had gathered everyone’s opinions, I decided to put Amy to the test the following day. “Amy, you’re going to transfer the water from one barrel to the other within an hour.”

I told her why I was testing her, and what she must do. She was excited, but

also very anxious. After all, she had practiced doing this many times but had not been successful even once.

“Also, after today, I won’t be overseeing your practice anymore. So this is your first and last test! Let’s see what you’ve got.”

A look of determination came over Amy’s face as she realized she only had one shot to do this.

“Start!” At my signal, she shot magical energy towards the barrel of water. Her family watched over her from a short distance away. However, no matter how much she tried, she could only make the column of water, not move it.

Ten minutes had passed. Jin and his party were passing by and stopped to watch once they saw what we were doing. They asked what was going on, and I explained that I was testing her. But then I remembered an errand I had to run.

“Sorry, Jin, but can you watch Amy for a bit for me? I have to go for a minute. And make sure you don’t *say anything unnecessary*.” I emphasized that last bit, then ran off. The place I was going was a bit far, so I used magic to boost my speed. Although at this point I probably had a warped point of view as to what constituted long or short distances compared to my previous life.

I arrived at my destination, took care of my business, and then returned. Twenty minutes had passed. Then thirty minutes, but Amy still hadn’t successfully transferred the water. She must have been starting to panic, because the water columns she’d made were beginning to lose their shape. She was trying too hard to transfer the water, panicking because she was running out of time, and before long she couldn’t even maintain the water column itself.

Finally it was time, and I said, “That’s enough! The test is over.”

Hearing those words, Amy collapsed on the spot. She hadn’t run out of mana; she was just depressed. Tears filled her eyes. No one knew what to say.

However, I then turned towards Amy and continued, “Okay, I’m going to teach you how to make the birds your followers now.”

“What?!” everyone cried in unison. Amy’s face was streaked with tears and snot as she looked at me in confusion.

“I never said she would fail the test if she couldn’t do it,” I said.

“Yeah, but normally when someone says they’re giving someone a test, you get either a passing or failing grade!” Jin said.

“I just told her to show me what she had. I never said that I wouldn’t give her the rockbirds if she couldn’t do it,” I replied firmly. I thought Jin of all people would’ve noticed that nuance, but I guess not.

By the way, Jin had grabbed me by the collar, so I responded by twisting his arms behind his back to put him in a choke hold. After I let him struggle for a while, I released him and turned back towards Amy. “First, you need to make eye contact with the monsters, and—”

“W-Wait a minute! But I didn’t manage it!” Amy frantically interrupted me.

I decided to explain things to her. “First of all, about the test—if you do things like this, it’s simple.” I picked up the barrel of water and poured its contents into the other barrel.

Amy seemed stunned. “H-Huh?”

“I never told you to use magic to transfer the water. I realize it’s a bit abstract, but doing it this way is both faster and less tiring.”

She raised her voice. “But that’s not fair!”

I didn’t let this bother me. “That’s right. It’s not fair. But if you think like that, then once you become an adventurer, you’ll die easily. If magic users become too reliant on magic, they’ll become weak and won’t understand how to solve problems without magic.”

Rick and the Dawnswords all nodded.

“I wanted to teach you that if you can’t do it with magic, then you need to find another solution. I’m sorry, Amy,” I apologized. “But now, I’ll teach you how to register your followers.”

Everyone looked taken aback at how quickly I changed gears.

It was quite simple to tame a monster and make them your follower.

Step 1: make eye contact with the monster and confirm that you feel a

connection with it.

Step 2: channel mana into the monster, and see if it channels mana back into you.

Step 3: if Step 2 is successful, give the monster a name.

By following these three easy steps, you too can tame a monster and make it your follower...but only if you have the knack for taming, otherwise you won't feel a connection and you'll fail on the first step. To put it in a more negative way, having a monster follower is kind of like having a slave contract. Giving a monster mana is impressing yourself upon its soul. Giving it a name binds it to you, almost like a curse. That was what the god of beasts said before, anyway.

However, if your compatibility with said monster is poor, or if the monster doesn't acknowledge you as its master, then it might attack you instead.

Amy was going to try out these steps on the two rockbird chicks, but as they were so little and seemed to like her, I doubted that anything bad would happen. She'd cared for them since they were in their eggs, so if this process failed I would have to chalk it up to her having no predisposition as a Tamer.

Amy immediately did as I instructed.

"Hm? Oohhh! T-Tenma, I did it! They're my followers!" She made a strange noise and then told me she had succeeded. And it did look as though the chicks were even more fond of her than they were before.

"Good for you, Amy! Go ahead and name them."

"Oh, I already did! The boy's name is Rocky, and the girl's name is Birdie!"

I wasn't really sure what to say about those names. Put the two together and you got Rockbirdie... Well, it's not like I was being very original when I named Rocket either.

"All right. Put this on them," I said, handing her two small collars with tags on them. I'd gotten them from the guild after explaining the situation. They were proof that these monsters had been tamed and belonged to someone. If anyone ignored this and slew the monsters, they would face a very severe penalty—worst-case scenario, they would be enslaved. (By the way, I'd

forgotten to get them beforehand, so that was the errand I had run to take care of earlier.)

“Thank you so much! I’ll take very good care of the birds!” Amy said, putting the collars on them.

“The first thing you need to do is get them food. They can survive on vegetable scraps, but the best thing to give them is earthworms and caterpillars. And make sure you continue to practice your magic.”

She froze for a split second at that last sentence. “I-I’ll do my best.”

Well, at any rate, that matter was settled for now. As long as Rick was around, I knew the rockbirds wouldn’t starve. Despite what his appearance may have suggested, he was apparently a Rank B adventurer, so he could easily procure the insects.

Speaking of caterpillars, I was always ready to eat them, so I could certainly bring some back for Amy when I went to get them for myself too.

Finally, my first foray as a teacher had come to an end.



A few days later, an unusually tense mood hung in the air near the entrance of Sagan.

This was because a carriage had arrived with an ogre. Supposedly the ogre was tamed, but it was a very strong Rank B monster. And there was already a group of people waiting at the gate who had arrived the previous evening. They were mainly merchants or ordinary travelers. From their perspective, ogres were nothing else but terrifying creatures.

However, despite their fears, the ogre was very calm. It behaved like a well-trained knight, standing next to the carriage and guarding it without moving.

The people around them looked impressed. A young man stood there, puffing out his chest as if he were the one being praised. His name was Gary von Sammons, the second eldest son of Marquis Carlos von Sammons. He was seventeen years old and currently attended a high school in the capital. Since the school was on break at the moment, he was accompanying his father on

official business, which was surveying Sagan.



By the way, the boy was not a Tamer. But the ogre was very intelligent, and recognized the boy as the son of its master, so it did as he said within reason. That was why the young man misconstrued the crowd's praise for the ogre as praise for himself.

"Father, tell the guards we are nobles so that they'll let us in at once," Gary said.

"I can't do that. We can't break the rules just because we are nobles, or else it will come back to haunt us one day. Plus, we must not act as though we are better than others just because we are nobles either. The gates will open in thirty minutes, and then we can use the line for preferred entry, reserved for VIPs. Isn't that good enough?" Carlos asked.

Gary didn't seem pleased with the idea.

Perhaps I raised him wrong. I was so strict with my eldest boy that perhaps I got too soft when it came to raising Gary, Carlos thought when he saw his son's reaction. He regretted how he had raised him. And unfortunately for him, his regrets would be realized soon afterwards in Sagan City...

Part Six

My notoriety had suddenly skyrocketed lately. The reason was simple; it was Solomon's fault. Or should I say, it was thanks to Solomon?

Anyway, cases of dragons being tamed were well documented throughout history, but most of those cases involved very low-level dragons, with wyverns making up about ninety percent of that number. The rest were different types of dragons, but all of them were low level.

There were unconfirmed reports of people having tamed mid-level dragons, and according to legend there was another individual called the Dragon King who came afterwards, but this information was very uncertain.

Under normal circumstances, every Tamer dreamed of taming a wyvern, which was Rank B according to the guild's slaying hierarchy, but supposedly they were more difficult to make your follower than a Rank A monster would be, and they had abilities above Rank A as well.

You might ask why it was classified as a Rank B in that case, and the answer was because as an individual monster, it wasn't that difficult to slay. In order to do so, you simply had to wait until the wyvern came down to the ground to feed. In the air, wyverns were quite powerful, but they weren't much of a threat on the ground.

Still, if a Tamer was controlling one, they wouldn't expose that particular vulnerability during battle. However, the most attractive attribute of taming one was the possibility of riding it. Just think about it: if you were attacked by a monster as strong as a wyvern, and then on top of that a magician was riding on its back, you'd pretty much have no choice but to flee. That's how scary it would be. Even a small one would be more than three meters long, but they didn't really eat much for their size, so they were fairly economical to keep.

I'd been thinking of trying to get one sometime, but now that I had tamed Solomon, I no longer felt that wyverns were very attractive. By the way, Solomon was *currently* classified as a low-level dragon, but if he kept growing well, he would definitely become higher than mid-level. For that reason, it was

pretty much guaranteed that I would become the first person to have ever officially tamed a mid-level dragon.

And so that made me stand out. Solomon was also super popular with women and children. I only had to take my eyes off him for a second, and he would be surrounded by people. Obviously, that also meant some hooligans would try to steal him, but they ended up getting burnt or bitten by Solomon, or else getting ganged up on by the other people around.

When Solomon was tired of flying, he would land on Shiromaru's back and rest his wings. Lately he liked to hug my head and cling to me as though I was giving him a piggyback ride.

Today I was planning on going dungeon diving. I had gotten down to the twenty-eighth floor at this point. Under normal circumstances, that would only be accomplished by a party of four to five seasoned adventurers and would take them more than two years, so there were some adventurers who thought I was cheating somehow.

Once you got past the twentieth floor, the levels became much larger, and it was much more dangerous too. It wasn't unusual for one floor to take a whole year to clear once you got down to level fifty.

Before I went to the dungeon, I planned to drop by the guild and see if there were any interesting quests available. I would occasionally get requests from Amy too, to catch caterpillars. Since she was my student, I gave her a discount and only charged her 10G per caterpillar. By the time she asked me to get her some, I no longer wanted to eat caterpillars, so I really just got them on the way while I was dungeon diving.

I was near the guild when I saw a crowd of people gathered around an ogre. It was about three meters tall, standing above everyone around it.

A short time earlier, Marquis Sammons entered the city of Sagan and headed for the guild.

"Gary, I'm sure you already know this, but I'm here on business. Please behave like a noble would." The marquis's main objective on this trip was to survey the dungeon city, discuss countermeasures against monsters as well as

how to train to fight them—and, if possible, try to lure adventurers to come back to his domain.

Still, it wasn't as though he could bring a hundred soldiers to train here, so instead he had decided to bring thirty new soldiers and twenty soldier hopefuls. Bringing that many soldiers all at once would be a lot of trouble, though, so he'd come with his son first, along with the ogre, five new recruits, and five veterans, so that he could secure a place of lodging for everyone, and introduce himself to the influential people in town.

"You don't have to tell me that. I was already planning to," Gary replied immediately, but it was clear from his tone that he hadn't been. However, the marquis tried to be optimistic, deciding to think his son could do this because he *was* a noble, after all.

After he had made his way around greeting various people in town, he decided to head to the guild next, announcing, "I'm going to the guild." However, being that they were nobles, Gary didn't seem to understand why they had to be the ones going to say hello to everyone, and he seemed quite annoyed by the whole process. Gary felt it was unthinkable to let the aristocrats themselves do the legwork of greeting everyone, but since the city of Sagan was a territory under the direct control of the royal family, it was said to have a kind of extraterritoriality—exemption from typical local laws. Because there were many adventurers here and a dungeon where monsters appeared, what mattered most in this city was strength. Most of the people who stood at the top of the food chain were very powerful people, so even though the marquis and his son were nobles, they couldn't treat them lightly. But Gary did not understand that.

However, Gary's mood improved as they approached the guild—the number of adventurers increased along the way, and more attention was drawn to the ogre. From Gary's perspective, since the ogre's master was his own father, he felt as though *he* was basically its master too, and in turn, this meant that people were also staring at him. His overbearing thoughts fueled his conceit.

When they arrived in front of the guild, some soldiers ran to find an inn while the others went inside. Carlos said to Gary, "I'm going inside. What will you do?"

Gary thought about this for a moment, then said, “I’ll stay here and watch Gulliver.”

Gulliver was the ogre’s name. Gary said he’d keep an eye on him so that the ogre wouldn’t cause any trouble, but actually, Carlos was more worried about Gary getting into trouble. However, he thought that perhaps if he indulged Gary with this small thing, Gary would keep quiet for a while, so he agreed. Of course, Carlos had no idea that a monster wholly incomparable to an ogre—that is, a dragon—was approaching...

It wasn’t long after Carlos had gone inside that Tenma approached the guild. Even for Tenma, there weren’t many chances to see a living ogre up close, so his interest was piqued.

And when he approached the crowd, one of the people outside noticed Solomon, who was stuck to Tenma’s head.

“Hey, here comes the dragon!”

When that happened, people gathered around Solomon, ignoring the ogre, and in no time Tenma was surrounded.

People seemed to know what both Tenma and Shiromaru were capable of, so they didn’t touch Solomon without permission, but they kept a certain distance and surrounded Tenma and the others to get a glimpse of the little dragon. The people, most of whom would normally never be able to see such a sight in their lifetimes, were completely impressed, and praised Tenma for the act of taming him.

Gary was the only one who wasn’t amused. Until just a little while ago, the crowd had been impressed with Gulliver (and him, by proxy), but this mysterious child had come along, stealing away his glory.

And since Gary was so conceited, there was only one thing he could do. “Hey! You over there!”

“What is it?”

Gary made his way through the crowd over to Tenma. “Give me that dragon!” He selfishly attempted to get himself a new toy, but...

“Save the nonsense for when you’re talking in your sleep. Get lost. You’re in my way.”

“Eek!” Gary let out a miserable voice and collapsed under Tenma’s murderous gaze. Meanwhile, laughter erupted from the crowd. Gary’s thoughts completely froze for a few seconds, but when he came back to himself, his face turned bright red.

“How dare you speak that way to a nobleman! You won’t get away with this. Get him, Gulliver!” He tried to rile up the ogre. However, it seemed that Gulliver could not figure out what Gary wanted him to do. This only made Gary more irritated.

“What are you doing?! I’m telling you to beat him up! Listen to me!” He raised his voice and issued the order again. Gulliver reluctantly approached Tenma and brandished his arm, but once he sensed the much stronger malice that filled Tenma, he froze in place.

At that moment, Gulliver must have realized in an instant that if he swung his arm down, he would surely die. Not only that, but Gary would also be killed, and at worst, his master who was currently inside the building would also suffer the same fate.

When he came to that realization, he couldn’t move.

“What are you doing, Gulliver?! Kill him quickly!”

Gary finally said the one thing he should have never spoken aloud. No one would have raised a complaint if he was killed for saying it. Furthermore, everyone who witnessed this situation would take Tenma’s side. That was how forbidden it was to utter such a sentence in this situation.

Tenma slowly closed the distance between him and Gulliver. Gulliver moved back the same distance. They repeated this series of actions for a while, but as it turned out, Gulliver had started from a bad position...because the guild walls were now behind his back and there was nowhere else for him to go.

However, there was someone who took aim at Tenma from behind, as he faced down Gulliver. It was Gary. Gary drew his sword and slashed at Tenma, who wasn’t even looking in Gary’s direction, but...

“Argh!” He let out a cry as Tenma smacked the sword away with his fist.

“What’s all this commotion?” Two men came out of the guild... Carlos and the guildmaster. As soon as Carlos came out, Gulliver slumped to the ground.

When Carlos exited the guild, he saw his follower Gulliver leaning against the wall, a boy in front of Gulliver looking full of murderous intent, and his son Gary lying a few meters behind the boy.

Carlos and the guildmaster had no idea what happened. However, one person who seemed to be an adventurer approached the guildmaster and whispered into his ear. The guildmaster’s eyes went wide and he said, “Hey, someone tie up that guy lying over there!”

“What are you talking about?!” said Carlos, approaching the guildmaster.

But the guildmaster calmly replied, “If we don’t tie him up, that boy will kill him.” He pointed at Tenma and told Carlos what Gary had done.

After listening to everything, Carlos’s face turned pale and he trembled due to the weight of the crimes his son had committed.

In this case, Tenma was not considered at fault, and Gary was charged with attempted robbery, attempted murder, and another penalty for attempting to incite his follower to violence within the city. No one would have complained were he taken away to be executed at this very moment—what Gary had done was so deeply serious that it didn’t matter if he was a noble or not.

Carlos was trying to think of how he could possibly save his son when, unexpectedly, someone spoke up.

“Guildmaster. You can release him.” It was the victim, Tenma. When the guildmaster asked why, he went on, “He’s just a child that got carried away and went on a rampage. Let’s forgive him, just this once.”

The crowd laughed at the amusement in Tenma’s voice.

“Are you sure about this?” the guildmaster asked, just to be sure, before telling the adventurers to release Gary. No matter how vicious the act, Tenma, who was the biggest victim, had forgiven him, and thus Gary’s crimes were reduced to nothing more than a penalty for trying to incite his follower to

violence within the city. Furthermore, since not much damage had been caused, the guildmaster would decide his fate, which could even be acquittal.

Tenma ignored the discussion between the guildmaster and Carlos, and instead approached Gulliver to stare at him.

Gulliver, on the other hand, wasn't as frightened as before because Tenma wasn't emitting any bloodlust right now. However, he still seemed nervous.

Part Seven

The guildmaster was discussing something with a man who seemed to be the boy's father, but I didn't really care. Rather than concern myself with such trivial matters, I prioritized looking at the ogre called Gulliver before me. Meanwhile, someone called out to me from behind.

"May I have a word with you?" The man who'd called out to me was the father of the boy, who was called Gary. His complexion had improved somewhat from before. "I'm sorry that my stupid son has caused you so much trouble. And I am very grateful that you have forgiven his crimes." He apologized very profusely.

"I heard you were a noble," I asked, "but can I ask your name?"

I already knew it because I had secretly performed Identify, but it would be better to hear it from the man himself.

"Oh no, he brought up our nobility... I'm so sorry! My name is Carlos von Sammons. I have received the title of marquis from His Majesty."

"Ah, excuse me for my rudeness. My name is Tenma. I'm a Rank C adventurer." After I introduced myself, the marquis's eyes widened at my name.

"Are you the boy Duke Sanga has spoken about...?"

Apparently he was close with Duke Sanga. He told me that he belonged to the same faction as Duke Sanga, and they seemed to be on good terms. That was how he had heard about me.

Then the topic shifted to followers. He seemed to open up to me more after learning we had a mutual acquaintance. Not only that, but we were both Tamers. The first thing we talked about was Solomon. Apparently this was the marquis's first time seeing a dragon, so he was a little excited. I told him I was also interested in Gulliver, so I asked him about him.

"I found Gulliver about ten years ago, dying from injuries."

Apparently, at first he thought the ogre was too dangerous, so he tried to

finish it off. However, when he got closer, he ended up thinking that maybe he could tame it, and succeeded. Having done so, he quickly cast Recovery magic on the ogre, and afterwards, kept him close by as a guard. Gulliver seemed to be more intelligent than a normal ogre and listened to what Carlos said, so Carlos had become very fond of him.

“Ugh! A-Ahhh!” Gary suddenly regained consciousness. As soon as he saw me, he started speaking, but I had no idea what he was saying because it seemed that either his jaw was dislocated or his jawbone was broken. He yelled, thrashing in pain. The sight made me feel sorry for him, so I decided to cast some healing magic.

“Aqua Heal!”

It was a water-attribute recovery magic. It healed less than light magic and the speed of healing was slower, but in exchange, if there were abnormalities in the target’s bones, it would—at least to some extent—restore them to their original state. There was also a light-attribute variant of the spell, but you had to be careful with that one. Although it healed a large amount, in the case of a bone fracture, the bone would heal incorrectly and be stuck in a displaced state.

The pain must have subsided considerably because then Gary glared at me again. “You bastard! How dare you attack an aristocrat?! Do you really think you’ll get away with this?!” He tried to approach me, but the marquis landed a blow to the top of Gary’s head.

“You idiot!” He shoved Gary’s head down, forcing him to bow, and said, “Please forgive us... I’m going to have to hammer all of this into this dunce’s head...”

“It’s fine. Then, if you’ll excuse me...” With these words, I rushed off towards the dungeon. There was no way I wanted to go inside the guild after that incident. When I turned towards the dungeon, Shiromaru—who, unbeknownst to me, had hidden himself—came up and joined me with Solomon on his back. We entered the dungeon in a hurry and skipped straight to the twenty-eighth floor using the warp point.

Meanwhile, in front of the guild...

“Father! Why should I bow my head to such a hooligan?! He laid his hands on me!”

Hearing those words, Carlos let out a big sigh. “I didn’t think you were this stupid...”

Carlos’s words infuriated Gary. “What nonsense! That boy is...”

“Be quiet for once, would you?” Carlos interrupted Gary’s words with such force that it became impossible for him to object. “Here, the title of nobility is like a mere bonus. In a dungeon city, if you have talent, you will be praised even if you are a child...and if you don’t, you will be laughed at even if you are royalty. Furthermore, in this case, you shoulder all the blame. If he didn’t forgive you when he did, you could have been sentenced to death.” Carlos paused and slowly looked around. “As long as we’re in this city, you should be prepared to have people point and laugh at you.”

Hearing those words, Gary panicked and looked around. Everyone was looking at him and talking in a whisper. As expected, Gary couldn’t stand it, and was about to raise his voice.

“Don’t you dare shame yourself even more. Not if you still consider yourself an aristocrat,” Carlos said, stopping his son. He apologized to the people around him and headed to the inn with the soldiers. Gary also rushed after him, not wanting to be left behind in this place.

Meanwhile, I was oblivious as to what was happening in the city as I advanced through the dungeon.

The monsters that appeared around the twenty-eighth floor were high orcs, kobolds, skeletons, hobgoblins, and other monsters that often moved in groups. Instead of using magic, we opted for physical attacks, so that we could practice fighting in tandem as we slaughtered the enemy.

I thought it might be a little difficult for Solomon, but he surprised me with how much he contributed. He mainly flew around over the monsters and made noise to attract their attention. Once he’d accomplished that, Shiromaru would take advantage of their inattentiveness and rampage right through them. In addition, Solomon plucked up fallen skulls one after another and flung them

around to confuse our opponents.

However, since he didn't have much stamina, he would get tired and slow down if he flew too much. He came under attack several times when that happened, but even though he was a baby, he was still a dragon, and therefore didn't incur that much damage.

As for our spoils, we got meat from high orcs, fur from kobolds, and bones (which can be used for fertilizer and to craft equipment) from skeletons, on top of their magic stones. Hobgoblins had no uses other than providing us with magic stones. However, some of them were equipped with knives that seemed to have been stolen from adventurers, so I looted those.

The types of monsters did not change even after descending to the next floor. The only thing that differed was that there were a few more skeletons.

As expected, I was beginning to grow tired from practicing our coordinated attacks, so I decided that we'd take a break when I found a good place. As I had before, I located a dead end and blocked it off with a wall to create a private room.

Inside the small room, I took out one of the high orcs that we'd just defeated, butchered it, and grilled up the meat. Once it was thoroughly cooked, I shared it with Shiromaru and the others, and started eating. Rocket also wanted grilled meat today, which was rare, so I divided it into five equal parts and placed them on a plate.

"Shiromaru...don't eat so fast, or Solomon will imitate you!"

A recent problem we were facing was that Solomon was mimicking the way Shiromaru ate. It might not have had anything to do with his once being wild, because Shiromaru had been raised as a pet since birth, but you'd never think it thanks to the way he ate. Basically, after chewing a few times, he would simply swallow his food whole, and he wouldn't eat vegetables either. Also, he would always seize any opportunity to steal food off people's plates, and things of that sort. Lately, Solomon had been trying to stick his face into people's plates too, so I wanted to nip this bad behavior in the bud as soon as possible.

First of all, I wanted him to use Rocket as an example. Rocket had become even more skillful in eating lately, and had finally become able to use knives,

forks, spoons, and chopsticks. I wondered whether it was really necessary for him to use so many different utensils, but that was beside the point.

At any rate, our meal progressed and as usual, I decided to take a nap afterwards.

When I got out the bed and slipped under the covers, Shiromaru lay at my feet, Rocket on top of my head, and Solomon next to me, beneath the covers. For some reason, when we napped in dungeons like this, they would always choose those same positions, even though back at the inn they slept wherever they pleased.

After taking a light nap for about an hour, I felt quite refreshed and in a good mood. Of course, I didn't find a convenient tunnel out this time. Instead, when I broke the wall, a group of a dozen-odd high orcs that were nearby greeted me. It seemed the odor of one of their comrades being grilled up had attracted them here, from a tiny gap in the wall I hadn't been able to block.

Since I had just woken up, I didn't want some long, drawn-out battle, so I took out the adamantium sword and cut them all in half by myself. Shiromaru looked thrilled that there would be so much meat today.

By the way, kobold meat was full of gristle and would be hard even if you boiled it, so I didn't want to eat it unless it was an emergency.

All of the high orcs I'd just defeated had been equipped with swords as weapons. However, they were terribly rusty and weren't very sharp, and some were chipped in places. Even so, I picked them up just in case and put them in my bag. After that, I didn't encounter any monsters until we went downstairs.

However, the atmosphere on the thirtieth floor was completely different. Somehow, the air seemed clean and refreshing. That might have been a strange way to describe a dungeon, but the air wasn't as stagnant as before.

I thought how strange it all was as I went down the stairs and turned the corner. The ground was wet, like there was water leaking out from somewhere. There were plants growing on the walls too—that must have been why the air felt so pure.

But the wet ground was troublesome. Every time I walked, I heard a splash,

and it was slippery in some places. I had to proceed more cautiously than usual, and of course that was all while we were getting slammed with one monster attack after another.

High goblins and high orcs, kobolds and slimes...and most troublesome of all were the bug-type monsters. These approached by crawling (which was only natural since they were insects) and made almost no sound as they came near.

During our first encounter, Shiromaru was almost bitten by a spider-type monster. He dodged the attack with a small leap backwards, and then countered with a bite, killing it. After it was over, I wiped Shiromaru's mouth with water, which he didn't appreciate.

But it wasn't all bad. Thanks to the bugs, I found an easy strategy for this floor. It was simple—all I had to do was float in the air!

I used floating magic to float about ten centimeters above the ground and began slowly moving forward. I'd discovered this tactic being startled by a monster that resembled the most disgusting of all insects, roaches—oh, I don't even want to say their name, so I'll just call them "R" from now on—suddenly attacking me from the side, as I'd been forced to fly away to dodge it. Of course, I finished the monster off with magic, but then I remembered the saying: where there was one, there'd be thirty. Perhaps that didn't apply to this R-type monster, though, because I hadn't seen another since then.

Spiders, caterpillars, centipedes, praying mantises, and so on... The farther I ventured, the more bug-type monsters I saw. Eventually, I stopped seeing goblins and those types of monsters entirely. And when I did see them, they were nothing more than piles of bones, because they had been eaten by the insects.

After about an hour, I found the stairs and tried to go down. However, when I stepped onto the stairs, I was attacked by a centipede that was more than twice the size of the ones I had seen so far. I threw one of the rusty swords I'd picked off a high orc at the centipede's head.

"Screeeeeeeeee!"

The centipede did not appear to be particularly damaged. The sword that hit its head was repelled and shattered. That had apparently angered the bug, and

now it rushed at me with its body trembling. I countered by shooting a Fire Bullet at the centipede, but unbelievably, it was deflected by the back of the centipede's head. I was so distracted by the sight of it that I was a second late to dodge.

I hurriedly jumped over the centipede and tried to avoid the attack, but the centipede's fangs grazed my right leg and I was knocked aside by the impact. The momentum flung me into the wall with a crash, and my eyes went out of focus.

The centipede didn't miss its chance and jumped at me to finish me off. I instinctively took the *kogarasumaru* out of my bag and prepared to slay it, but...

"Squeee!"

Solomon spewed fire at the centipede. It didn't seem like it did much damage to the centipede, but it did make it stop moving because the fire hit its face. Not about to let the opportunity slip, a silvery-white flash flew at the centipede like an arrow, beheading it.

The flash of silver and white kept going and pierced straight through the wall. Next, it took aim at the body of the centipede, Shiromaru turning his furred body into an arrow once again. This second attack sliced the centipede's body in two. The centipede's body was still moving, but it was no longer a threat.

"Damn... I let my guard down. Thank you—Shiromaru, Solomon. You saved me!" I stroked their heads, and their eyes narrowed in happiness. "That thing was huge...and had really strong poison. I should probably detoxify just in case."

I used the detoxification magic "Antidote" on my leg. Immediately after using it, the numbness that I'd felt faded slightly. "The fact that this poison worked on me means that it could be life-threatening to someone who didn't have Debuff Resistance," I muttered.

I stared at the centipede, which had finally stopped moving. Its total length exceeded four meters. It was about fifty centimeters wide and twenty centimeters thick. When I picked up the decapitated head, I saw that it had fangs about ten centimeters long in its mouth.

It definitely didn't seem edible, but the shell of a centipede was not only

incredibly hard but also magic resistant. There was no way I was leaving it behind.

I stowed it in my bag and went down the stairs again, and luckily I was able to find a warp point at the bottom of the stairs.

I debated for a little bit, but ultimately decided to call it a day here, and just go home and organize the contents of my bag.

On the way back from the dungeon, I found Amy surrounded by a group of unfamiliar men. I quickly approached them and cut in between Amy and the men, who all seemed surprised by my sudden appearance.

“What do you want with her?” I demanded, getting into an offensive stance. There were four of them all together. I grabbed Amy by the arm and pulled her away from them. At the same time, Shiromaru leapt behind us, positioning himself behind the men. Solomon was flying around in the sky, and Rocket was at the men’s feet. They were totally surrounded, and I had the advantage.

“Wait a minute! We don’t mean any harm!” one of them spoke up.

“Who’s actually going to admit that they mean to do harm, though?” I retorted. The men began to panic.

Suddenly Amy said, “Um, Master? These guys say that they’re Tamers from here in town...”

I blurted out in a threatening voice, “Are you after Solomon?”

“N-No, wait! Just wait a minute! We’ve come to invite you two!”

I confirmed this with Amy, and it turned out that the men were just trying to invite us to their gathering. They were on their way to find me when they happened to run into Amy, and that was when I’d come across them.

“...Really?”

“I swear to the gods, it’s true!”

Knowing the gods personally, I didn’t find that statement very reassuring, but it didn’t seem like he was lying either.

“Excuse me. I jumped to conclusions,” I apologized. The men told me not to

worry.

“No, it’s all right, we’ve heard about what happened to you recently. It’s no wonder you misunderstood!”

The recent situations he must have been referring to were the people who kept appearing to try to kidnap Solomon. Even though I taught them all a lesson to get them to stop, they just kept coming out of the woodwork.

For the time being, I called Shiromaru and the others back to my side, and decided to listen to what the men had to say. They invited me back to the guild. I followed them and they showed me to a room on the second floor, which had a table in the corner. An elderly man was sitting there already, and as soon as he saw me and Amy, he stood up and welcomed us.

Name: Agris Monacato

Age: 61

Class: Human

Title: First-Class Adventurer, Tamer

“I’m the organizer of this gathering, Agris Monacato. It’s a pleasure to meet you,” he said, and held out his hand.

I took his hand. “I’m Tenma. And this is...”

“I’m Amy! Nice to meet you!” Amy seemed a bit nervous as she introduced herself.

“So, what kind of gathering is this?” I asked. Agris gave me a surprised look. He turned towards the men who’d brought us here and said, “You didn’t even explain?! You fools!” He sounded angry, and the men were frantic to apologize.

“I’m sorry! We didn’t even introduce ourselves!” one said, and then the pleasantries began. “I’ll start. I’m Ted. Nice to meet ya.”

Name: Ted

Age: 28

Class: Human

Title: Adventurer, Tamer, Courier

“I’m Wright Seider. It’s a pleasure.”

Name: Wright Seider

Age: 26

Class: Demi-human (Canid)

Title: Adventurer, Tamer, Peddler

“The name’s Akagi Saqalat.”

Name: Akagi Saqalat

Age: 24

Class: Human

Title: Adventurer, Tamer, Blacksmith

“I’m Aoki Saqalat, Akagi’s younger twin brother.”

Name: Aoki Saqalat

Age: 24

Class: Human

Title: Adventurer, Tamer, Blacksmith

When I used Identify on all of them, I saw that they all had the title of Tamer, but nothing else in common.

“We’re part of something called the Tamers’ Guild. It’s less of a guild and more like a small society, though,” Agris explained. It was true that I had never heard of a Tamers’ guild. At the very least, there hadn’t been one in Gunjo City.

I asked Agris for more details, and he explained that the number of Tamers had been steadily decreasing for about twenty years now. There used to be a

guild for them, but it would be rare to see that now. Sagan used to have one, but it'd gone out of business about ten years ago.

It seemed that Tamers either weren't suited for dungeon diving, or just found it difficult. Tamers could be roughly categorized as those who kept large numbers of followers, those who assisted others, and those who were part of the elite few.

Those who "kept numbers" were, in the truest sense of the term, those whose strength was supplemented by their large number of followers.

Those who assisted others were those who focused on using their followers for reconnaissance and restraint, used followers who could fly as their messengers, or used followers for assistance in the transportation and movement of large monsters.

Finally, the elite minority, to put it simply, were Tamers like me, who were good at attacking and intercepting powerful monsters.

The support and elite types of Tamer were suited to dungeon diving, but monsters that were good at support were generally not suitable for battle. The elite types didn't need to team up with others, so it was difficult for Tamers to form an impromptu party. As a result, people decided that it was better to become a warrior or magician, jobs which had more opportunities to play an active role in dungeon diving (plus offered more chances at fame), so the number of Tamers gradually decreased.

But I was unique even among the elite Tamers. I had high offensive power, I could use magic, and all my followers were very strong. That was why they thought they had to invite me to their gathering.

"Ah, just so you know—we're not asking you to form a party with any of us. We just think that in case of an emergency, the more Tamers there are, the better. That way, we can all get together and come up with a plan. And if something goes wrong for one of us, the others will be there to lend a hand," Ted said.

"Also," Agris added, "one of our goals is to help new Tamers. In Amy's case, you were there for her, but normally people aren't that lucky. That was another reason we wanted you to get to know us—so it'd be easier for us to help out."

In addition, it seemed that they also exchanged opinions on how to raise their followers and discussed other minor things related to Taming. However, since each of them was working as an adventurer, it sounded like they didn't all get together like this very often.

And then the topic of discussion shifted to each of their followers.

Agris's followers were large monkeys called grappler apes. With a size of about one and a half meters in length, they looked like a cross between gorillas and chimpanzees. They were very strong and agile, and were able to use human weapons. Apparently he had three of them, each equipped with a sword, a spear, and a bow. Of course, as their name suggested, they could also engage in close combat with their bare hands.

Ted's followers were big eagles called thunderbirds. They had a length of two and a half meters and a wingspan of just under four meters. Ted sometimes grabbed on to the eagles and had them carry him long distances, so he was sometimes called a courier.

By the way, they had lightning and wind attributes and had considerable attack power. They seemed to have considerable combat strength even outside dungeons.

Wright said he had ten wildcat-type followers called hardlynxes, and out of everyone in the group he seemed to be the most active in the dungeons. Hardlynxes were more than a meter long, and even though they were cat-type monsters, they were accustomed to moving in packs, which was quite rare. However, apparently other adventurers teased him often, asking him why he had followers for cats when he was a dog-type demi-human.

Now, the Saqalat brothers were a bit unconventional as Tamers.

Apparently, the two brothers were both masters to the same followers. At first I didn't believe my ears when they told me so, but it was true, and said to be one of the biggest mysteries that had been seen among Tamers so far.

They counted mountain turtles, tortoise-like monsters with shells two meters long, and flame tigers, fire-attribute tiger-type monsters, among their followers.

By the way, the other unsolved Tamer mysteries were how to determine the

maximum number of followers one could possess, and how to tame a high-level dragon. They thought perhaps they might learn something about the latter through observing me and Solomon.

As for the maximum number of followers one can have, long ago there was a Tamer who had twenty wolf-type monsters as followers, but then he found that he was no longer able to tame more wolf-type monsters. However, he could still tame other types of monsters. As such, there had been Tamers trying to solve that particular mystery for a very long time.

Each member used a small dimension bag to transport their followers, but a bag with a capacity of ten meters would cost at least 100,000G, so they made do with five-meter bags.

By the way, I'd given Amy a ten-meter-capacity dimension bag I wasn't using as a congratulatory gift. I didn't want anyone to target her followers, so it was a way for her to protect them. If someone other than Amy tried to use it, it was rigged to attack them with a very powerful Stun spell.

However, it wasn't possible to completely prevent theft, so I told Amy not to bring them out in public or speak about them to anyone until they reached adulthood.

At any rate, I gathered that the men had no intention of harming us, and it didn't seem like they were out to use us either, so I decided to accept their invitation. Actually, I thought I could make use of *them* to lower the chances of Amy being harmed.

Although I agreed to join their guild, there was no contract or registration form. All I had to do was express my intentions and receive their permission and it was done. Not that they would've said no, since they were the ones who'd asked me in the first place.

By the way, when I went to peek at the guild bulletin board, I ran into Jin and his party.

"Oh! I didn't know you were here, Tenma!"

I thought that this was a good opportunity, so I took the head of a giant centipede out of my bag. "I just defeated this thing... Is it common?" I asked. I

had used Identify on it and it said it was a Rank B monster called a giganto death centipede, but I'd never heard of it before.

As soon as Jin saw it, he yelled, "Get that thing away from me!" and he started backing up. The other adventurers around us had the same reaction. I was puzzled, because I figured surely this thing would make for some good materials.

"T-Tenma, are you really sure you should be touching that?" Jin asked timidly.

"Oh, it bit me, but it was fine once I cured myself of the poison."

"That's weird!" Jin, Mennas, and Galatt all said in unison.

Leena gave me a surprised look and said, "Tenma... As the name of this centipede suggests, it has poison powerful enough to kill a giant—like an ogre—within minutes..."

She said an ordinary human-sized creature would usually suffer instant death.

"Oh, I'm just naturally pretty resistant to poison, so maybe that had something to do with it," I explained.

"No, no, no. You're on a completely different level from 'I'm resistant to poison.' *What a monster...*"

He muttered that last sentence so I wouldn't hear it, but I did anyway. So...

"Hey, Jin. Catch!" I threw the head of the centipede towards him. By the way, I'd already removed its fangs, so it no longer posed a threat...I think.

"Wha—? Arghh!" Jin reflexively caught the centipede's head and then frantically threw it away again...this time, towards Mennas.

"Don't throw it at me!" Mennas also panicked and knocked the head away...and it landed right on Jin's face. I suppose you could have called it a kiss of death, because the centipede's mouth landed right on Jin's lips.

The time between when the centipede's head hit Jin and when it hit the floor must have been only a second or two. However, at that moment, the surrounding adventurers stopped moving completely and everyone was looking at Jin.

The centipede's head rolled across the floor. It felt like time had completely stopped around us. It was Jin's screams that broke the illusion.

"Noooo! I don't want to die like this! S-Somebody...! Give me the antidote, the antidooooote!"

He was completely panicked, thrashing about on the floor. Leena looked at him and hesitantly said, "Um, Jin? The death centipede's venom has no effect if you ingest it."

Jin, who was lying on the floor, paused, then looked up at Leena with confusion. "What do you mean?"

"The venom is only deadly if it gets into your bloodstream. In other words, you're not going to die, Jin."

Once again, the illusion that time was standing still came over us. Jin slowly got up and brushed the dirt off his clothes.

"Ahem. Jeez, Tenma. You should be more careful, even if that venom is harmless if ingested!" He came over to me as if nothing had happened. Behind him, there were many people desperately holding back their laughter, including Mennas and Galatt.

"Jin, even if the venom won't kill you if ingested, it can still cause the symptoms of being poisoned," Leena added.

Jin froze. "Seriously? Am I gonna be okay?"

"That little amount is fine. You need about a half glass for it to be dangerous."

Jin was clearly relieved to hear that.

"Bwa ha! I-I can't hold it in anymore. Oh god, my stomach hurts!"

"L-Look at Jin's face... He was so relieved...!"

The two behind me burst into laughter as if they couldn't stand it. And with that, the entire guild exploded in laughter.

"*"S-Somebody! Give me the antidote, the antidooooote!"*" I repeated what Jin said, making everyone explode into even more riotous laughter.

"You bastard! Tenma, get over here!" He reached out to grab me, but I easily

dodged his hand.

“Noooo! I don’t want to die like this...!” I taunted him again. He was desperate to catch me.

“Damn it, I can’t catch you! Mennas, Galatt! Hurry up and help me catch Tenma!” He asked his companions to help, but the two of them were laughing so hard they were squatting on the floor, holding their stomachs.

I felt bad teasing him so much, so I said, “Sorry, Jin. Here, take this as my apology.” I set something on the table.

“Wait a minute! These are the fangs of a centipede!”

One could say they were the cause of Jin’s commotion. “Oh, don’t worry about the poison. I washed the fangs thoroughly and also soaked them in an antidote, just in case,” I said. Nevertheless, Jin kept his distance.

Galatt looked at them and said, “Good for you, Jin! Giganto death centipede fangs are quite useful!” He whacked Jin on the shoulder. It was clear that he was desperately holding back his laughter.

Next, Mennas tapped Jin’s other shoulder. “That’s right, Jin. Isn’t this a good chance to overcome your fears by holding centipede fangs?” He also looked like he was holding back laughter.

“Y-You think so?”

The two doubled up with laughter as Jin hesitantly put the fangs in his bag.

“Come to think of it, this is the first time I’ve seen this centipede, but do they often appear after the thirtieth floor?” My question made the surroundings fall quiet for a moment. Had I said something wrong?

Returning to his senses, Jin said, “Is that true? These guys are pretty rare, even if you get down to the fortieth floor...” he murmured, then went off to inform a guild staff member. They posted a notice on the board warning of the danger.

“Well, anyway, good job, Tenma! Until now, there have been no sightings around the thirtieth floor, but from now on, we’ll proceed with caution. That’ll make it harder for anyone to get poisoned by the centipedes.” Jin said,

cautioning the adventurers around him to be careful. On the other hand, when I asked about the usage of the centipede, I was told that the flesh of the centipede was not good and had a bitter taste when raw, so it was not edible.

However, if you dried it, boiled it, then drank the liquid, it made for a restorative medicine. In addition, its exoskeleton was light and durable, and had magic resistance, so it could be used as armor. For that reason, it seemed to be popular with sorcerers.

“Come to think of it, Tenma... There’s a use for the centipede’s poison too.” Leena said, and after looking around with some hesitation, she quietly approached me and whispered into my ear. According to her, if you heated the venom of a centipede and diluted it with a liquid made by boiling several kinds of medicinal herbs, you could make a medicine that would invigorate your—ahem—*male functions*, and it could also fetch quite the price.

I had packed the poison in a bottle just in case; there were about five hundred milliliters of it. However, I wasn’t particularly interested in making such medicines at the moment, so I decided to use the poison for hunting and so on, and put it in my bag. Furthermore, since the poison lost its potency when heated, prey that had been killed with it could be eaten without any problems, as long as they were cooked thoroughly.

Just then, Amy came down from the second floor. Apparently, she’d finished receiving various lessons on how to be a Tamer and raise the chicks, so she decided to go home with me.

On the way home, Amy told me a lot of things she’d learned about methods of training.

For example, bird-type monsters would grow better if they fed on bug-type monsters, and if you mixed magic stones or magic cores into their food, they’d become more likely to grow up with lots of magical power.

I had plenty of magic cores from goblins and orcs in my bags, so I gave a bunch to Amy.

She was hesitant at first, but once I told her most of these magic cores were too weak to sell for much, she accepted them.

Once I got home it was too late to do much of anything, so I decided to start cooking an early dinner.

As for the menu, I decided to mainly use the pork I'd secured today. First item: pork loin steak served in a savory citrusy sauce. Second item: grilled ginger pork. Third item: simmered pork. Fourth item: sweet and sour pork. Fifth item: pork cutlet. Sixth item: roast pork. Seventh item: stewed cartilage. Eighth item: pork dumplings. Ninth item: gyoza. Tenth item: pork buns.

I just started making everything I could remember that I had ingredients for, and that's why I ended up making so much. I wanted to cook more dishes from various countries (from my previous life), but I couldn't remember a lot of them.

Anyway, my main goal wasn't any of those ten dishes—it was something else. I'd never made it before, but I more or less knew how.

It was a dish that had to be made from bone broth, simmered with onions, vegetables, and eggshells. However, I didn't have time to simmer it, and I didn't have one of the other main ingredients either. So for that reason, it wouldn't be on the dinner table today.

Ahh... I just wanted to eat it right now, though. The food that was said to be the national dish of the country I'd lived in during my previous life... Ramen! My beloved pork ramen!

I'd have to make the noodles myself, but worst-case scenario I could make do with just the soup. It'd be better than eating some weird noodles, anyway.

In the future, I planned to make other variations, such as chicken, salt, miso, and soy sauce, but the first one I *had* to have was pork. Luckily, I'd had many opportunities to see how to make it on TV programs in my previous life, so I should be able to reproduce it somehow!

In that spirit, I stayed up nearly all night.

By the way, I almost ran out of food after that one dinner... I was planning to make a lot and divide it into several meals, but the most gluttonous person in my family, "Banzai," ate it all up, and I think another gluttonous person in my family helped... I was starting to feel like, sooner or later, I'd have a Banzai

Number Two on my hands.

The knights on horseback surrounded the carriage as it continued.

“Master Merlin, we will arrive at the village soon, which is the midpoint of our journey. We’re planning on seeking lodging for the night and then setting out tomorrow morning.” Edgar spoke to Merlin in the carriage.

“Hrm, very well, then.”

To tell the truth, Merlin wanted to keep going towards Gunjo City without sleep or pause. However, he knew that if the knights and horses didn’t get rest, they would suffer from mental fatigue as well, so he had no choice but to reluctantly agree.

If I’d known it would be like this, I would’ve gone by myself. Would’ve been faster that way!

He had held back resisting the escort since the knights had been dispatched by Alex directly, and although he was now regretting it, it was too late to complain. Still, the thought remained in his mind.

About an hour after Edgar’s report, Merlin and his party were able to arrive at the village, which was the halfway point.

“Master Merlin, I’m going to look for an inn, so please wait here for a while,” Edgar said, before getting off his horse near the entrance of the village. He entered with two other knights. In the meantime, he entrusted Kriss with command, so she gave instructions to the rest of the knights, looking cautious at their surroundings.

Just then, another carriage came out of the village. The knights’ carriage was blocking the road, so Kriss instructed Mark to move the carriage closer to the edge and let it pass. As the carriages passed each other, the man inside the other carriage called out, “Sir knights, we are merchants. Is there anything you need?”

Kriss was taken slightly off guard by the sudden question, but Merlin got out of the carriage and asked, “What are you selling?”

Kriss felt a little bad that she'd made Merlin deal with the merchant, so she casually stepped in front of them so she could be ready to act at any time. The merchant seemed to understand the meaning of Kriss's actions, but didn't seem bothered by it.

"Right now we have rations, dry goods, spices, alcohol, medicinal herbs, potions, armor, weapons, and slaves." The man, who called himself Jaiman, rattled off his list of products for sale.

"Hrm, we definitely don't need slaves... Kriss, how are we on potions?" Merlin thought for a moment, then checked with Kriss.

"There's still a lot left. It seems like we've consumed about twenty percent of them on our journey so far."

Each person held on to a few potions themselves while Kriss managed the rest. Each time someone used one, they let Kriss know so she could replenish their supply as they went.

Hearing this, Merlin said, "Then we'll take about twenty potions...though of course I won't buy them if they are more expensive than the market price or if they are inferior in quality."

Jaiman nodded and took out a potion. Merlin took it, opened it, and licked the liquid inside.

"Hrm, that's a pretty good one," he said. He paid the fee and gave the potions to Kriss. Jaiman was selling them for about ten percent cheaper than market price, so he went ahead and ordered ten more.

"Thank you very much. Well, if you'll excuse us, then. I'm sorry for keeping you." Jaiman bowed deeply and returned to his carriage, leaving in the same direction from which Merlin and the others had come.

"Master Merlin. He seemed like he was in a very good mood, even though we only bought thirty potions from him." Kriss seemed to be uncomfortable with Jaiman's attitude.

"He probably realized that you and the others are royal guards. Selling his products to royal guards is a source of pride for merchants, I believe."

Kriss wondered if he might be right, but her thoughts were interrupted because Edgar and the others had returned.

“Master Merlin, I found an inn that had vacant rooms, so I went ahead and booked some for us. You, Kriss, and I have single rooms, and everyone else will be staying in a shared room.”

Edgar showed them to the inn, which was coincidentally where Jaiman and the others had stayed—Merlin’s room was Tenma’s former room, although Merlin had no way of knowing that.

“Okay! Well then, let’s get a good night’s sleep so we’re all rested up for our journey to Gunjo City tomorrow!” Merlin said, and they all went into their rooms for the night.

I’ll be able to see Tenma soon! Tenma, Gramps is coming for you!

And Merlin’s journey continued...

Meanwhile, it was approaching dusk in Sagan.

“Son of a bitch! Everyone’s looking at me and laughing!”

A boy was walking down a back alley. The boy’s name was Gary. The second son of Marquis Sammons, he was a young boy who had made a fool of himself by picking a fight with Tenma the moment he arrived at the city.

However, although he was certainly laughed at by the residents, more than half of it was just Gary’s paranoia. Of course, rumors had spread about him as “the son of a nobleman who messed with Tenma,” but really, most people couldn’t really care less. All they thought was, “Oh great, another idiot’s come to town.”

However, from Gary’s point of view, he had been embarrassed by a child who was younger than him and stood out more than him. And not only that, but the incident had left his father furious with him. So he wasn’t able to realize that people didn’t care about him as much as he thought they did.

“It’s all that brat’s fault! He should’ve just shut up and handed me his dragon!” Gary was completely ignorant to the fact that he didn’t have nearly

enough power to make the dragon Solomon his follower, yet his rage towards Tenma only continued to grow.

Perhaps that's why Gary didn't notice that he had lost his way.

It wasn't easy to get lost in Sagan if you kept to the main streets. Worst-case scenario, if you got off track you could just head towards the center of the city where the dungeon was. So people only rarely got lost here.

However, Gary did for many reasons: he was in unfamiliar territory, he was walking through back alleys to avoid people, he was lost in his thoughts, and he was furious.

As a result, Gary didn't realize that he had strayed into the west side of the city—in other words, the slums. When he finally came to his senses, he realized the area was full of dingy buildings, the alleys were littered with trash, and he had ventured far enough to see orphans and vagrants trying to hide behind piles of garbage.

“What a filthy place. Where am I? I'll probably catch some terrible disease if I stay here,” Gary said. He tried to go back down the path he thought he'd come by, but he wasn't able to find his way back to the main street.

And it was no wonder. This area was built with illegal permits, so the structure of it was completely different from the other districts in the city. Only those who had lived here for a long time could navigate the place.

As a matter of course, Gary, who had just arrived in this city, had no way of knowing the way, and no matter how much he walked, he would never emerge onto the main street.

Growing irritated, he said to a man lying nearby, “Hey, you over there! Take me to the main street!”

The man took one look at Gary and flashed him a vulgar smile. “Sure. Just a second.” He whispered to another man nearby, and they both came closer to Gary. “All right then, I'll take you there. It's pretty far away, so it'll take some time.” The man stood in front of Gary and began to lead him away.

But after about twenty minutes of walking, Gary began to feel frustrated that they still hadn't arrived back at the main street.

“If you turn here, it’ll be right up ahead,” the man said and stepped aside. Without any warning, Gary pushed the man away and turned the corner.

“Hey! What is this? It’s just a dead end!” He was staring at a vacant space which had basically turned into a junkyard. He turned towards the man with irritation.

“This kid is really stupid. What kind of idiot believes a stranger in this kind of place and then just follows him around?!”

Four men were standing there, besides the one who had led him here. Gary reached for the sword on his hip.

“Hey, you better watch it! That thing’s dangerous!” Suddenly, a man appeared from behind and grabbed him. Several others emerged from behind the piles of garbage.

“Let go of me! Don’t you know who I am?! I’m Lord Gary, the second son of Marquis Sammons!”

The men laughed loudly at Gary shouting his own name, seemingly unfazed.

“Ooh, lucky for us! Let’s get ourselves a ransom, boys! I bet the marquis will pay as much as we want!” one of the men said, then punched Gary in the back of the head, knocking him unconscious. He tied up Gary’s hands and feet, and put a gag in his mouth.

“Hey! Someone get me a collar!”

The item that the man had brought was originally meant to be worn around the slave’s neck, and it was called a “slave’s collar.” It was fashioned so that it would make the person who wore it unable to disobey what their master said. The man expertly put the collar around Gary’s neck.

Of course, this was illegal, and originally only official slave traders were allowed to do this, but that was a rule that had nothing to do with the folks who lived in these parts.

“We’ve scored our golden goose at last, boys! Someone go get some information on this guy! And listen—don’t you dare screw this up for us!”

At those words, several men ran off to carry out his orders while the

remaining men took Gary elsewhere.

Part Eight

I was oblivious to what was going on aboveground far away, because I was once again busy dungeon diving today.

Currently, I was exploring the thirty-eighth floor. I was in the middle of setting a record for conquering the dungeon in the shortest time so far, and my name and face were becoming known around the city. That was why everyone was wondering about my adventurer rank.

I had proven myself capable of conquering the dungeon down to the thirty-eighth floor solo (although strictly speaking that wasn't completely true, as I had my followers with me) and everyone started thinking it was strange that I was still just a Rank C adventurer. Various speculations were starting to fly around.

According to one legend, Tenma was a spy of the kingdom who traveled around without increasing his rank, secretly researching influential people in various places and reporting them to the king.

Another said that Tenma was a homunculus created by magic, and although he looked young, he was actually several hundred years old, which was why his strength didn't match his rank.

Yet another said that Tenma was the illegitimate child of a nobleman, and his excessive talent made the heir of the family feel his status was in danger. Therefore he had banished Tenma, but Tenma held a grudge against him and intended to get revenge on him someday. That was why he traveled around the kingdom—because he was trying to get stronger and therefore didn't want to call attention to himself by having a high rank.

Anyway, those were the kinds of rumors circulating about me, and it was incredibly annoying.

The one I heard most often was the one about me being an illegitimate son of a noble, though. The reason for that was because word had gotten out that I was an acquaintance of Duke Sanga, and Marquis Sammons had bowed his head to me in front of a large crowd of people. So people speculated that I was

the secret son of some very important noble—perhaps even the king.

As far as I could recall, I'd never mentioned Duke Sanga's name during my time in Sagan, so I had a feeling someone I knew from Gunjo City had spread those rumors to people like Jin.

By the way, when I heard those rumors from Jin and the others, I suspected them for a moment, but they frantically denied it so I decided that they weren't the culprits.

"Why are people spreading such rumors?"

And in order to avoid hearing them, I'd been focused on dungeon diving for the past two or three days.

Just then, Shiromaru suddenly started growling and Solomon perked up, on high alert. I stopped moving, pulled out the *kogarasumaru* I had on my waist, and looked around.

Something's headed straight for us... Where is it?

I was just about to use Detection to trace its location when suddenly I felt a strong sense of malice above my head.

"There you are!" I swung my sword overhead and felt it hit something. Whatever I'd hit fell to the ground a short distance away from me and then showed itself. It was...

"A snake?! It felt like I was hitting a rubber tire with a stick just now..."

I was looking at a huge, jet-black snake. I used Identify on it and discovered it was a dark rubber anaconda, Rank B. It seemed like my sudden counterattack hadn't done much damage to it. While it wasn't a full-powered blow, apparently the *kogarasumaru* didn't seem to have much effect on it.

"Guess I'll have to get a little more serious."

I put my sword back in its scabbard and assumed an offensive stance. The anaconda recoiled its body, and then the next moment it flew towards me like an arrow with tremendous force.

"Hah!" I let out a short breath, slightly bending my body to the side to dodge the anaconda while I drew my sword to counterattack. This time the response

from my *kogarasumaru* felt a little different from what I had imagined, but when I forcibly shook it off, the blade slashed from the middle of the anaconda's jaw, cutting off the top half of its head, and sent it flying through the air.

Losing its head didn't seem to affect the momentum of the anaconda's body as it flew towards me, but I stepped aside. It slammed spectacularly into the wall and then slid to the ground. It twitched a few times, but of course couldn't attack me anymore.

"I guess the blade is ineffective unless it's at the exact right angle..." I muttered, putting the sword back in its sheath as I went to retrieve the anaconda.

When I looked at the cuts on the anaconda's head, I could see that the first slash had been repelled by a rubberlike skin about five millimeters thick. The meat had a beautiful pink color, and although it looked like chicken at first glance, it felt more elastic than chicken when I touched it.

But the strangest thing was that an anaconda about six meters tall had come down from above. If this had been a forest, that would make sense, but this was a dungeon, and I couldn't figure out where a monster that large would hide.

When I looked up at the place where I thought the anaconda had come from, I saw a tunnel there. I floated up with magic and looked into it, and I could feel that there was wind flowing out from within.

I asked Rocket to go check it out, and he went up, then returned in about two to three minutes. According to his report, there was a large space at the back of the tunnel.

I used Earth magic to widen the hole, and after enlarging it enough for me to crawl through, I decided to try to reach the place Rocket had described.

Rocket went ahead of me, and after crawling behind him for about five minutes, I came to a large space with many jagged rocks. I immediately hopped down and looked around, then sensed a strange presence nearby.

It was on the other side from where I was now, wedged between two boulders. I knew there was something there, but the rocks were blocking it

from my view. I thought maybe it was another anaconda, so I took out my sword and ordered Shiromaru and the others to stay while I slowly and stealthily approached.

I couldn't see anything in the shadow of the rocks, but I could feel some kind of magical power there, as if a barrier had been created around the place.

I cast a counter-magic spell called Dispel towards the place where I sensed the presence, and it dissolved the barrier.

“What the...? Girls...? What are you doing here?”

There I saw two girls, both wearing dingy clothes. One was a small girl with white hair, and the other girl—no, now that I had a closer look I realized she was a woman—had dirty golden hair.



Either the two girls didn't notice me, or they were startled that the magic barrier had suddenly dissolved, but once the white-haired girl came back to herself, she reached for the rusty sword nearby and pointed it at me with a glare. The other woman looked at me with vacant eyes. She tried to protect the girl, but she looked extremely weak, and collapsed instead.

"Wait! I'm not here to hurt you!" I said loudly, then dropped my sword and held up both hands in the air. The white-haired girl still didn't drop her sword. "I have a bunch of potions and all kinds of other medicine! If you put down your sword, I'll give you what you need to heal her!"

The young girl hesitated for a moment and then said, "Please give us the medicine, then!" and lowered her sword. She didn't let it go, but it was a sign that she wasn't as cautious as before.

"Here, this has potions and antidotes inside."

I wrapped up the items in a kobold skin and tossed them over to her. I tossed the bundle lightly so that the bottles wouldn't break. It landed about three meters away from the girl, so I backed up about ten meters and sat on the ground. I had Shiromaru and the others positioned around the girls just in case.

The girl cautiously retrieved the pouch and took out the potions, careful not to turn her back to me. She opened the bottle and lightly licked the contents to check them, then tried to get the woman to drink it. "Drink it, Aura!"

Either the woman was so weak she couldn't even drink, or she'd reached the point where she was so weak it wouldn't have any effect if she did, because she didn't show any signs of improving.

"Aura! Please drink it!" the little girl screamed, but the woman's response gradually grew weaker. I'd had no idea her condition was so precarious, so I began to approach them. "What are you doing?!" The little girl aimed her sword at me as I got right in front of them.

"We don't have time to argue right now!" I batted the sword away with my hand. Blood streamed from my palm and I wiped it off on my clothes.

The girl seemed startled and slid down to the ground. Meanwhile, I checked the woman's condition. She was incredibly pale and her breathing was shallow.

I thought perhaps a poison had weakened her body and was circulating through it. Honestly, I wouldn't be surprised if she expired at any moment.

"Antidote! Cure! Resist! Aqua Heal!" I cast one spell after the other. Antidote would cure her poison. Cure would work as an antiseptic to detoxify any wounds or illnesses she might have, and boost her recovery. Resist would raise her resistance, and Aqua Heal would heal her wounds.

Finally, her color began to improve and her breathing stabilized. I tried having her drink a potion, and this time she was able to.

I was relieved for the moment, but just then the girl stood up and snatched the woman away from me, taking her into her arms. She seemed happy that the woman's color had improved, but she was still cautious of me. I watched as the girl did this, and then stood up. I took my bed out of my bag and set it up.

"I apologize that this has been used, but it's better than having her lie on the ground. Go ahead and use it," I said, then backed away from them. Then I called Shiromaru and the others over. The young girl looked scared when she saw them suddenly run out from the shadow of a boulder, but I instructed my followers to be nice and not to hurt the girl under any circumstances. I told them to guard the premises while I healed my left hand, then began cooking some food.

I decided to make a stew using the meat from the anaconda. First I tasted the meat raw to see how it was. It wasn't very fatty, and it had a light flavor to it, so I thought that the girls might be able to stomach it. I began to simmer that with other ingredients I felt would have a cleansing effect.

I diluted milk with water and added a little flour to make a white sauce. I didn't use any spices except for a bit of salt and soy sauce to bring out the flavor of the vegetables. I grated some potatoes to put in the stew as well. I simmered it all together, and then it was done.

That wouldn't be enough for me and my followers, though, so I also made some broiled anaconda and orc kebabs. I had some orc bones, which I would dole out as treats to my followers, stashed in my bag for later.

Shiromaru must've been attracted to the aroma of the stew, because he came padding over to me. Rocket then came over as well and threw up a bunch of

monsters. Well—I knew that the inside of him was basically like a dimension bag, but I couldn't help but see this behavior as anything other than p*ke.

I looked at what he'd brought me. There was a small dark rubber anaconda (about two meters long), along with five kobolds, one orc, and three horned rabbits. I transferred the contents to my bag as I praised my followers and gave them their food.

The girl was watching me. Suddenly, her face turned red and she held her stomach. It must have been growling, embarrassing her, though I didn't hear it. At any rate, I put some stew into a bowl and carried it over to her.

"This stew is made from cleansing ingredients and should be easy for you to stomach. If you don't think you can eat it, I'll make you something else, though." I handed her a bowl and a spoon, but she didn't try to take it. I knew she was hungry, but she still didn't trust me.

I gave up and put the bowl on the ground near her, then went back over by the pot so I could eat my meal. I took the first bite. *Damn, anacondas are delicious!* The first time I'd tasted it raw earlier, I thought it was lean and had a light flavor, but once I simmered it, the cartilage in between the sections of meat became gelatinous and melted into the broth. The meat just fell apart in my mouth. The cartilage had a certain umami about it which made the flavor of the stew even better.

I was so absorbed in eating I even had seconds. Shiromaru and Solomon wanted more meat too. (No wonder they were Number One and Number Two.)

But, since I was still a strict father, I put a bunch of vegetables in with their meat. Shiromaru and Solomon looked pretty disappointed, which was quite amusing. They reluctantly ate the vegetables too, but ended up cleaning their plates.

The girl watched us closely and then hesitantly took a bite of the soup. She quickly started gobbling it up. Apparently she liked it. She cleaned the bowl in no time, and then looked like she could eat more. I asked her if she wanted me to bring the pot over so she could have seconds. She hesitated for a moment and then nodded shyly.

While I poured her a second bowl, the woman began to regain consciousness.

“N-Nngh... Where am I...?”

“Aura! You’re awake! Do you know who I am?” The girl put down her stew and rushed over to the woman.

The woman seemed confused for a while but then slowly said, “Jeanne... Where are we? What are we doing here?”

“May I?” I examined the woman’s coloring and then cast Cure and Resist on her again, just in case.

The girl, whose name was apparently Jeanne, still seemed cautious of me, but she didn’t stop me because she knew now that the magic had worked.

“I don’t know who you are, but thank you.” The woman named Aura was still lying down, but she politely thanked me as she inclined her head. “Jeanne, what in the world happened? My memory is all fuzzy and I can’t remember...”

Jeanne took a moment to think and then said, “After you got a fever, we were attacked by monsters and we fell down here. That’s when *he* died.”

“Oh...” Aura said, apparently understanding what she meant.

“Who’s ‘he’?” I butted in.

As expected, Jeanne said, “It’s none of your business.”

But then Aura said, “Our master.” Only then did I realize that they were wearing collars around their necks like the ones slaves wore. “We’re slaves, and our master was a noble. A viscount.”

Just then, I remembered something I didn’t really want to bring up. “Listen... I don’t really want to say this, but...” I trailed off.

“We didn’t kill him, for your information!” Jeanne said defensively.

“No, that’s not it. It’s just that if you two are slaves, then that means... Er...”

“Spit it out! What is it?!” Jeanne demanded with irritation.

“That means that the ownership rights of you two transfer to me,” I told them.

Both of them froze. Apparently they hadn’t been expecting that.

“If the owner of a slave dies in a dungeon, then the ownership rights get transferred to the first person who finds the slaves. In other words...you’re treated as loot. So that’s why I’m your master now...”

They were so still I wondered if they’d even heard me. I waved my hand in front of their faces and they still didn’t move, so now I clapped my hands in front of them.

“But why?” Jeanne asked, slumping down to the floor.

Aura squeezed her eyes shut tightly. “I have a favor to ask. Please don’t separate us. Even if you sell us, please make a deal that we must stay together.” She bowed her head deeply to me.

It was all so sudden my mind was a jumble.

Seeing this, Aura said, “To tell you the truth, Jeanne came from a noble family and I was her maid. I’ve been with her ever since she was born.”

She told me their whole story. Both of them were raised without wanting for anything, but about five years ago they were swept up in a war and Jeanne’s family fell out of power. All of her relatives died. They were the only two survivors, and so they were sold off as slaves to a viscount.

Fortunately for them, the viscount wasn’t interested in women, so he never assaulted them, but he had been about to sell them again.

He had come to Sagan incognito and entered the dungeon with guards. But he was too confident. He’d been ambushed by strong monsters who’d killed both the guards and the viscount, and then the two girls had fallen into a hole.

Even though Jeanne had mentioned falling into a hole, I didn’t believe everything they said. I thought maybe something important might be listed on their statuses, so I decided to check them.

Name: Jeanne

Age: 14

Class: Human

Title: Cursed Child (Saint), Ex-Viscount’s Daughter, Slave

Name: Aura
Age: 16
Class: Human
Title: Maid, Slave

Jeanne's status said that she was a Cursed Child (Saint). I didn't know if she was hiding that on purpose, or if she simply didn't know. But I decided not to completely trust them until I found out.

At any rate, I told Aura that she should get some rest while I looked around. First, I searched the hole that the two of them had fallen from. I saw that the walls around the opening of the hole were sloped like a slide, so they hadn't been seriously hurt.

The hole was pretty high up from here. I flew up and looked at it. "This seems familiar..." Then again, a lot of places looked similar in this dungeon, so I decided not to think about it anymore.

After that, I searched all around, but I didn't find anything of note. There was a rock that had a reddish-brown stain on it, so I wondered if there was a lot of iron in the rocks here. I didn't need any right now, though, so I ignored it.

I was able to find a warp point here, though, so I put a rusty orc sword down to mark the location of it.

I went back over to the girls and found them discussing something. They didn't seem to notice I was back, so I purposefully walked a little louder to let them know I was there.

Hearing me approach, they stopped talking and looked over at me.

"We should get out of here for now," I said, but Aura still looked as though she wasn't ready to stand. I decided to carry her on my back. Shiromaru followed behind just in case, and Solomon flew above Jeanne.

Rocket got inside my bag, and I told him to jump out if he noticed anything suspicious. But apparently, that concern was unnecessary, because we were able to safely use the warp point and get above ground.

The moment we stepped outside, Jeanne exclaimed, "Ahh, the first time

we've seen the sky in a whole week!" which surprised me. That meant she had stayed by Aura's side when she was on the verge of death and had maintained that barrier for close to a week. Even if she had used some kind of magical tool to accomplish it, that would be difficult for any ordinary magic user.

I thought I should probably let the guild know about them, so I began walking there when I suddenly heard a commotion nearby. Curious, I approached the guild.

"Don't move! You're under suspicion for the kidnapping of a noble!" Two men wearing knights' armor stopped me. I had no clue what they were talking about, so I turned slightly to ask them about it. "I said, don't move!" he said, thrusting his spear towards me.

"Air Impact!" I cast a shock wave using Wind magic. The man who'd tried to thrust his spear at me was knocked back about ten meters due to the blast, rolled across the ground, then hit the wall behind him.

"So you *are* the culprit!" the other man yelled, moving to attack me.

"Graar!" Shiromaru growled and threw himself at the man, tackling him. He had his mouth half-open, ready to tear into the man upon my command.

The man wasn't knocked out from the impact, but all the color drained from his face as Shiromaru's ferocious glare loomed right in front of his eyes.

"Shiromaru. Drag him over here!" I commanded, and then I had Jeanne open the door to the guild for me. There were several soldiers and knights sitting around a table discussing something inside, and they hadn't noticed me yet.

So I picked up the man Shiromaru had dragged in and tossed him right onto the table.

"Wh-What the—?!"

The knights panicked but then immediately realized I'd done it.

"Don't move! If you move then you declare yourself as an enemy and you'll force us to use magic on you!" I yelled, trying to stop the knights. But one of the soldiers drew his sword. "Air Bullet! Air Impact!" I shot off two spells in succession. The bullets knocked away their swords and the impact spell blew

the soldiers away. Now they understood that I wasn't just bluffing.

"You're going to defy Marquis Sammons?!" one of the knights yelled.

"If he's behind this, then that means he's my enemy!" I yelled back with malice. That's all it took for the knights to scramble backwards from me. "You're the ones who started this fight with me. And you'll regret it till your dying day!" I said for good measure. I knew that if it was a real fight, I'd have an overwhelming advantage, unless the one I threw across the table had been the weakest of them all.

However, I never got the chance to figure it out. Marquis Sammons heard the commotion and came rushing to intervene. "Hang on! That's enough! Put your swords away!"

The knights sheathed their swords, but I had no intention of listening to him. "Marquis, don't be ridiculous. You want me to put down my sword when I was the one who was attacked here?"

Honestly, I was pissed. The marquis's knights had tried to attack me while I was carrying a woman on my back!

Marquis Sammons's face twisted and he glared at the knights. Then he turned towards me and said, "I apologize. It seems as if they misunderstood my orders." And then he bowed his head to me. Lately it seemed this was happening to me a lot.

"Anyway, I'll have to talk to you about this later. There's something I have to do first." I went straight past the marquis and towards the desk, and told the person there about Aura and Jeanne. I asked to be given the necessary paperwork.

"I'm sorry, but since they belonged to a viscount, we can't give you ownership rights over them until you prove that you weren't the one who killed him," they said. And thus began the interrogation.

"They were attacked by the monster somewhere around the thirtieth or thirty-first floor. The first one who died was the viscount, followed by three knights who had accompanied them as guards. Then, the adventurer who was acting as their guide died. Then Aura suddenly fell ill, so Jeanne decided to take

her and rest at a dead end, and that's when they were attacked again."

I answered all the clerk's questions. "The monster that attacked them was a giant centipede."

Knowing that I had recently defeated one, the clerk glared at me. "Tenma, do you still have the body? If you do, take it out."

And so I took out the giganto death centipede's body from my bag.

"That's it! That's the monster that attacked us!" Jeanne pointed at the centipede and screamed.

I took a knife and cut open the centipede's belly, and out spilled a human-shaped glob that was wearing a noble's crest.

"Hang on just a moment... Yes, here it is. That's the crest of Honorary Viscount Esa. We have his records right here. That means it's very likely that these two were slaves belonging to him."

The clerk told us to wait a moment and then left the room. I was worried about Aura's condition, but right now she seemed stable—just a little exhausted.

Jeanne and Aura were whispering something to each other that I couldn't hear. I probably could have if I focused very hard, but I wasn't really interested, so I killed time by feeding Rocket and the others snacks.

About ten minutes later, the clerk still hadn't returned. There was a knock at the door and a man wearing priests' clothing entered the room. He bowed towards us.

"Hello. I am Fromme Fenault, a priest of this city's Church of Pharma."

Ah—so this was going to be Jeanne and Aura's inquisitor. I had to leave the room for confidentiality reasons, so I decided to go talk to Marquis Sammons.

He was sitting at the table scolding the knights about something.

"I'm back, Marquis Sammons."

The marquis paused his lecture, turning towards me and bowing his head. "Master Tenma, I humbly apologize. This is all my fault. I ordered the knights to

go search for you so that you could help me. However, the knights who had witnessed your tiff with Gary misunderstood and thought I meant you were a suspect.” He bowed his head again.

In the first place, I honestly had no idea what this whole kidnapping thing was about.

“Ah, I’m sorry. Here—this letter arrived at the inn I’m staying at.” The marquis realized he hadn’t explained the gist of the situation and took a letter out of his pocket. I got his permission to read it.

“We have your son. If you want him back, then give us 10,000,000G by tomorrow. The exchange will happen at the fountain ruins in the center of the slums. Once we see the money is legit, we’ll let him go.”

I thought that sounded awfully old-fashioned, but I thought the marquis would be pretty offended if I laughed so I managed to suppress it.

“So? What do you need my help with?”

“I don’t want you to misunderstand. This isn’t an order—I’m asking a favor as Gary’s father. You’re the most powerful person I’ve met in Sagan, and the one I trust the most.”

I assumed he felt he could trust me since I was Duke Sanga’s acquaintance. At any rate, I decided that cooperating now would probably benefit me later.

“I know this is a sudden request, and I apologize for the knights’ rude behavior—”

“I’ll do it,” I interrupted him.

“What? Really?!”

“I can’t do anything about it right now because there’s not enough time. I’ll need tonight to prepare.”

“That’s fine... But what should I do?” He asked whether there wasn’t anything he could do to help, but honestly the most useful thing he had in his possession was Gulliver. Unfortunately, Gulliver wasn’t really suited to this kind of situation.

“Just act like you’re taking measures. Spread the word that you’re

investigating me since I'm the most likely suspect and maybe that'll throw off the true perp."

I wanted to make it clear that the knights would only be getting in my way.

"All right. I'll do as you say."

Now that our discussion was over, I went back to Jeanne and Aura, who had just finished undergoing their inquisition with the priest.

"Oh, Tenma! Nothing about their story was suspicious, so we've gone ahead and transferred ownership of them to you," the clerk said, and handed me the papers. I put them in my bag and decided to go home.

On the way there, I tried talking to Jeanne and Aura, but all they would give me were half-hearted replies like "Yeah" and "Mm-hmm." To make matters worse, I ran into Amy and Jin and his party in front of my room.

"Hey, Tenma! Unusual to see you with a woman!" Jin said.

"Hm? Tenma, those two women are slaves. Don't tell me you *bought* them!" Leena was aghast when she saw the collars around their necks.

"Master..." Amy looked at me with a sad expression on her face.

Jin elbowed me and leered. "So you're a man after all, Tenma!"

I backed up away from them. "Stun!"

"Argh!"

Jin fell backwards, towards the ground. Was he really a top adventurer in this town? Lately I wasn't so sure I believed that.

"I'll explain so no one gets the wrong idea," I said, and told them the gist of the story. Luckily, they believed me.

Amy was still staring at me, though. I hadn't done anything bad, but I still felt like she was judging me.

"Where are they going to stay?" Amy asked.

I knew if I didn't think long and hard about this that she'd give me another of those glares.

“That’s what we’re going to discuss right now.” I knew that wasn’t an answer, but she didn’t seem to mind. “Anyway, I’ve had a long day, so if you’ll excuse me...” I went past Amy and the others and took the girls to my room. As soon as we got inside, I sat down at the table and was about to start the discussion, but one of them spoke up first.

“Master Tenma, if you don’t mind, please let us continue serving you as slaves.”

“Huh...?!”

It was all so sudden I didn’t comprehend what they’d said at first. If I hadn’t heard wrong, they were asking to be my slaves...?

“Please make us your slaves, Master Tenma. I discussed it with Jeanne, and that’s what we’ve decided.”

Apparently I hadn’t heard wrong at all.

“Why did you make that decision?” I had to wonder, after all, because at first it seemed like Jeanne hadn’t wanted anything to do with me.

“Because that’s the best decision for us. Of course, if you don’t want us, that’s another matter...” Aura said, but there seemed to be a reason behind her words. I pressed her on it and she said, “All right. The main reason is because we’ve recognized that you’re an incredibly powerful adventurer. So powerful that even a marquis bowed his head to you!”

I suppose that from their perspective, having a master who could protect them would be very favorable. But I’d never once thought that I wanted slaves.

“Master Tenma, if you don’t take us in, we will almost certainly be sold into slavery as prostitutes.”

Objectively speaking, both girls were very beautiful, and I was sure that was probably what would happen. There was no way they’d be left unharmed.

“I’m a man too, you know...” I protested.

“It’s a thousand times better for us to choose someone with a bright future than to be forced into the hands of a strange pervert.”

That was a pretty simple argument. I was speechless.

“Oh, but if you decide you want to take Jeanne, please at least get her consent first. You can do whatever you want with me; I don’t mind.”

Once again I was at a loss. A complete loss. I somehow managed to pull myself together and said, “We can talk about that tomorrow...” My only choice was to put off the problem until later.

Aura grinned at me and said, “Yes, let’s do that, Master.” She had a triumphant look on her face.

Meanwhile, Jeanne hadn’t said one word, but her face was bright red and she was trying to hide it in Shiromaru’s fur. It looked like Shiromaru had grown fond of her. What a playboy.

At any rate, it seemed like my party had grown by two slaves and I had a job lined up. So why did I feel so depressed?

I thought about renting another room from Amy’s mom, but Aura objected, and there were no other vacancies. So it looked like this room was about to have three human and three follower occupants.

I let Aura and Jeanne have my bed since Aura still wasn’t fully recovered, and decided to sleep on the floor. Aura offered to sleep on the floor instead, but I refused. She didn’t seem happy about that. I had to use my power as her master to order her to get in bed.

For dinner, I served the leftover anaconda stew from the dungeon, along with bread and some more grilled meat. I put the two girls to bed early and decided to start preparing for my job tomorrow. I found myself wondering whether there was a Time-Space magic spell that could let you rewind time...? If so, I would’ve left Jeanne and Aura in the guild’s custody and just run away.

I’d never lived with a girl besides my mom before, not even in my previous life, so suddenly having two female slaves made me even more anxious than raising a dragon.

Part Nine

I was in the central area of the slums. I say “central area,” but really I was on a rooftop. The sun was just about to come up. The reason I was up here was partly to fulfill my promise to the marquis, but also because I couldn’t stand being in the same room with those two girls for a second longer. Just so you know, that doesn’t mean I like guys. If I’m gonna fall in love, it’ll be with a woman. But I’d never slept in the same room with a woman before besides my mom, and it just made me really unsettled.

For that reason, I got up very early and left, then killed some time up here in the slums. I promise I was actually doing my job—I just had a very valuable experience on the way here. Before I’d reached this area, I was about to leave my room when I realized there were a bunch of strange men who weren’t the marquis’s lackeys watching me. The knights had been ordered to pretend to keep their eyes on me, but the other men were definitely part of the group who had kidnapped the marquis’s son.

After confirming the situation, I casually went back into my room and had Rocket swallow me. I know the expression might sound strange, but basically I had Rocket put me in the dimension bag inside him, had him go out into the night, and then let me out some distance away from the inn so I could head to the slums.

Speaking of Rocket, he was resting in my bag right now. I was trying to fit into my surroundings by wearing all-black, tattered clothing, and had a black turban tied around my head. At a glance, no one would recognize me as Tenma.

I’d left Jeanne and Aura back at the inn, but ordered Shiromaru and Solomon to stay there and guard them, just in case. This disguise was really tough, though. From time to time I had to use magic to lower my body temperature, but I still couldn’t stop sweating. I just wanted to get this over and done with so I could go take a bath.

At any rate, I used Detection to see if I could find Gary. Luckily, I had met him before, so if I focused really hard, I’d be able to find his presence. And to my surprise, he was incredibly close—inside the building I was on the roof of, in

fact.

This building had four stories. The exterior was so crumbled and worn down it looked like it would topple if a big earthquake struck. First, I used Detection on the inside and discovered there were four people by the first-floor entrance and two by the stairs. Then there were three near the stairs on the second floor and two in the hallway. Gary was on the third floor, along with three others in the same room, and three in that hallway. As for the fourth floor, there were two people in the hallway, and three in a room directly below me. So all in all, there were twenty-two people present, plus Gary. And if I added in the people who were watching over my room and the marquis, there were probably a little over thirty enemies in total.

At any rate, now that I had a general idea of the layout, I decided to get started. First, I had Rocket swallow me so I could infiltrate the room directly below me. Once we were inside, we saw three kidnappers who seemed to be the bosses. They were drinking.

I slipped only my arm outside Rocket and spread a soundproof barrier over the room.

“Stun.”

I cast a strong Lightning magic spell at the three of them, paralyzing them. The marquis wanted everyone alive, if possible, but he said he would understand if I had to kill them. Luckily, those three survived.

I emerged from Rocket and tied the three of them up with rope. Afterwards, I stuffed them in my dimension bag and got back inside Rocket. Next, I infiltrated Gary’s room and repeated the same steps as before.

Gary was bound and gagged, but as soon as he saw me his eyes filled with malice and he began to let out muffled screams. I slipped off his gag and he yelled “Look at what’s happened to me—a noble! Just what are you going to do about it?!” He was making a huge fuss so I went ahead and Stunned him just as I had the kidnappers, just to shut him up. I used a weaker version of the spell, so he only lost consciousness.

After I recovered Gary, the rest was simple. I walked out of the room and rendered the kidnappers powerless with Stun before they could even shout,

tied them up, and tossed them into my bag. Then I moved onto the next target, and repeated these steps.

I'd solved the kidnapping case in less than an hour.

Now I just had to put the last of the perps into my bag, along with any weapons, gems, and money I'd found in the building, before leaving the hideout. Some people might look at what I'd done as cruel, but these people were criminals. I had a feeling these items were stolen anyway, so I might as well take them with me to save me the trouble of having to recover them later. Plus, if I took them to the guild along with this information, it would improve my standing there.

Before I went back to the guild, I took care of the kidnappers who were waiting near the guild and watching the marquis's knights, tied them up, and threw them in the same bag as the others.

Now it was time to go to the guild. "I'm done, Marquis Sammons," I announced as soon as I stepped inside, then took Gary out of my bag.

Gary was still unconscious, but he'd wake up on his own eventually. I told the marquis that he had been startled since he hadn't known about the plan, so I'd used magic to keep him quiet, and the marquis didn't seem bothered by this.

"G-Goodness... Thank you, Tenma. Despite all the trouble Gary caused you, you still saved him... I can't tell you how much I appreciate it."

Even if Gary was a colossal brat, the marquis still loved his son. Just then, I remembered something. "By the way, I forgot to ask about payment for this quest."

I should have asked about this before, but things had been so hectic due to Aura and Jeanne that I'd totally forgotten. Well, if he tried to stiff me I'd just let the kidnappers go somewhere, and if they decided to target Gary again I might help them out this time.

"Ah, about that, I'd like to include a token of my apologies along with my payment. I'll give you the 500,000G that I collected as ransom, and a metal plate embossed with the crest of Marquis Sammons. Although not as powerful as the Duke of Sanga, our family is also a senior aristocratic family with a certain

amount of power. I'm sure it'll come in handy for you."

It seemed like I had underestimated the marquis a little. He said the extra payment was a token of his appreciation, but I had a feeling that part of it was to keep me quiet about all the trouble his son had caused in this town. If I refused, it would make me look pretty pathetic and might affect my reputation as an adventurer.

But because of this incident, he'd discovered how powerful I was, so it would be a good idea to accept it in case I ever needed to call in a favor from him later. Plus, it wouldn't hurt to take it, anyway. However...

"Thank you for the generous payment. Let's put everything that happened here behind us. However, if your son ever tries to come after Solomon or one of my friends again, I will be forced to deal with him accordingly," I said firmly, making myself very clear. The marquis seemed to understand, and he got a wry smile on his face. I'm sure he knew his son best, and that was why he reacted that way.

"Oh, right—I almost forgot!" I said dramatically, pulling all the kidnappers out of my bag. There were thirty-one in total, because there had been four people watching the inn and five more watching the marquis's knights.

The marquis and the knights clearly hadn't expected to receive this many criminals alive, and they along with the guild workers had eyes as big as saucers.

"I'll let you decide their punishment. I'm pretty sure I got all of them, but I can't guarantee there weren't some that slipped away without my knowledge."

At this point I considered my job here done, and decided to go back to my room. Everyone was still asleep. That wasn't surprising, though. Only Shiromaru noticed me coming in, but it would've been nice to have a bigger welcome.

I was dirtier than I'd expected, so I decided to wash off outside before I went to bed. I really wanted to take a bath, but I knew that if I did that I'd probably fall asleep.

I went back inside and found Shiromaru warming up my cot. Even when I tried to go to sleep, he wouldn't get off it. I picked him up and moved him, then tried

to go to sleep.

I woke up several hours later and found that Aura and Jeanne were already up. Aura was in the kitchen, and Jeanne was sitting on the bed. “Good morning, Master Tenma!” Aura said.

“Good morning...” Jeanne didn’t seem to be as awake as Aura, and perhaps she still hadn’t recognized me as her master, because her greeting was lukewarm at best. Aura seemed to be feeling much better, because she was making breakfast in the kitchen.

“Breakfast is almost ready. Please take a seat at the table,” she said, so I went ahead and sat down. Then I realized I’d forgotten something very important.

“Morning, you two.”

“Good morning!”

“Mmm...” were their responses—Aura first, then Jeanne.

“Here you are.” Aura served me some leftover stew, toasted bread, and salad. It was simple, but perhaps perfect for breakfast. What I was really curious about was why I was the only one eating. I asked Aura about it.

“We’re slaves. We couldn’t possibly eat breakfast with our master,” she replied.

This was a small room, so I felt strange eating alone with my back turned to them. I asked them to eat with me, but Aura stubbornly refused. I realized it was a waste of time, but explained that I wasn’t a noble, then ordered them to sit at the same table as me and eat.

Finally Aura relented, and we all ate breakfast together.

Something I noticed during breakfast was that the two of them only had one pair of filthy clothes each. I decided to go buy them new clothes and other things they needed, but I had no idea where to get such things in Sagan. And I didn’t have the confidence to go alone either.

That’s why I decided to bring along a valuable helper—Amy! Well, she was really the only girl I knew in this town, and as such was my only option. I went to ask her if she would help.

“Okay. I know a good shop with lots of items at reasonable prices!” she declared. However, Amy had rare visitors over—Leena and Mennas. I asked why they were there and they said they were taking the day off from adventuring.

“We came to play with Rocky and Birdie!” Leena said, but Mennas said she was just there to babysit. That made Leena angry, but Mennas said since Leena tended to be an airhead, she needed to be accompanied.

At any rate, those two would accompany Amy to the store as well.

“Are you planning on picking out their underwear too, Tenma?” Mennas asked. I told her I would just give them money and excuse myself. Therefore I sent along 50,000G with them for lunch and clothing. I honestly didn’t know how much women’s clothing cost and thought it might be too much, but Mennas convinced me women’s clothing cost more than men’s, so I handed it over.

Since I now had some unexpected free time, I decided to go to my secret hideout in the dungeon to start crafting armor.

First, I was going to make muffers. I would be using mythrill, silver ingots, and the anaconda hides. First, I cut the hide to size and began to shape it.

I decided to go with half-finger gloves, and made some temporary stitches to help decide on the size. It was kind of difficult, but I kept going, giving myself room to grow.

Now for the metal part, I decided to use the adamantium muffers as a template. I made them smaller so they would fit me better, and began cutting out the shape. I was planning on making the spots around my wrists out of mythrill links.

I had made a prototype out of iron earlier. I could have used that, but since that one was smaller than I needed, I would have had to adjust it.

I had intended to melt it down when I was finished with it, but realized that it might fit Aura or Jeanne so I decided to keep it.

I made the shape rounded so it would make counterattacks bounce off it, and extended the mythrill down to the base of my fingers so I’d be able to use them

easily. I made it so that the muffers would fit into the armor covering my lower arm.

I only had time to make one of them, so I called it a day for now, then decided to use my remaining time to collect silver. I did that for about thirty minutes and got about two grams. I melted that into ingots and then put them in my bag.

I left the dungeon and saw that lunch had long passed, and figured Jeanne and Aura would be back by now. I returned to the inn but saw Amy and Leena waiting for me outside. As soon as they spotted me, they began grinning and dragged me up to my room.

“Tenma’s home!” Leena yelled as she opened the door. Amy pushed me from behind and I stumbled inside.

“Who’s that?” I replied dumbly, but then realized I was looking at Jeanne and Aura. They were dressed so nicely I hadn’t even recognized them. Amy elbowed me in the side.

Still, that was how beautiful they looked. I’d heard the phrase “cleaning up nice” before, but never really witnessed it until now.



Their messy hair was neatly combed and trimmed. Jeanne's beautiful white hair, which extended down to the middle of her back, was neatly fastened into a ponytail with some kind of floral barrette. She wore a light-blue dress. The front of it fell in layers below her knees and the back went down to her ankles. She wore a white shawl around her shoulders, fastened at her chest.

Meanwhile, Aura's blonde hair had been turned into a fluffy bobbed cut, but the thing that stood out to me first was...

"A maid's uniform?"

...the clothes she was wearing. It wasn't the kind of thing you saw cosplayers wear (not sure if that subculture even existed in this world); it was a classical maid's uniform. The apron *did* have frills on it, though.

"Does it not look good?" Aura asked.

Of course it looked good on her. "It does, but...I'm just wondering if you should've bought some regular clothes instead..." I murmured.

"These *are* my regular clothes!" she said huffily, sticking out her chest...which was bigger than I'd thought.

"Master?" Amy's voice restarted my brain, which had stopped functioning for a moment. Luckily, no one realized what I was staring at... Ah, wait. Mennas definitely noticed. She was making a drinking gesture with her hand. Apparently she wanted me to buy her a drink to keep her quiet about my little secret. Whatever.

We negotiated via eye contact and then Amy hesitantly said, "Um, about the money you gave us... I'm sorry, but we used it all!" She held both of her hands up in an apologetic gesture. I had expected that, though, so I told her not to worry about it. "Mennas and the others went shopping too, so that's why we ran out..." she murmured, after sighing with relief that I wasn't mad.

"What'd you just say?" I asked, but she was facing and staring at Leena and Mennas, who were trying to escape out the window. "Hold it right there!" I grabbed them both by the collars and pulled them back in. I made them kneel and Amy tried to follow suit, but I told her she was fine, gave her some snacks I had in my bag, and sent her home.

“Now, you two. Let’s hear your excuses.”

Leena immediately raised her hand. “Mennas made me do it!” With these words, she quickly threw Mennas under the bus. Obviously, Mennas started panicking and tried to put her hand over Leena’s mouth.

“You’re the one who said it was your treat, Tenma! So I thought it’d be better to not waste it!” She didn’t sound like she felt guilty at all, and when I looked at her she added, “Haven’t you ever heard of a tip?”

Because of this, I decided to make Mennas stay there for a while and let her legs go numb. As I kept my eyes on her, Leena tried to casually stroll in the direction of the door, so she ended up getting the same punishment.

They were both exhausted after this, and frankly speaking they were being a nuisance, so I wrote a note on a piece of paper and gave it to Shiromaru, who delivered it to Jin so he knew to come pick them up.

Then I ignored the two of them and focused my attention back on Jeanne and Aura. I had them sit down because I wanted to ask them whether they could fight if I brought them into the dungeon with me.

Jeanne said, “I can use Light, Fire, Water, and Earth magic, and I can use a sword and mace a little bit.”

“I can use Fire and Water magic; I can fight using a sword, spear, and bow; and I have a little hand-to-hand combat experience,” Aura said.

I already knew that Jeanne could use magic, but I was surprised to learn that Aura could as well. But as I spoke with them a bit more, I discovered that they could only use simple spells. They’d never had the opportunity to learn more advanced magic.

Name: Jeanne

Age: 14

Class: Human

Title: Cursed Child (Saint), Ex-Viscount’s Daughter, Slave

HP: 1500

MP: 7000

Strength: E+
Defense: D
Agility: D+
Magic: B-
Mind: C+
Growth: A+
Luck: E+

Skills

Light Magic: 4
Water Magic: 3
Endurance: 3
Debuff Resistance: 3
Fire Magic: 2
Earth Magic: 2
Vitality Boost: 2
Recovery Boost: 2
Sword: 2
Rod: 2
Magic Boost: 2
Growth Boost: 2

Gifts

Protection of the Goddess of Love
Protection of the Goddess of Nature
Protection of the Goddess of Fertility

Name: Aura

Age: 16

Class: Human

Title: Maid, Slave

HP: 3000

MP: 5000

Strength: D+

Defense: D+

Agility: C+

Magic: C+

Mind: B-

Growth: A

Luck: B-

Skills

Cooking: 8

Endurance: 5

Bow: 3

Sword: 3

Spear: 3

Brawling: 2

Fire Magic: 2

Water Magic: 2

Jeanne had said she couldn't use high-level magic spells, but then I remembered she had created that magical barrier back in the dungeon, and asked her about it. She said that it was an effect from a magical tool which had belonged to her deceased master. He had it for protection in the worst-case scenario. Unfortunately, he'd been attacked and had died before he could use it.

Their abilities weren't that bad. But I couldn't really say they were good either. When it came to whether or not they'd be able to improve, I was most concerned with Jeanne's "Cursed Child (Saint)" attribute. Why did a girl who had the protection of three goddesses have a title that said she was cursed? If only I could ask the gods about it...

At any rate, I intended to test them in various ways the next day. But before that, I had to make sure they had proper equipment. I didn't think I'd have a problem buying things before we went to the dungeon tomorrow, but since they were going to need practice equipment, I decided to get the lowest quality stuff for the time being.

When I told them this, they both looked nervous.

“You’ll be fine. I’ll have you practice in a place where there are no monsters tomorrow. And I’ll be there to protect you, just in case.” This seemed to lessen their anxiety.

I was just about to begin making dinner, but Aura stopped me. “That’s a maid’s job,” she said. That was fine by me because her food was delicious, but I was used to making all the food (like when I’d been with the triplets) so it felt a little strange. By the way, the food she served really was incredibly delicious.

After dinner, I wanted to take a bath. I went outside and took out my carriage, put my barrel inside, and filled the barrel up with hot water. I spread a towel out on top of a board placed near the barrel, which had a drain at the bottom so it wouldn’t rot.

At first I told Jeanne and Aura to take a bath, explaining how to use it and also giving them soap and towels. Of course, I wasn’t going to peek. But I was a bit naive about how much time girls spend in the bath. They were taking far too long. Ninety minutes passed before it was my turn, and by that time the water was lukewarm. I reheated the water and was finally able to take a relaxing bath.

I intended to leave for the dungeon early in the morning, so I decided to get to bed sooner than usual. Right now I had a curtain hanging in the middle of my room to separate my sleeping space from the girls’, making it a bit easier on me mentally to get some rest.

During the night, I awoke with a strange feeling and found myself in a white room.

“Not this again...” I wondered who my visitor would be this time. I was about to sit up and placed my hand beside my body, but...

“Ahh!” I felt some kind of soft, squishy sensation and heard a sort of sexy voice.

“Waah!” I quickly drew my hand away in shock and saw that the goddess of love was next to me.

“Tenma... I didn’t know you were so bold,” she said, and tried to hug me. “Ouch!” I gave her a light karate chop to the head to get her to stop. It didn’t

seem to hurt her, despite her exclamation.

At any rate, I asked her what she wanted.

“You can easily remove Jeanne’s curse,” she told me. Apparently, the curse had the effect of hindering her growth and lowering the luck of those around her. She had been born with it, but since she also had the Saint title, it hadn’t affected her much.

“How do I do that?” I asked. The goddess smirked.

“All you have to do is make her drink your bodily fluids!” she said expectantly.

“You mean I need to make her drink my blood?”

She gave me a disappointed look. “That works too. Ugh, how boring!” she pouted.

I asked her what made my blood so special and she replied, “Because you have the protection of several gods, are close to Jeanne in age, and are a different gender from her.”

In other words, by giving her my blood, I could cancel out the negative effects of the curse with the positive effects of the gods’ protection.

However, there were several conditions that needed to be true for this to work. You had to be the opposite gender of the other party, your age needed to be within five years of theirs, and you obviously had to possess the protection of multiple gods.

Not only that, but once was not enough to negate the effects of the curse. You had to give them your bodily fluids several times.

I asked where the curse had come from, and she told me it was caused by the stagnation of magical power in this world. Apparently, those who were cursed would have their life force reduced day by day. There were not many people who could live to Jeanne’s age. The only reason she had survived for this long was because she had the goddesses’ protection, which had slowed the progression of the curse.

At this point, the goddess told me she only had a few minutes left, and wanted to know if I had any other questions.

“Why have you guys been visiting me so often lately?” I asked.

She laughed. “We like to work the god of creation to death, so we force him to make these spaces for us.”

She had a smile on her face as she said this. Poor god of creation. For the first time ever, I felt sorry for him.

For some reason, the goddess of love held me in her arms until the space disappeared.

Part Ten

Early the next morning, we went to the dungeon. My goal today wasn't to clear floors, but to test Jeanne and Aura's abilities.

Before the dungeon, we stopped by the blacksmith's shop to get weapons and armor. I got leather armor and a light two-handed sword for Jeanne, and leather armor and a long spear for Aura along with a short bow. Unfortunately, she was very stubborn about her appearance and insisted upon wearing her maid's uniform over her armor.

After that, we went to my secret base inside the dungeon. They were confused, because I guess they thought they were going to be fighting monsters right away. But I summoned a golem for each of them to go up against so I could gauge their skills.

"You're weak... Actually, it's more like you just don't know how to fight," was the conclusion I came to. They told me that they had only learned self-defense tactics as a sort of game, and they just happened to have magical abilities, so they'd learned bits and pieces from self-study. Plus, Jeanne's family had been destroyed when she was young, so she hadn't gotten the chance to learn much of anything at all. Because of this, I was surprised they had survived that long in the dungeon previously.

At any rate, I began teaching them magic in the same fashion as I had taught Amy, and then had them face the golems again. I made it so the golems wouldn't counterattack, but I asked Shiromaru and the rest of my followers to watch over them just in case.

I had other things I wanted to do while the girls trained. First of all, I needed to work on my weapons—I wanted to fix the adamantium sword that had gotten broken in my fight with that golem Solomon had emerged from.

Next, I wanted to make *tonkotsu* soup. I had plenty of orc bones, so I could just use those.

Finally, I wanted to continue working on my armor, which I had started yesterday. I wanted to at least finish one arm.

I would start with the sword, then move on to the armor, and the soup could simmer while I was working. But that was naive thinking on my part. Because...

“Ew! What the heck? This reeks!” I loved *tonkotsu* soup, but a stench so malodorous wafted out from the pot I thought I would pass out. And since that was my reaction, I’m sure you could probably guess how the girls were taking it—they’d run off to the far edge of the room. Even Shiromaru had a paw over his nose.

“What’d I do wrong?”

I soaked the pot in water to try to get rid of the smell, and used magic to change out the air in the room. By the way, this room wasn’t completely sealed off; I’d made air holes here and there, with tunnels leading to various places throughout the dungeon. But I was worried that small monsters like slimes would invade my base, or that other adventurers might find it, so I’d asked Rocket to install metal grates in the tunnels. The holes were on the ceiling to make them less noticeable, but there might still be some adventurers who caught a whiff of the odor.

Even if they did notice the smell, however, it would be difficult for them to get to this place unless they were a talented sorcerer.

I had frozen the soup at first, but now I thawed it so I could examine the bones I’d used. I hadn’t put in anything rotten—just bones. But when I examined the bottom of the pot more carefully, I noticed that it was unusually sticky. As a test, I threw away the soup, filled the pot with water again, washed the bones that had been stewed earlier, and then simmered them. This time it looked more like the *tonkotsu* soup I was accustomed to, but its odor was still strong...

At this point, I thought I knew what was causing the smell. I had a hunch that when you boiled orc bones, it made a broth exponentially stronger than the *tonkotsu* soup I knew. Something else I noticed was that every time you boiled orc bones, you had to clean them or else the bottom of the pot would get sticky from the unnecessary stuff stuck to them.

I was sure to be careful of these things while making my next batch of soup. I let Jeanne and Aura know that I’d figured out what was causing the odor, but

neither of them tried to approach me, so they might not have believed me. They stayed where they were over by the wall, having apparently decided to resume their training there.

That hurt my feelings a little, but I tried not to let it bother me. As my new batch of soup was simmering, I decided to finish repairing the sword. Although the sword was broken, it was just a little chipped, so I decided to just patch it up.

I put the adamantium sword into the furnace; heated it up using the fire, magic, and alchemy; hit the chipped part many times to stretch it out; and finally put it in a globe of water I'd made with magic to cool it down.

When I took it out of the water globe, I could hardly tell where it used to be chipped. However, as the process had made it lose its sharpness, I then moved on to sharpening it.

Since I didn't want the adamantium sword to be too sharp, I only lightly polished the surface. The repair work on the sword was now complete.

When I peeked into the pot before starting my next task, the soup looked good this time. Then I looked over at the wall, and for whatever reason, Shiromaru, who'd been holding his nose earlier, was now looking at me with his tail wagging. There didn't seem to be any issues this time, so I decided to continue boiling the soup while removing the scum from the top.

Next, I intended to start working on the gauntlets, but while they were still heating up, I decided to take a moment to check on Jeanne and Aura. The two of them seemed to have gotten used to the golems, and their movements had improved considerably. Because of this, I decided to raise the golems' level, and have them execute light attacks and feints too.

Even though their attacks were "light," the golems were many times heavier than a person, so while the two of them tried to block the golems' offensives with their shields, they were knocked off their feet many times. Rocket and Shiromaru would catch them whenever this happened, so they didn't get seriously injured, but thanks to the increase in danger they ended up glaring at me with resentment from time to time.

After working for about an hour while ignoring the occasional glare thrown

my way, I was able to nearly complete the gauntlets. All I had to do now was match them with the base parts and make some fine adjustments.

For the time being, it didn't feel that uncomfortable when I tried pulling one on. Or maybe I only felt that way because I'd worn kendo gauntlets in my previous life.

If I had to be picky, I'd say it felt a little loose around the wrist, so I tightened it up just a little bit. I decided to make any further adjustments if necessary after actually using it.

When I looked at the pot to see if the soup was ready, I found Number One and Number Two...or rather, Shiromaru and Solomon...both peeking into the pot.

Jeanne and the others seemed to dislike the smell of *tonkotsu*, so they continued to keep their distance. The golems were waiting in line with Jeanne and Aura, so all four of them were lined up together.

“Wuff?”

“Squee?”

Both Shiromaru and Rocket tilted their heads while looking at me... I thought they were cute, but the effect was spoiled slightly by the drool dripping from their mouths.

However, the bones in this pot could still be used, so I decided to give them the extra bones from earlier. The bones had been washed with water to remove all the dirt and scum, so they didn't have a strong odor like before. Even so, I was surprised that raw or roasted orc bones didn't have much of a smell, but when they were boiled, they gave off such a disgusting odor. The blood and flesh of the orcs probably reacted with the spinal fluid of the bones in the pot. If I had done this experiment in my apartment, I might have been kicked out immediately.

My two greedy followers, oblivious to my thoughts, gleefully gnawed at the bones, so I decided to leave them alone for a while and see how the soup tasted.

“There's still a slight smell...”

I decided to add in some vegetables that I thought would get rid of the smell, using my experience from my previous life. I chose ginger, green onions, and radish leaves from the bag, since they could be used to eliminate odors. I'm sure there were others, but I couldn't think of them, so I narrowed it down to these three. I thought I remembered that eggshells worked too, but I didn't know how effective they really were, plus that seemed like a strange thing to put in a soup. In the end, I decided to leave those out.

I added the roasted meat chunks along with the vegetables, covered the pot with a lid, and lowered the heat a little. I decided to put the soup on low heat, then went to see how Jeanne and Aura were doing.

They didn't appear to be injured, and I wanted to see how far they could go...but I was hungry so I decided to have a late lunch first.

They braced themselves as if they thought that *tonkotsu* soup would be served, but today's lunch was all food from vendors in town that I'd stashed in my magic bag.

The menu consisted of a large amount of skewered pork, chicken, and beef, a soup made with dried meat, and several types of bread. I included some cabbage and torn lettuce as well.

I quickly sliced the bread horizontally and put cabbage and pork skewers between each slice. After that, all you had to do was pull out the skewer and you had a simple pork sandwich. By the way, the kebabs were all salt-flavored, but I had a jar of my special sauce so I could enjoy teriyaki-style sandwiches.

Jeanne and Aura also made their own original sandwiches while Shiromaru and Solomon were after the kebabs.

At first, Jeanne and Aura were confused about having to open their mouths so wide to bite into the sandwiches, but they seemed to like it once they tried it. They tested out various combinations after that. As for Shiromaru and Solomon, I took the skewers out and put the meat on a plate for them.

When I saw how Jeanne and Aura ate, I thought that women in this world must generally eat a lot. I already knew men ate a lot, but it seemed like women had no problem keeping up with them.

Life was a lot more dangerous here than in my previous world, and since there were also female adventurers here, I guess it made sense that the women in this world ate more. The only common thread between my old world and this one was how dangerous it was to comment on a woman's weight...

I thought I had prepared a lot of food, but between the three of us and my three followers, there was nothing left over. In fact, as it turned out, there wasn't quite enough.

After lunch, I decided to take a break and put out a bed instead of a sofa for relaxing (two of them, of course). By the way, starting with this lunch, from now on I would be secretly mixing my blood in with all the meals I served. I didn't know which bits Jeanne would eat, so I mixed it into everything, but to be honest, the thought of eating my own blood was kind of disgusting.

Even so, I powered through it, thinking it was necessary to break Jeanne's curse. However, once I was done eating, I realized I could have just put my blood into a bottle and told her it was medicine and had her drink it that way, and I got a little depressed.

By the time the meal was over, the soup seemed to be done. I strained it and kept the remaining bones in a bag for Shiromaru and the others to eat as a snack.

Then, I took out the chunks of meat that had been simmering together in the soup and put them in a jar containing a seasoning liquid. If I marinated it for a few hours, I would be able to make something like char siu.

There were some characters in the room who had their hearts set on the jar containing the future char siu, but I ignored them and put it in my bag. (Recently, Solomon's behavior had become more and more like Shiromaru's, which was rather worrisome...)

I was just about to lie down in bed when I noticed Jeanne and Aura were still on their feet.

"What are you doing?" I asked, approaching them casually. But for some reason they began to back away from me. Upon closer examination, I realized that they were drenched in sweat and seemed to be self-conscious about it.

Even though they were my slaves, I regretted that I hadn't shown them enough consideration; obviously women wouldn't want to lie down in bed when they were all sweaty. First, I prepared a simple changing room with the bathing barrel. Then I gave the two of them towels and instructed them to use them as they pleased. Lastly, I built another identical facility some distance away, for use as my own private changing room.

They must have been happy to be able to use the hot water because they both entered in a hurry.

Once they were both clean, they seemed to be suddenly exhausted and fell asleep as soon as they got into bed.

After we'd taken our break, I decided to observe Jeanne and Aura's training. Having watched them for some time, I came to the conclusion that, while they didn't have bad instincts, they were incredibly inexperienced. I thought that I could teach them on the go, as we hunted monsters. Luckily, through the training they'd done so far, they'd learned the basics of how to use weapons, how to coordinate attacks, and how to defend themselves, so they should have been able to fight against weak monsters without any problems.

I decided to teach the two of them several simple joint attack patterns today, and let them gain experience in the shallower floors of the dungeon starting tomorrow. After their lessons, the two of them continued their basic training. Having learned new attack patterns, they were able to deal with the golems much more easily than before.

By the end of today's training, both of them were exhausted. I could've let them walk back up to the surface, but I wasn't sure if they would make it. So I took a cart out of my bag, put the two of them in it, and asked Shiromaru to pull it.

The cart was small and sturdy; I'd made it while I was in Gunjo City. I'd had a bunch of materials left over from when I made my carriage, and I didn't want them to go to waste. I hadn't had a chance to use it until now, so it had just stayed in my bag.

The two of them looked embarrassed, but I persuaded them that it couldn't be helped because they couldn't move. I made sure to make them have an early

dinner, take a bath, and go to bed early so that they wouldn't be tired tomorrow.

When I woke up the next day, the sun had only just risen, but I'd gone to bed early the previous night so I woke up feeling refreshed.

Since it was so early and the girls had been so exhausted yesterday, they were still asleep. I decided to prepare a simple breakfast.

Aura woke up while I was doing so and apologized for not being able to cook it herself, but I told her not to worry about it, and that I was doing it because I enjoyed it.

Unlike Aura, Jeanne didn't get up easily, but Aura forced her out of bed just before breakfast was ready. Jeanne woke up looking quite disheveled, and rather than enjoying the view, I felt very awkward and wasn't sure where to put my eyes.

After breakfast, I quickly put away the dishes and headed for the dungeon. I didn't use the warp point today; instead, we used the stairs because I was having them start from the first floor. I had told them in advance that I expected them to deal with the monsters together, and that I wouldn't intervene unless it was an emergency.

When they actually started, they didn't really have a hard time fighting goblins, and began to slay them one by one. Well—I would have been quite embarrassed if they had a tough time with goblins after all that practice on my golems.

Their fighting style was stable for now. I gave them the occasional bit of advice and corrected them when I needed to. They were a lot sharper than I thought and were able to immediately put my suggestions into practice.

I didn't intend for them to go very deep today so that they would only have to deal with goblins, but their pace was faster than I expected, and in about six hours they had gathered around fifty magic stones.

That was a pretty good result for two beginners. But the most important thing was that they weren't injured.

After leaving the dungeon, I decided to head to the guild and ask the

receptionist to issue a guild card for the two of them. Technically, since the two of them were my slaves they didn't need to register, but I wanted them to register for identification purposes. However, I was turned down because Jeanne was unfortunately not old enough to register.

In the end, only Aura was officially registered, while Jeanne got a temporary registration. However, Jeanne would turn fifteen in a few months, so I would register her then.

The next day, I had them hunt goblins in the dungeon in the morning, and then in the afternoon they trained with me at the secret base. We did this schedule for a week until they had gotten quite good at fighting.

Fortunately, both of them had a predisposition for magic and had as much magical power as an intermediate magic user. So in addition to the training so far, I decided to have them learn simple attack magic, recovery magic, and support magic.

Magic training was extremely simple. First of all, either Jeanne or Aura would play the role of a "blocker." While the blocker was keeping the goblins in check, the other would cast magic from behind them. That's all there was to it. It was simple, but it was also a very commonly used tactic, so I didn't teach them any other methods.

I also taught them offensive magic—mainly ball-and bullet-type spells. And although they hadn't quite mastered them yet, they were able to produce something that was more than effective against goblins.

Thanks to magic, their range of attacks had expanded. Once they got used to using offensive magic against goblins, I thought I'd have them try to deal with different types of monsters.

On the fourth day since they'd started practicing attack magic, I decided to change up their training and have them clear floors of the dungeon instead. I gave them the goal of reaching the tenth floor by the end of the day.

First, however, I needed to get them better weapons and armor. I made Jeanne's sword and Aura's spear myself. I used a special material I called "magic iron," which was iron mined from the space where I had first met them mixed with a considerable amount of magical power. It was stronger than regular iron

—however, it was also much heavier, so care had to be taken when using it.

Besides the weapons, I also gave them gauntlets made of magic iron. They kept the rest of the equipment they had been using before. Since the two of them were basically the type to fight with light armor, leather armor was the main focus, but I decided to add a little pizzazz to it.

Specifically, I combined the back of the centipede's shell with anaconda skin, and pasted this onto the front of their leather equipment.

Centipede shells were very lightweight for how hard they were, so even if you put anaconda leather on the back, it wouldn't affect the weight much. However, attaching the shells to all of the equipment would have made it thicker and hindered the user's movement, so I only attached them to the breastplate and the backplate, and sewed anaconda skin onto the rest.

Anaconda skin was similar to rubber, as the name suggested, so if used as a lining for equipment, you could expect it to absorb the force of attacks.

Now that I'd upgraded the equipment, goblins were no longer enough for it.

Now there was no way they would stumble anywhere in the first five floors. Jeanne and Aura took the shortest path to the stairs, slaughtering the goblins that stood in their way without using magic.

The sixth floor was the first floor they had to really work at, so they began to slow down a bit. However, most of the monsters that appeared were goblins, with slimes appearing only occasionally. Once they grew accustomed to this, their speed rose again.

The seventh floor was where Jeanne got injured for the first time. At the moment she defeated a goblin, she let her guard down and took a hit from a slime that was hiding behind a rock. Because of this, she fell and scratched her leg.

Aura killed the slime without difficulty, but was confused about how to treat the wound. I'd taught them both how to treat wounds before, and helped her remember after she calmed down. Since it was just a scratch, she cleaned and disinfected the wound with water and alcohol, without using potions or magic.

The eighth floor... It seemed like goblins and slimes were often together

today. That was unusual, but in the end they were just goblins and slimes, so having to fight them together didn't affect the difficulty much. However, it seemed like Jeanne and Aura were nervous about things, because they kept overkilling the monsters.

The ninth floor... Goblins and slimes continued to appear here, but they'd become easy prey for Jeanne and Aura, who were now used to defeating them. It had been about five hours since we'd begun, and we were just about to reach the tenth floor. At this rate, they'd make it in no time.

The tenth floor... Once they finished this floor, they had achieved their goal, but they seemed to have plenty of strength left. I asked them how they were feeling, and they were still raring to go.

Because of that, I changed our plans and decided to see just how far they could go in one day.

Then came the eleventh floor...and I had been completely naive. They'd managed just fine against caterpillars, but then that *thing* showed up. The black devil—the most hated creature in the insect world!

I'd only seen this guy once on the thirtieth floor, but Jeanne and Aura must have had bad luck, because there were more than ten of them here. (I was just guessing, though, because I hadn't seen them directly.)

Even though these devils were relatively small, they were still about sixty centimeters tall. They were really disgusting.

I wondered where these guys were hiding out, so I used Detection to locate them. There were countless pings from a nearby dead end. But when I looked, I didn't see anything.

When I used Detection again, I realized there was a wall in the middle of the passageway, behind which appeared to be a hidden room. The black demons seemed to crawl out from a small gap in that wall, and there were several more gaps in the corners of the passage that they could pass through.

Therefore, I put ten golems on standby in front of the wall before using Earth magic to turn it to sand. At the moment the wall came down, I activated a barrier, blocking the passage in front of us.

But I made a big mistake: instead of using Earth magic, I had created a barrier.

I knew full well that there was a group of demons on the other side of the wall, but because the barrier I had created was transparent, I ended up looking directly at them. What should I do if they appeared in my dreams...?

Jeanne and Aura were on the verge of fainting, and so was I. Anyone who had their wits about them wouldn't want to see these things.

After all, several hundred Rs over sixty centimeters tall were rushing towards us... Fortunately, there weren't enough of them to break the barrier—instead, they collided with it and then collapsed. A spectacle that I never wanted to see again spread out before my eyes. One was crushed against the barrier, and there was another stuck to it, slowly slithering up and showing us its belly.

I ordered the golems to exterminate the demons, but that also produced a series of gross scenes.

As a last resort, I opened a hole at the top of the barrier, so small that even Rs couldn't pass through it, and used it to fire off a spell called "Blizzard."

In my previous life, I'd heard that Rs were vulnerable to the cold, so I tried using it, and the effects were outstanding!

The movements of the Rs slowed down as they watched—or rather, as they froze. The fact that they were vulnerable to the cold might not have had anything to do with it...

However, in the end, I think it was the most effective tactic against them. This was just a hunch, but if you burned them with fire, they'd likely end up running around until they died, and you'd get the stench of them burning too.

They were often called "oil insects," so I doubted water attacks would be effective against them.

If I used Earth magic, on the other hand, I'd have to see the sight of all of them crushed. There were too many to bury alive, plus many of them would escape because of their innate speed.

Furthermore, if I used wind magic to cut them up while they were scrambling all over the place, they'd probably keep moving even after being cut to pieces.

That also sounded too gross to stomach.

For all of those reasons, freezing seemed to be the only correct answer...

When they were all completely frozen, I moved the golems to crush them, so that if by any chance they melted, none would come back to life.

The crushed Rs were grotesque, but I guessed it was better than dealing with splattered bodily fluids. I dispatched golems to the inner space as well, and after confirming that there were no surviving Rs, I had them investigate the surroundings.

As a result, we found something surprising: this nest of Rs was also a mythril deposit.

It was possible that even monsters like Rs, which don't have much magical power, could still raise the magical energy of the surrounding area when gathered together in the hundreds like that. As a result, the silver that had originally been there reacted with the concentrated magic and became mythril.

I felt a bit conflicted about it, but I wanted to get my hands on that mythril, so I had the golems scrape out the remnants of the Rs from the nest and place them to one side, before casting Earth magic on the entire wall inside the nest. Then the golems collected the remaining mythril.

We ended up with thirty-four one-kilogram ingots, and the market price for each of these was 17,000,000G—an outrageous amount. In addition, I found forty silver ingots weighing one kilogram each. This was probably worth around 200,000 to 400,000G, but since silver was necessary for processing mythril, I wouldn't sell them as long as I had the mythril. Honestly speaking, at this point I was pretty numb to the monetary value of things...

Anyway, now that I had this much, I could divide it up and sell it when I needed to, or just use it to enhance my equipment. As I thought about how to use it, I tried searching for mythril again with Detection, but couldn't find any. I'd probably already exhausted what there was, or perhaps all that was left were grains of mythril sand that couldn't even be caught by Detection.

I dug a hole here to serve as a graveyard for the Rs, and ordered the golems to dump their corpses into the hole. After I disposed of them without leaving

behind a single fragment, I covered the hole with sand, which I then hardened with Earth magic. Very carefully.

Then, while everyone went outside, I used magic to break the ceiling of the entrance to seal the space off once and for all.

I returned the golems that had completed their tasks to the soil and tried to recover their cores, but found that I was somehow hesitant to pick them up. However, I couldn't just throw them away, so in the end I washed them off with water before putting them in my bag.

Obviously I didn't feel like fighting anymore, so I decided to call it a day and return to the surface from the nearby warp point.

Jeanne and Aura also seemed to have taken a lot of mental damage from the encounter, and didn't say a word until we reached the surface.

By the way, it seemed like magic stones could be obtained from Rs as well, but I didn't collect any this time. I left the dungeon wondering if there would be a hero who could dissect one someday and get its core.

And then, on the way home from the worst dungeon exploration ever, it turned out the time had finally come. At last, the one I had been longing to see was there...

They were standing quietly in front of a store. Their figure looked divine, like a painting of a saint.

Before I knew it, I was standing beside them, touching them to make sure they were real.

"You got any more of this rice, lady?" I asked.

I had found a sack full of rice. This rice was not the kind of Indica rice that I had seen before in this world, but it was instead very similar in shape to the Japonica rice that I'd eaten almost every day in my previous life.

"There's still fifty kilos in the back. How much more do you want?" she asked.

My answer was obvious. "All of it!"

For me, a former Japanese person, I could never have enough rice. Moreover,

thanks to the magic bag, I didn't have to worry about it going bad.

The lady was surprised, but she must have been happy to have her inventory of it cleared. She hurriedly called to the employee in the back and brought out five jute bags similar to the one I had in my hand.

The total was sixty kilograms, and the price was 3,600G, but perhaps because I bought a lot, the lady gave me a 100G discount. "It's rare to find someone who buys so much all at once," she said with a laugh.

When I paid the bill, she told me that this rice was cultivated in some areas in the north, and that it was less popular than Indica rice because it was stickier and its distribution was less widespread.

She'd happened to purchase it at the request of a merchant acquaintance, but she had been worried about what to do because it wouldn't sell.

We left the store with the lady waving at us. Since we were returning from the dungeon, naturally Jeanne and Aura had accompanied me. They seemed surprised by my impulse buy, and were speechless for a moment.

"Master Tenma, what are you going to do with this much rice? I have never cooked this kind of rice before..." Aura finally asked. She seemed anxious, perhaps thinking she would have to be the one to cook it.

"It's okay, I'll cook it!" I wouldn't let anyone get in the way of this memorable encounter! I had decided in my heart that I would not let Aura interfere.

After I bought the rice, my steps felt so much lighter, but then I noticed the two of them were lagging behind me, staggering so much they looked as if they were about to pass out.

I slowed down guiltily, trying to dampen my enthusiasm.

After taking longer than usual to return to my room, I took a clay pot out of my bag. This was something I'd made to eat hot pot dishes when I was in Kukuri Village, and it had a lid too.

Rice was commonly cooked in a rice cooker back home, but of course I didn't have one here, so I decided to make my own earthenware pot instead.

First, I washed the rice, put it in an earthenware pot with the same amount of

water I'd used to wash it, then soaked it for about thirty minutes.

In the meantime, I removed the top half of the pizza oven, modified the bottom half so that the clay pot could be set in it, and used magic to light the fire intermittently.

I heated it over high heat until it came to a boil, then reduced the heat and continued simmering it until it no longer made any sounds. Then I removed it from the heat and let it steam... That's it!

When I opened the lid, the surface looked perfect. When I mixed it, however, I found that the bottom was as burnt as charcoal. Since it was only a part of the bottom, though, I removed that bit and then checked the taste of the cooked rice itself.

"So good..."

A nostalgic flavor spread through my mouth. The quality of the rice was definitely lower than that of the rice in my previous life, and the cooking method was far from perfect. But that didn't matter... No, I didn't care! Because first of all, I was eating the same kind of rice as I had in my previous life—and secondly, because it tasted good!

Surprisingly, Aura was the one who was most curious about what I was eating.

"Master Tenma, may I have a bite?"

Jeanne and Aura were having a different dinner than I was. Aura had made them stewed meat and bread.

Lately, Jeanne and Aura had become less reserved with me, and so had I, which meant spending time together wasn't as uncomfortable as it had been before.

"Sure."

I handed the whole plate—I didn't have a bowl on me, so I'd used a plate—to Aura. Confused, she gave the rice a try...

"Delicious..." she said with surprise. Perhaps it was rare in this world to cook rice like this. This cooking method was the one I'd learned in my previous life, after all.

Possibly inspired by me and Aura, Jeanne also seemed interested and hesitantly took a bite. In the end, the rice that I'd made wasn't enough for the three of us, so I decided to cook more.

Shiromaru and the others were also interested at first, but after taking bites, they were startled at how hot it was and lost interest. From now on, I decided to buy up the entire stock of this rice whenever I saw it. I had a magic bag, so I didn't have to worry about it going bad, and I could easily store one to two tons of it.

The day I enjoyed the taste of rice for the first time in years and years, I got into bed feeling like I was in paradise.

Part Eleven

The next day, we continued making our way through the dungeon, starting from floor eleven. Since we had laid the Rs to rest the other day in their eternal nest, I convinced the girls we were unlikely to come across them again.

About thirty minutes after we began, we still hadn't seen any Rs, just as expected. Perhaps it was because the two girls had witnessed such a huge swarm of Rs, but they no longer flinched upon seeing bug-type enemies such as caterpillars, spiders, centipedes, and even millipedes.

The twelfth floor was filled with locusts and spiders, but the two of them kept their distance, using magic while they attacked. At first their attacks bounced off, but gradually they learned where the vulnerable spots of the bugs were, and were able to win the battles without difficulty.

The thirteenth floor was where Aura came under attack. They both proceeded cautiously, but they still hadn't fully grasped the insects' attack patterns, as they nearly got bitten by spiders that were stuck to the ceiling.

But I sensed the spiders, so I was able to kick them away before they bit Aura, preventing any serious injury. I let her know that there were bug-type monsters which can cling to the ceiling, so she needed to be cautious of that. We resumed our dungeon dive afterwards.

The fourteenth floor was where millipedes began to attack from the ceiling, but thanks to my warning, both of them were able to easily dodge them and Jeanne even managed to land a counterattack.

It seemed the two of them had gotten used to their weapons, because as long as a monster wasn't too large, they were able to defeat it in one blow.

The fifteenth floor was where the two of them started showing signs of fatigue. They were unable to concentrate any longer, and ended up coming under attack by monsters more often. I kept giving them breaks, but I had a feeling they were reaching their limits. Five hours had passed since we'd entered the dungeon, so they had spent about an hour on each floor.

It was possible for us to return from here because there were stairs nearby,

but I decided to make them take a break and then keep going.

The sixteenth floor was different from the others, which surprised the girls. I had met them on a deeper floor, though, so their reaction was curious to me. Apparently their late master, the viscount, had mooched a ride off the adventurer that was guiding them and didn't even start fighting until the thirtieth floor; the moment he descended the stairs, he took a break at a dead end and was immediately attacked by a centipede.

No wonder they were surprised to see this floor, then. That viscount sounded like a colossal idiot. He didn't know how to protect himself and had ended up as centipede chow.

Putting that matter aside, I began digging near some tree roots to find some white caterpillars.

Jeanne was curious as to what I was doing, and peeked down at my hands. But once she saw the caterpillars and heard what I was going to use them for, she leapt away from me with surprising speed.

Aura seemed to know I was going to eat them. She didn't say anything, but she had a wry smile on her face. Caterpillars are delicious, though...

By the way, I'd gotten enough for Rocky and Birdie, so I called today's trip through the dungeon complete.

That night, I enjoyed caterpillar cuisine for the first time in a while, but Jeanne was thoroughly repulsed and refused to talk to me for a while. However, as a cook, Aura expressed an interest in the taste. She hesitantly took a mouthful of the soup and was surprised by how good it was, but couldn't stomach the thought of grilled caterpillar with butter.

Jeanne was shocked that Aura tried the caterpillar soup, and didn't speak to her for the rest of the night either.

By the way, Amy's rockbirds had gotten quite big lately and could eat the caterpillars whole now, which reduced the mental burden on Amy.

Until now, Amy had cleaned my room in exchange for caterpillars and magic cores for the birds, but ever since Aura had arrived, I no longer needed Amy to clean my room. So I had been billing her instead. I honestly didn't need the

money, but I had a public image to uphold, so I told her, “Since you’re my apprentice, I’m going to have to charge you.”

I felt much closer to Aura after we shared the caterpillar cuisine, but the gulf between Jeanne and me had grown even larger. *Things just don’t work out sometimes*, I thought as I got the bath ready. By the way, so far there had been no lucky perverted bath-related events...or rather, I had no intention of having any!

Maybe it was because I was thinking such thoughts that a flag was raised, because all of a sudden, a bath-related event *did* happen. I was the victim of it, though.

I was planning on taking a bath first for a change, but Jeanne didn’t notice me and came inside the carriage. Her eyes locked right onto my little guy...

I suppose it was my fault for being stark naked in the middle of the carriage, but I really didn’t think it was necessary for Jeanne to shriek and call for Aura. Because not only did she come running into the carriage, but so did Amy.

Luckily I had ducked into the bathtub to hide myself from view, but it took a long time to clear up the misunderstanding for Amy. Aura explained things to her, but I think she suffered a lot of psychological damage before that...

By the way, Amy had come to thank me for the caterpillars when she heard Jeanne’s screams, so she reflexively ran into the carriage along with Aura.

Jeanne, on the other hand... Not only did she scream bloody murder, but she didn’t take her eyes off my little guy the entire time. I had no intentions of pursuing this due to my samurai-like mercy, but that night I made various oaths to be more careful in the future.

The next morning, we were supposed to go back to the dungeon, but...

“Jeanne, good mor...”

The moment I called out to Jeanne, she disappeared from my sight... Oh wait—she just hid under the futon.

I tried to talk to her several times after that, but she hid behind Aura and behind Shiromaru, and even covered her face with Solomon... *You know you*

can't hide behind Solomon, Jeanne...

Basically, she just kept avoiding me.

The same thing kept happening when we went inside the dungeon. I tried to consult with Aura, but all she did was smile and say, "Jeanne's so adorable, isn't she?" No advice was forthcoming.

I had no one to rely on as we continued our dungeon dive...

From the eleventh floor onwards, I proceeded with caution, keeping an eye out for possible R attacks, while still hoping I'd been able to exterminate most of them the day before yesterday. So far, I hadn't seen hide nor hair of them.

Jeanne and Aura fell back into their usual rhythm, and their attack speed rose.

Their abilities had improved considerably since we met, and if you included the boosts from their weapons and the improvement of their magic skills, they'd be comparable to lower Rank C adventurers.

However, that was only if they fought with magic, facing forward. They were still pretty limited when it came to the range of their attacks. But even if you took all that into account, they'd still be able to hold their own as Rank D adventurers.

The girls (and I) were clearly relieved that the Rs were nowhere to be found. Even so, I didn't forget to pay close attention to my surroundings like before. In fact, a spiderlike monster tried to attack from directly above the two of them, but they easily dodged and intercepted it.

By the way, it was a kind of spider I had eaten before, so I was responsible for collecting the corpse.

The search continued. And then...

"Jeanne, it's time to take a break..."

When I called out to her, she still hid behind Aura...

And Aura, for her part, was smiling faintly...

I felt as though, after everything I'd gone through with them, my heart would break if this continued... I tried to project that feeling over to them, making eye

contact with Jeanne, who was watching me from behind Aura...but all she did was hide again. Her face seemed red, but I didn't have the luxury of worrying about that right now.

Half-defeated, I prepared a spot for us to rest. As usual, I built a wall at a dead end, took out my new beds from inside my bag, and placed them there. All of a sudden, Jeanne rushed over and moved one of the beds far away from the other ones. This was just so depressing...

Having seen this, Aura pulled Jeanne to a corner and started discussing something with her.

I don't know what the outcome of the discussion was, but Jeanne's face was red and Aura was grinning more than usual.

Neither of them seemed to be willing to tell me what they were talking about, so I decided to not ask either and just eat. After the meal, I gave Jeanne medicine mixed with my blood and took a break... Aura might have gotten suspicious if Jeanne was the only one getting medicine, though, so I gave her some that was the same color.

I told them that it was a medicine that sped up their stamina recovery. I made other types of medicines as well: one that sped up magic recovery and one that increased resistance. They all actually had those effects too; none of this was a lie.

After taking a short break, we conquered the rest of the sixteenth floor, and after breaking through the seventeenth and eighteenth floors, today's dungeon dive was over.

When we got out of the dungeon, we noticed that there were many people looking at us and whispering to each other.

Some of them were talking while pointing their fingers at us. It really bothered me, but when I tried to approach them to hear what they had to say, they kept their distance from us, so I had no way of finding out what they were saying. The only thing I noticed was that it was more like they were staring at us than making fun of us, so I didn't think there was much to worry about in terms of getting into trouble for now.

Still being watched by the people around me, I headed to the guild, then ran into Jin and the others on the way. I told them about what had happened earlier.

“What, don’t you know?! You guys are a hot young party right now, and Tenma is the strongest adventurer in this town! Everyone’s talking about it.”

I couldn’t hide my surprise at Jin’s words. I kind of understood why they called us a “hot young party,” but I didn’t know why rumors were spreading that I was the strongest around.

It was true that even before Jeanne and Aura joined, I was the talk of the town because I was dungeon diving solo, and then there was that whole thing about how I tamed a dragon...but there had never been any rumors that I was the strongest.

Seeing my reaction, Jin said, “Well, it’s probably because you beat up a nobleman’s son and frightened an ogre with one look.”

“Not only that, but Tenma stunned Jin and buried him in the ground, and then Jin began to complain to other adventurers at the tavern that he was scared of Tenma, that he refused to go against Tenma, and that he didn’t want to die at Tenma’s hands...”

“That’s *your* fault!”

Thanks to Leena’s information, the culprit who’d originally spread the rumor was identified... So, as usual, I tried to shoot a Stun spell at Jin.

“Farewell!”

But Jin hightailed it outta there. I was a little surprised by his speed, but as soon as Jin started running, Shiromaru chased after him, and then Jin was crushed by Shiromaru before he had gone even fifty meters... As an aside, those who witnessed this scene began spreading a new rumor: “No one can escape from Tenma!”

“Now, now, that’s enough. But isn’t Tenma doing well these days? Even though he’s bringing two girls along this time, he’s got a reputation for reclearing floors at a fast pace without letting them sustain any serious injuries.” Mennas grinned while emphasizing the words “two girls,” but I didn’t

let my expression change.

“Is that so...?” I said, ignoring the last bit.

Apart from Mennas, who now looked somewhat bored, Galatt piped up next. “By the way, Tenma—will you and the girls participate in the martial arts tournament?”

“What tournament? First I’ve heard of it.” It was news to me, but I could guess what it was all about.

Galatt looked at me with surprise.

“Well...you’ve been so busy lately you probably didn’t have time for this kind of thing. I guess it’s not surprising you don’t know about it,” Mennas pointed out.

“Ah, that’s true!” Galatt agreed, apparently deciding that made sense.

“What is the martial arts tournament?” I asked Mennas and the others.

For some reason, Leena leaned in from the side and said, “To be precise, it’s the ‘Victory Prayer Imperial Martial Arts Festival’ sponsored by the royal family.”

Thanks for the information, but that doesn’t tell me anything besides the fact that it has a ridiculously exaggerated name.

“The name is too much of a pain for people to say, so everyone calls it ‘the martial arts tournament.’ It was originally a mock battle held by knights to boost the economy long ago, when this country was still small. However, since this tournament is sponsored by the royal family, it’s easy to gather talented participants, and some of the top winners of the tournament are awarded titles or appointed as knights. There are a lot of people who take part—over a thousand every year—so it’s a big tournament.” He explained all of this in an easy-to-understand manner.

“Furthermore, in this tournament, there are three divisions: ‘Individual,’ ‘Pair,’ and ‘Team,’ so many adventurers who want to become famous will participate,” added Galatt.

When I asked whether there was a “Party” category, they said that the

“Team” category had a maximum of five people fighting on the field, with one additional member recognized as a substitute. That was a bit different from a regular party, and a lot of people only joined forces for the sake of the tournament, which is why they were called “teams” instead of “parties.”

“So, Tenma, are you going to participate too?”

“I’m not thinking about participating... Wait, what do you mean, ‘too’?” I looked at Mennas, focusing on that last part of his sentence.

“Oh—the Dawnswords are planning to take part in the tournament!” he said proudly. Apparently, the Dawnswords had participated in the team battles last year, lost in the qualifying rounds the year before last, and played in the main round last year when Leena joined. However, due to the fact that she had just joined, their cooperation wasn’t as good and they lost in the first round.

By the way, last year, there had been around 450 individual participants, 200 pairs, and 100 teams.

The reason the number of participants easily exceeded a thousand was that there were no limits on the contests you joined, meaning those who participated in the individual competition could also participate as part of a pair or team. There were even cases where two people who joined as a pair went on to participate as a two-person team.

In the preliminary rounds of the previous tournament for individual participants, dozens of people were grouped together to create a maximum of sixteen groups. Within each group, participants fought in a battle royal format, and the two individuals left standing at the end would proceed to the main tournament. A maximum of thirty-two people would be selected through this process.

The pairs were selected in much the same way, resulting in a maximum of thirty-two pairs proceeding to the main stage.

The team competition was different—all teams were divided into sixteen blocks, and the tournament was conducted playoff-style. The teams that survived each block went on to participate in the main tournament.

All matches on the main stage were playoff-style, with opponents determined

by a lottery system before the start of the first round.

These additional rules only applied to the individual competition, but seeding rights were given to those who had advanced to the semifinals or higher in the previous tournament. Those individuals were allowed to participate from the final round without needing to qualify.

The tournament was scheduled to run over nine days. The first three days were the qualifying rounds, the next three would be the semifinals of the main tournament, and then the finals were held on the last day, with a two-day break beforehand.

In this tournament, both official and unofficial bets were conducted, and it seemed that there were various kinds of bets, such as betting on the winner, betting on placements, and betting on the finalists.

The tournament was to be held in about two months, and an auction would also be held at that time.

Personally, I thought I should give it a try, because if we went to the royal capital I would probably hear about Kukuri Village, and there might be people who had moved to the royal capital from the village. Also, it occurred to me that I should probably let the king know that I was alive.

I decided to discuss this with everyone tonight.

But at this point, I figured that restoring my relationship with Jeanne was a priority, so I looked over at her. She still hid when we made eye contact. It was better than it had been in the morning, but she was still avoiding me.

We decided to have a simple dinner today. After finishing it quickly, I brought up our future plans. Of course, Jeanne and Aura had no right to veto anything due to their positions, so all I had to do was decide on the route we'd take to the royal capital and the date of our departure.

I told them that I had an acquaintance there whom I wanted to see, because I couldn't exactly just tell them that I knew the king. I covered this up by saying I was just going to see someone from my hometown.

"Um... Master Tenma, Jeanne's relatives are probably in the royal capital..." said Aura.

“Well then,” I replied, “I guess we should part ways there. You two would rather be taken in by a relative than be with me, wouldn’t you?”

“No—anything but that!” Jeanne raised her voice with this objection, which was unusual for her. Her shouting and her reluctance to be released from slavery took me by surprise. “I would rather die than go to a man like that! I’d rather be your...Master Tenma’s slave!”

I asked why, but Jeanne refused to explain, so Aura answered in her stead.

“That relative is the husband of Jeanne’s mother’s cousin, and his name is Baronet Podro il Chloride. As far as I know, he is the worst man.” Aura said with disgust. It was clear she disliked this Podro character.

According to Aura, Podro had married into a branch family of Jeanne’s, but when her family fell into decline, he was the first to abandon her. Even without taking that into account, it seemed he looked at Jeanne and the others in an indecent way every time they met, and had a rather bad habit of womanizing, having more than ten mistresses.

Not only that, but Podro’s wife had been suffering from emotional distress due to Podro’s womanizing, and she became basically bedridden after he abandoned their marital home. That was over a year ago, so she was probably dead by now.

“I don’t mind if you go to the royal capital, but please...don’t hand us over to that man.” Aura lowered her head and begged.

Due to the course of events that had resulted in my becoming their master, I thought that I couldn’t hand them over to such a man, so I agreed that I wouldn’t do so no matter what.

Jeanne looked at me. “Um... Master...Tenma?”

“Tenma is fine.”

She thought for a while and then said, “Okay then. Tenma... Um, thank you...” She looked embarrassed.

Aura tried to warn Jeanne that she shouldn’t address me so informally, but I told her it was fine since I had given her permission. I tried to convince Aura it

was okay to call me that too, but she refused.

“I am a maid before I am a slave, so I can’t be rude to my master like that. Also, I will let it go this time, but I am not impressed with you two blurring the line between master and a slave.”

And thus, I ended up being lectured...

Now that our discussion was finished, I decided that we would leave for the capital one week from today, in order to secure an inn room as soon as possible. At this moment, I had no plans to participate in the tournament. I wouldn’t hand them over to Podro, and I decided that, worst-case scenario, we could escape back to Sagan without telling anyone.

I promised that the two of them would carry a special golem core in the place of a bodyguard on the way to the capital. If they had a golem, it should buy them enough time to escape if I was attacked and couldn’t come to their aid right away.

They seemed very relieved to hear that. Jeanne, in particular, fell asleep almost immediately after getting into bed.

Starting tomorrow, we would begin preparing for our journey to the capital, in addition to our regular dungeon diving. Because of this, I thought it would be a good idea to go to bed early. Aura agreed and went to bed at the same time as me—oblivious of the fact that it would lead to a commotion the next morning...

Part Twelve

“Master Merlin, Gunjo City is now in sight!” One of the knights who had ridden up ahead came back to report. It was still dark out and would take another hour or so before the sun came up.

Normally, they wouldn't run a carriage at such a time, but since they were within a day's journey of Gunjo City...and of Tenma, Merlin demanded that they keep forging ahead.

However, the knights understood how Merlin felt and didn't utter a single complaint. Instead, they took turns taking breaks as the carriage proceeded on its journey.

“Hrm, I'm sorry for pushing you too hard. But I can finally see Tenma, after all this time. Kriss, would you go on ahead to the gate and get permission for us to pass through?” Merlin asked. He handed over the royal crest entrusted to him by Alex. That crest allowed them to pass through most places, but in order not to confuse the gatekeepers, Merlin decided to have Kriss go on ahead first.

“Yes! Understood!” She straightened up and saluted him from her horse, then ran off with a knight.

Thanks to Kriss going on ahead, they were able to enter Gunjo City without much confusion... However, most of the soldiers at the gate had never seen the actual royal crest. Under normal circumstances it would have taken a considerable amount of time to verify it for authenticity, but thanks to the captain of the knight order who happened to be there, they were able to enter Gunjo City without any problems. Merlin would only find out about this little backstory much later, though.

“Mark, how long does it take to get to that Full Belly Inn?”

“Not too much longer... Oh, there it is! Over there!” Mark pointed to an inn and shouted.

“There's a line... Is that really it?” Merlin saw a large number of people lining up early in the morning, which was unbecoming of an inn. They parked the carriage near the line and approached three girls who were queued up near the

entrance.

“Hey, Gramps! No cutting in line!”

“If you try to cut in front of us, the duke will get angry!”

“The end of the line is just around the corner.”

And thus, Merlin ended up getting lectured by three catgirls.

“Oh, sorry about that. We’re actually here to see someone who’s staying at the inn. By the way, what is this line for, anyway?”

Hearing that, the three catgirls realized that they had misunderstood, apologized, and explained what the line was for.

“People are lining up to buy sweets?!”

“These sweets are super popular lately because people say they’re even better than the ones in the royal capital, so if you don’t line up early in the morning, they’ll be sold out in no time!”

“We lined up an hour ago, but look how long it’s gotten now!”

Merlin thanked the three of them and entered the inn, without saying a word to any of the others in line.

“Hey, is Dozle here? It’s me—Mark!”

They heard a rustling noise, and then a large man came jogging out from the back of the inn.

“Oh, Mark, long time no see! How many years has it been?!” In contrast to his stern appearance, the man actually seemed to be approachable and friendly. “I’m happy you came to visit, but it’s so sudden! I wish you would’ve told me beforehand so I could’ve given you a proper welcome...”

“Sorry, sorry. Enough about me. We’re here because of him.” Mark stepped aside to introduce Merlin, who was behind him.

“Nice to meet you. My name is Dozle, and I’m an old friend of Mark’s.”

“Oh, you don’t have to be so polite. Actually, I heard that you’ve been taking care of my grandson here...”

“Your grandson?”

“Ah, his name is Tenma. He’s a fifteen-year-old boy.”

When Merlin said Tenma’s name, Dozle put his hand to his forehead. “Tenma is no longer here...” he told Merlin.

Merlin was stunned, but quickly recovered. “Do you know where you went?!” he demanded, approaching Dozle.

“I’m sorry... I don’t know the details. I only know that he mentioned he would visit Dungeon City before he left,” Dozle said apologetically.

“I see... By the way, did the Tenma who stayed here have two followers—a white wolf and a slime?” Merlin asked, just to confirm.

“Yes. Tenma certainly had a white wolf named Shiromaru, and a slime called Rocket,” Dozle said firmly.

Tears formed in Merlin’s eyes. He murmured, “Oh! That’s definitely my grandson Tenma... I’m so glad...he’s still alive...”

Everyone watched without saying a word until Merlin composed himself again.

“There are many people whom Tenma was close to in this town. I can introduce you to them. Maybe you can ask them some questions and they can give you more information?”

He gave Merlin several names, but upon hearing them, Merlin muttered, “Those are all women’s names...”

“Ah,” said Dozle, “three of them just came inside! I’ll bring them over.” And he ended up bringing the same three catgirls whom Merlin had spoken with outside the inn, just a moment ago.

“Huh? The old man from before wants to ask us about Tenma?”

The girls were holding paper bags of sweets, and the words “Tenma’s Sweets” were written on the bags.

The girls’ names were Lily, Nelly, and Milly, and they were triplets. When Merlin said that he was Tenma’s grandfather and wanted to know Tenma’s

whereabouts, the three of them started talking in unison.

According to them, they'd met Tenma after he'd saved them from a dangerous situation, and he was their best friend in the whole town, and they went on Tenma's first quest together, and they had defeated a band of wicked bandits, and they'd asked Tenma to take them with him but he'd said no...and all they knew was that he was headed to Dungeon City.

After thanking the three of them, Merlin headed to the guild to meet the next person Dozle had told him about. The guildmaster and vice-guildmaster were named Max and Flute respectively, and he'd been told that Tenma was on good terms with Flute.

"I heard that you are Tenma's grandfather... Tenma did so much to help me." The woman named Flute bowed her head. She was surprised to hear Merlin's name, but once she started talking to him, she told him a lot of things.

Tenma was active above his own rank, and thanks to him, the number of low-quality adventurers had been greatly reduced. Tenma's success had raised the Gunjo City adventurers' guild's reputation.

However, the only thing Flute knew regarding Tenma's current whereabouts was also that he was going to Dungeon City.

Merlin then headed to the city council building, where he explained to a man named Marks his purpose for being there. "In that case, I think my niece will be of more help to you," Marks said, and proceeded to call said niece.

"It's so nice to meet you," said the girl when she arrived, introducing herself. "My name is Ceruna. Your grandson Tenma saved my life." She went on to give Merlin the full story.

She told him that the village where she lived was attacked by bandits, and that several women, including herself, were enslaved and suffered terrible abuse. Tenma, who was deceived by the bandit leader's fake request, came to the village. He noticed that something was amiss there and ended up saving all of the women.

Like the others, she didn't seem to know his exact destination. Merlin thanked her for sharing this story with him, and was about to head to the next

place when Ceruna stopped him. “When you meet Tenma again, please tell him that I am eternally grateful,” she told him.

Merlin said he would and thanked her once more, then headed on to the knights’ headquarters.

It seemed that Duke Sanga’s third daughter, who was the captain of the fourth unit, was also close to Tenma.

“He certainly has a lot of female acquaintances...” Merlin wondered whether Tenma was a womanizer, but judging from their reactions so far, it didn’t seem like any of them had been in a romantic relationship with him. “Tenma, are you lazy, or are you just dense?” he wondered aloud. However, once he realized he didn’t have to worry about great-grandchildren in the near future because of Tenma being picked up by some strange woman, he felt relieved.

He told Mark as much, and Mark replied, “Why are you talking about the future? You could already have great-grandchildren and just not know yet. Wouldn’t that be nice?”

Merlin thought for a moment, then answered, “On second thought, it *would* be better to have them in the future instead of now. And the reason for that is that if I go to see my grandson and find out there’s great-grandchildren, I might die of happiness and shock!”

At these words, the knights, including Edgar and Kriss, were desperately holding back their laughter.

When they entered the knights’ headquarters, it seemed that word of Merlin’s mission had already gotten around, and they were allowed to proceed straight to the captain’s room.

As they entered, they were greeted with a salute by a woman standing there.

“Nice to meet you! My name is Primera von Sanga, commander of the fourth unit of the Gunjo Knights!”

“I’m sorry for coming here so suddenly. I’m Tenma’s grandfather, Merlin. It feels strange for me to say this, but please be at ease.”

Primera returned to her senses at those words, and offered Merlin a seat. She

made him tea herself as soon as he sat down. Apparently, this Primera woman was nervous that not only Merlin, but also the king's guards such as Edgar and Kriss, were present.

"What would you like to ask me?" she said.

"There's no need to be so nervous. I'm looking for Tenma, so I've been asking his acquaintances if they know where he went."

Primera looked as though she had just remembered something. "Come to think of it, Tenma narrowed his list down to three dungeon cities..." She then told him the names of the places.

"I spoke with my father after Tenma left, and he said that Sagan might be the most likely candidate. I'm not certain, though..." She told him more about the conversation with her father.

"Sagan... Isn't that one of the places we passed right by...?" Merlin lamented, but since what was done was done, he decided to listen to Primera's stories about Tenma.

She told him about how Tenma scolded the knights and beat them to a pulp, and that he had cooperated with her father the duke to punish a crooked noble. Obviously, when Merlin heard Tenma had beaten the knights to a pulp he was surprised, but since Tenma had defeated a dragon zombie in the past, it was only natural that he would be capable of taking on some human knights.

However, what worried him was Primera's attitude when talking about Tenma. No matter how he looked at it, it didn't seem like respect was the only thing she felt. It seemed to him like she might have deeper feelings for Tenma.

At the moment, it seemed like her respect was winning out, but that could easily develop into more romantic feelings... Kriss, who was also a woman, had that particular thought.

By the way, leaving Mark and the other knights out of the question, Edgar surprisingly seemed to be ignorant of love affairs.

For the time being, they decided to leave the knights' headquarters, with the dungeon city Sagan as their next destination. Thanks to Dozle's kindness, they secured a room at the Full Belly Inn today, and there they were served a

sumptuous meal. They were very surprised to hear that some of the dishes and desserts were recipes devised by Tenma.

“Next time, I’ll definitely reunite with Tenma!” Merlin said, having finished his meal and returned to his room. It had become something of a catchphrase for him lately.

In the morning, I suddenly sensed something was off. I slowly opened my eyes, and the familiar face of a young girl was in front of me. I was still half asleep and thought, *What beautiful hair... Now that I look at her more closely, Jeanne’s actually really pretty...*

But after a few seconds, I realized that my current situation was absolutely horrible.

This is bad! It’s a disaster! I have to escape somehow... No, don’t grab my clothes! Jeanne!!!

Even though I tried to escape, Jeanne grabbed my clothes so I couldn’t get out of the bed. Not only that, but she had her legs entwined with mine and her face buried against my chest. *Mm, you smell good, Jeanne... I mean, NO!!!*

I tried to take off my clothes so as not to wake Jeanne up and escape that way, but every time I moved even slightly, she just tightened her grip on me.

I have to do something because this is very, very bad! As I was thinking that, something suddenly moved behind Jeanne... It was Shiromaru!

But Shiromaru won’t be any help! Yet my thoughts must’ve gotten through to him, because he put his front paw on the bed and barked. “Wuff!”

He wagged his tail like he wanted attention, and because of that, Jeanne’s eyes slowly opened. *It’s over...* I covered my ears with both hands in order to protect myself from the earsplitting sonic weapon I predicted was about to go off...

“Nngh...” She let out a soft noise and immediately closed her eyes, then fell asleep again... I was saved. I tried to escape again the moment she let go of my clothes, but...

“*Screeech!*” This time Solomon yelled. And this time, Jeanne’s eyes came completely open...

“...Good...morn...”

Time stopped for me and Jeanne. She was half asleep when she began to greet me, but then she finished waking up before getting to the end of her sentence, and froze when she saw my face.

I couldn’t move either, and ended up staring at Jeanne at close range for a while.

That silence was broken by a teasing voice. “Look at you two lovebirds. Sharing a bed already?” It was Aura, and then time began to flow once more...

“*K-Kyaah, uugh, uumghh!!!*”

“You shouldn’t be noisy so early in the morning, Jeanne.” Aura’s nice comeback stopped the sonic weapon. She covered Jeanne’s mouth with her hand, and said, “Jeanne, look carefully. This is Master Tenma’s bed.”

And at that moment, I managed to slip out of bed and put some distance between us.

“Jeanne, you were probably half asleep and climbed into Master Tenma’s bed from the other side,” Aura said. Jeanne groaned in a low voice, perhaps because she realized Aura was right.

Then Aura just had to go and ruin it with the next thing she said: “Well, it’s also possible that Master Tenma dragged you into his bed while you were fast asleep, I suppose...” Jeanne’s face turned bright red and she glared at me tearfully. *Gimme a break!* I thought as I looked at Aura.

“Well, whether it was an accident or intentional, I’ll have to ask Master Tenma to take responsibility for sleeping with a young maiden!” Now Aura was just being ridiculous, but there was a strange, firm tone to her voice that said she would accept no objections.

“So this is who you really are, Aura...”

However, I couldn’t accept having my future decided for me like this!

“Jeanne, please explain to Aura what happened. Hey! Jeanne!” I thought that

she would object too, so I tried to get her on my side, but she wouldn't answer. Wondering why, I looked over at her.

"Sleeping in the same bed... Take...responsibility... Marriage..." She seemed to be bugging out, muttering some disturbing words to herself. It was as if her train of thought had short-circuited; her face was bright red and she was mumbling the same phrases over and over again.

"Then let's decide by majority vote. Rocket, Shiromaru, Solomon, I'll give you all the right to vote," Aura said, trying to put it to a vote.

The triumphant look on her face was irritating. "Hey, what are you sayi—?"

"All opposed?" At those words, I reflexively raised my hand.

"Master Tenma has decided to participate! Any others opposed?"

Crap! I looked at my followers.

"No voter intimidation is allowed, Master Tenma!" Aura said firmly, interrupting my eye contact with my followers.

"It doesn't seem like there are any others... All in favor?"

In my heart, I thought that Shiromaru and others would not agree, but the result was...

"Three in favor, one against, and two abstentions—the motion passes!"

After this, Aura suddenly chanted, "Long live the king!" three times...

"This was rigged!"

"You can't say it was rigged just because you don't like the results, Master Tenma."

"But this is..."

"Despite the fact that you, Master Tenma, have gained fame with your exploits in this dungeon city, and have now lost a vote to a clear majority, you would use your position of master to falsely decry the results? Surely you wouldn't do something so unfair, would you?"

"No, this is just coward—"

“Certainly after losing, you’re not claiming the vote was rigged and that it was cowardly. You definitely wouldn’t say such shameless things, would you?”

This is dangerous... I don’t think I can win on my own... Jeanne...

“It’s embarrassing to ask for help from a girl you’re sleeping with, isn’t it, MaSTeR TenMa?!”

I’m stuck...but...getting married...?!

“Oh, I’m so looking forward to having two children... It was my dream to take care of Jeanne’s children!”

If everything is going to lead to marriage, then...

“...There’s no reason not to consider it...” I muttered vaguely, stumbling upon an escape route.

Aura frowned at me. *“Well, let’s just say you’ll consider it for now, then... Tch!”*

Why did I have to go through something like this...? I didn’t lay a hand on her... I was innocent... *Also, Aura, stop clicking your tongue...*

I was devastated, of course, and considered Shiromaru and Solomon to be traitors! I glared to get those feelings across to them, but they didn’t seem to understand. They ignored me and began begging Aura for food.

By the way, the results of the vote were as follows:

Yea = Aura, Shiromaru, Solomon

Nay = Me (Tenma)

Abstain = Jeanne, Rocket

Setting aside Rocket’s abstention, I didn’t understand why Shiromaru and others were in favor. When I asked Rocket later, he explained Shiromaru and Solomon’s thought process at the time to me.

Me (Tenma) = his favorite owner, substitute parent, someone who loves me,

someone who gives me food

Jeanne = colleague, someone who cares for me, someone who gives me food

Aura = colleague, someone who cares for me, someone who gives food

Also:

Tenma + Jeanne (with Aura) = someone who loves me x 3, someone who gives me food x 3 = Happiness x 3

Tenma + Jeanne + Aura (Jeanne + Aura) = someone who loves me x 1, someone who gives me food x 1 = Happiness x 1

It seemed that this was the calculation which crossed Shiromaru's mind. He seemed to think that Jeanne and the others wouldn't disappear on us, but he also thought that if Jeanne and I were together, the amount of happiness we would provide would triple, so he decided to vote yea... In other words, he prioritized his own happiness over mine.

Additionally, because Solomon was a copycat, he apparently came to the same idea as Shiromaru in an instant, and also voted yea.

By the way, this is why Rocket abstained:

"Emotionally, I want to be with Tenma, my master. However, unlike us monsters, it's difficult for humans to become mates, and they should work their problems out themselves without having others meddle in their affairs. Moreover, I'm just a slime, so it's not a good idea for me to cause unnecessary confusion with my actions. The most desirable thing is to have the two of them talk until they are satisfied and come to a mutually agreed-upon conclusion."

"Are you really just a slime, Rocket?" When he shared his thought process with me, I couldn't believe he was just a slime, but he was now proving it by bouncing his body and stretching his tentacles.

He seemed to be desperately appealing to me that he was, in fact, a slime.

As for Jeanne, who also abstained:

"Sleeping in the same bed... Take...responsibility... Marriage..." She continued

muttering the whole time, so Aura had no choice but to make her abstain, since otherwise there would be a glitch (Jeanne) in the vote.

“Let’s see... Today’s schedule is to go get the magic core of a high-ranked monster.” I announced this in a cheerful voice to try to shake off the sinking feeling I had, but...

“Sleeping in the same bed... Take...responsibility...”

“Jeanne, just come back!”

Jeanne, who was still bugging out, received a karate chop to the head via Aura at an angle of forty-five degrees.

“Mmph... Huh? My head hurts...”

It seemed like Jeanne had successfully rebooted.

“Are you awake now? Let’s eat breakfast and go to the dungeon!” Aura quickly set breakfast in front of Jeanne.

Jeanne tilted her head as she ate her breakfast sandwich, but when she finished eating, she said, “Aura... I had a strange dream...”

Aura ignored Jeanne as she started talking about the dream.

“Oh, that wasn’t a dream,” Aura said casually, as she cleared the plate Jeanne had finished eating. “Jeanne has been chosen as a marriage candidate for Master Tenma!”

“Huh...? Then I’ll marry Tenma...?”

“I’m just saying that you might end up doing so. Don’t worry about it for now—just know that Master Tenma will take responsibility for you and protect you. Right?” She turned towards me.

“Ah, that’s right...” I nodded, while letting out a dry laugh.

Jeanne seemed like she was on the verge of short-circuiting again.

“Yes! Let’s get ready!” Encouraging her, I urged her to get ready for the dungeon, and we successfully managed to get through without any further short circuits.

Part Thirteen

With preparations complete, we headed to the dungeon. I flew immediately to the thirty-eighth floor—the deepest one I’d reached.

“Listen up. The monsters here are much stronger compared to what you’ve faced on the other floors. Make sure you don’t get separated from me and my followers!”

“Okay!” the girls answered in unison.

“Rocket, Shiromaru, Solomon—I want you guys to prioritize backing up the two of them, got it?”

“Woof!”

“Squee!”

Obedying my instructions, my followers got into position. We went in this order: me, Solomon, Jeanne, Rocket, Aura, and Shiromaru.

“All right, let’s go!” And thus we began our hunt for magic cores.

“By the way, what are you going to do with all of these monster cores?” Aura asked as she looked around cautiously. Unlike Jeanne, she seemed a bit more confident down in the dungeon.

“I’m going to use them to make a new kind of golem.”

Aura gave me a puzzled look, perhaps because she didn’t understand how to make golems. However, she must’ve figured there was no sense in worrying about it, as she didn’t ask any more questions.

Generally speaking, there were two different ways to make golems.

The first was to use a stone that had magical powers—for example, a magical core, magical stone, or gemstone—as the golem’s core.

The second was to use metal as the golem’s core.

There were pros and cons to each method. The first method required you to engrave a magic circle onto several small cores. If you screwed up, you wouldn’t

be able to redo it, so it was difficult to repair. However, golems made using this method were more versatile and didn't use up as much mana, so they could be used in a variety of ways.

As for the second method, you could decide on the size and shape of the metal you used, so it was easier to carve the magic circle upon the core. And if you messed up, it was easy to start over. However, golems created by this method could only follow simple instructions and used up a lot of mana. Therefore, they were only suited for easy tasks. They were often specialized by having as many magic circles carved into their cores as possible.

It wasn't clear why there was such a difference in mana consumption between the two, but one possible explanation was that it was the difference between using something natural and using something synthetic.

Also, when making a core, you had to remember to specify what materials went into the golem's body, and to register the owner. The most commonly used ingredients were earth and rocks, but if you had more time to prepare, you could use more ingredients than that. If you didn't follow these steps properly, you wouldn't be able to summon a usable golem.

Golems that had a special body, like Tanikaze, were an exception to the rule. They tended to have higher performance than summoned golems, but on the other hand, they were often difficult to carry and store.

The owner's registration prevented a golem from being used by anyone other than the creator, but it obviously wasn't possible to do this for mass-produced items, which were meant for general use.

"Orcs are coming!" I gave a warning. High orcs appeared from around the corner just ahead. Since there were six of them, I went ahead and slashed them myself, killing them instantly.

"Huh? That was fast!"

Jeanne and Aura looked surprised to see the high orcs collapsing in the blink of an eye... *Come to think of it, is this the first time they've seen me actually fight?* I wondered as I put the bodies of the high orcs in my bag and proceeded ahead.

After that, we encountered several more groups of monsters, but they were all orcs and kobolds. I didn't find the monster I was looking for.

Jeanne and Aura were surprised at first, but they gradually got used to it. We began to make our way through the floors, with me weakening the high orcs before the two of them finished them off. It was pretty good training for them.

They did well by clearing the thirty-ninth and fortieth floors in succession, but at the same time, there were no B-rank or higher monsters. I was just about to suggest we pull back when suddenly I spotted a dome-shaped space up ahead. And there it was...

"Finally... There are one, two, three—three pings indicating monsters Rank B or higher, and dozens of others. Jeanne and Aura, coordinate with Shiromaru and the others. Focus on protecting yourselves!"

Without waiting for an answer, I rushed out into the space.

Three large scorpions, each nearly three meters long, appeared when I jumped out.

They had large pincers, sharp venomous stingers, and sicklelike claws on the tips of their feet, and the surfaces of their bodies were bumpy like rocks. Each raised their pincers threateningly.

I used my prior knowledge of scorpions to attack the one in front of me with Air Bullet, but this only scratched the surface of its body and didn't seem to inflict much damage. I figured this was simply due to its high defensive power and resistance to magic. My attack wasn't lacking magical energy, though—the main reason my attack failed was because the magic was repelled by the uneven surface of the scorpion.

I could probably defeat it with magic, but using a physical attack seemed like it would take less time and effort. I took out my adamantium sword and slammed it down on the scorpion, which was swiftly approaching, with all my strength.

The scorpion tried to defend itself by crossing its pincers, but they both broke with a loud *snap!* As expected, the adamantium blade was harder than the scorpion's shell.

Even though its pincers were smashed and it was leaking green fluid, the scorpion still raised its tail to pierce me with its venomous stinger.

I definitely didn't want to eat that attack, so I flew back to dodge it. However, the remaining two scorpions ran towards the spot where I was going to land.

"Stonewall!" As a countermeasure, I created a wall with Earth magic to block the path of the scorpions.

The scorpion closest to the wall crashed into it and took some damage, but the other one was at a slight distance from it, so it had time to jump over it before continuing to head straight towards me.

"Take that!" I shouted, swinging my sword at the scorpion as it tried to crush me. Surprisingly, my blow made an unexpected splitting sound, slicing open the scorpion's abdomen vertically and showering the area in green fluids.

"Hmm. Unlike their backs, their abdomens are soft..." I muttered, mercilessly whacking the head of the scorpion—which was still trying to reach me, even though it had been split in half—with my sword.

I succeeded in crushing the scorpion's head, but it was still moving. At this point I figured it would die if I left it alone, so I kept my distance, glancing over at the other two scorpions. The one with crushed pincers was trying to escape, while the other was making an attempt to circle around behind me.

I decided to use Earth magic to create a box to confine the first scorpion, while I took care of the one that was trying to get behind me.

I made contact with the latter scorpion, and it stopped trying to maneuver, instead lunging right at me. Unlike the others, this scorpion attacked with its tail first rather than its pincers. Judging from its appearance, it must have been the strongest among the three. It left itself open after this tail attack, though, so I waited for that opportunity and found that it was surprisingly easy to lop it off.

As the scorpion writhed in pain, I attacked it, crushing its pinchers, legs, and head in that order. I was able to easily defeat it without injury. By that time, the first scorpion, whose head had been crushed, had also expired, leaving only the one trapped in the box alive.

When I approached the box, I could hear a banging sound coming from

inside... It was probably trying to break the box with its tail.

At this rate, it seemed like the box would eventually break. I thought it would be better to kill the scorpion right away. I opened a hole in the top of the box and fired off an Ice-Snow magic called Blizzard inside.

After about five minutes of successive Blizzard spells, I had successfully frozen the scorpion to the core.

I used Identify on it and discovered it was an Earth Scorpio, Rank B. For the time being, I put it in the bag with the other scorpions and returned to Jeanne and the others. The girls were standing there with stunned expressions.

It seemed that no monsters had approached them, but I could still sense dozens of other monsters around us. I wasn't sure when they were going to make a move, but for now I decided to keep going.

I took a closer look at the space. It was dome-shaped with a diameter of about two hundred meters, and the ceiling was probably more than twenty meters high. It was a space where Solomon could fly around freely, which was quite rare for a dungeon, so he'd been playing around excitedly ever since we'd arrived.

After that, I proceeded with caution. None of the other monsters I had sensed attacked, though, so we were able to pass by them safely.

"For now, let's take a break, find a nearby warp point, and return to the surface." I made a rest area as usual, took out the bed and table set, and asked Aura to make some tea.

While she was doing that, I was thinking up a recipe for a certain food... "It's impossible... No matter how much I rack my brain, I can't figure out what I can use as ingredients for ramen noodles and curry roux..."

To be precise, I was thinking about the combination of *kansui* added to the noodles and the spices that go into curry.

I'd made udon noodles in my previous life, but since it was easier to buy ramen noodles than make them myself, I'd never made those. I just knew the basics of how to make them as well as the ingredients to use.

Curry was a more serious problem. After all, in my previous life, I could easily obtain curry powder, curry roux, and even prepackaged pouches, so I only had a general idea of the ingredients that went into making it from scratch.

“But I don’t want to give up! Maybe there will be some leads in the capital...” The royal capital was said to be the cultural epicenter of the kingdom, so I was hoping there might be dishes there similar to curry or ramen. And so I decided to temporarily pause my attempts here in Sagan. I didn’t have time for them, after all.

Just as I was coming to that conclusion, Aura started pouring the tea. I took out our leftover sweets while we were at it to make it a fancy teatime. Who cared if we were in the middle of a dungeon?

“Tenma, what were you thinking about just now?” Jeanne was still awkward, but seemed a little more used to me than before.

I decided to ask the two of them if they’d heard of any dishes similar to curry and ramen.

“I don’t know about that kind of cuisine... What about you, Aura?”

“I’ve never heard of ‘kansui,’ but I’ve heard of dishes that use many different spices, like this...curry?...you speak of. Perhaps one of them will be similar to what you’re thinking of, Master Tenma,” Aura told me, but she didn’t sound very confident. Just knowing there were dishes that used such spices here was a great piece of information, though. Her answer about the noodles was similar; she could only think of dishes that had pasta noodles.

I knew it wouldn’t be easy, but I vowed to make my curry and ramen dreams a reality someday.

After that, I decided to head to the nearby warp point and fly to my secret base, where I would begin making golems.

First order of business was butchering the Earth Scorpio. I didn’t know where or how I could use it, but the shell seemed very strong. Peeling it off and storing it seemed like a good idea. The poison might come in handy too. I’d try to collect as much as possible, and was sure I could find a use for it.

Now the question was whether I should try the meat. Once I’d dissected it, I

wasn't actually sure if it was edible or not, so I decided to just incinerate it this time.

The magic cores of the scorpions were about ten centimeters in size, and unfortunately one of them was cracked. However, the color had a brilliance reminiscent of black pearls. If someone had told me they were real jewels, I'd have been tempted to believe it.

For this new golem recipe, I was going to try to combine the best of both existing recipes. In other words, the idea was to combine magic cores and metal, carving magic circles into both. I planned for the design to be a necklace. I'd already bought the chain and metal fittings for that at a specialty store, and I was using a necklace I'd seen there as a reference point.

For this new type of golem, I would carve a magic circle with the image of a soul on the magic core and a body on the metal, and a part of each magic circle was intended to join the two together.

I carved a detailed magic circle and magic power circuit for the magic core's connection so it could absorb the magic power from its surroundings to some extent.

Having chosen mythrill as the metal to use, I carved the magic circle while it was hot. This was a race against time, and I used Fire magic to try to maintain a high temperature, but failed several times. Every time I made a mistake, I mixed more silver into the mythrill and tried again.

By the way, the body of the golem was to be made from soil, stone, and iron, and its shape was that of a scorpion that looked just like the Earth Scorpio. This was because I thought that this form might be compatible with the magic core, and also because I was inspired by the scorpion's excellent offense, defense, and agility.

It took about five hours to complete two magic cores with engravings of the requisite magic circles and one pedestal for accessories. I decided to do the rest, plus any adjustments and a test run, tomorrow.

When we finally returned home, Amy, Rocky, and Birdie were conveniently waiting outside my apartment. I decided to speak with her about my future plans.

“What? You’re leaving this place, Master?” she asked with surprise.

“It’s not like I’m leaving forever. I’m going to the royal capital, but I’m planning to come back... So I wanted to ask for a favor. If I pay you in advance, can you keep this room for me for half a year?”

I still wanted to conquer the dungeon, so I wanted a place to stay when I returned. Worst-case scenario, I could sleep in my carriage, but that was a last resort.

“I’ll go ask Mom and Grandma!” Amy ran off home. Rocky and Birdie stayed because they were playing around with Shiromaru and Solomon. After a while, Amy returned with her mother, Karina.

“Do you want to pay half a year in advance?” Karina asked. I told her how I still wanted to challenge myself with Sagan’s dungeon, therefore I wanted a room ready upon my return. I explained that Jeanne’s relatives were in the royal capital, but they didn’t get along well, so it would also serve as a place for us to evacuate to in case of emergency.

“I understand the circumstances, but if you put half a year’s worth in one lump sum, it will be 42,000G...”

“Is this all right?” I asked, as I took out the amount she asked for from my magic bag and handed it over.

“Come to think of it,” Karina said after a pause, “you *are* an extremely skilled adventurer. Pardon me for my rudeness.” She took out the contract she’d brought from home, checked the money I gave her, wrote various things down, and handed the papers to me. I took a quick look at the contract, wrote my signature on it, and returned it to her.

“You’re all set. I’ll keep that room open for you for six months, until that contract expires. Please let me know when you’ve returned!” Karina bowed her head before returning to the house.

Amy petted Shiromaru. “I feel kind of sad...” she said. I promised her that I would definitely come back.

“Oh—I almost forgot. Will you open up the windows for me every couple of days to let fresh air into my room? This is a quest for you. The reward is

everything I've given you until now," I said.

"Sure! I'll do that for you, Master!" she accepted, raising her hand.

I was just about to go inside when all of a sudden Aura screamed, "Ah! I forgot to buy ingredients for tonight's dinner!" I told her I still had some inside my magic bag, but she began worrying about the time. "Today's the big bargain sale at the market!" And so we all went shopping together, because there might have been some bargains left.



Luckily for Aura, the sale was still on at the market in question, and the inside and outside the store were overflowing with people...or rather, housewives. By the way, this particular bargain store was affiliated with the one I'd shopped at before—J Market.

"Let's go!" Aura checked over the money I had given her one more time, then dragged off Jeanne, who was making an unpleasant face. The two of them rushed into the swarm of housewives. I decided to wait outside and play with Shiromaru and my other followers. Could you blame me for not wanting to venture into the midst of those bloodthirsty housewives?

"Oh? Isn't that Tenma over there?" A familiar voice called my name. I turned around.

"Jaiman?" There stood the slave trader whom I'd helped when he was being attacked by bandits.

"I knew it was you! I thought that wolf looked familiar!" he laughed, but I wondered why he was here. I asked him about it. "This store is affiliated with my brother's shop. Oh, there he is right there. Let me introduce you to my brother, Jake."

Jaiman introduced me to a man who looked somewhat like himself. Jake looked at me, then seemed to realize something, because he whispered something to Jaiman before introducing himself.

"Nice to meet you. I am Jake, Jaiman's younger brother. I have heard rumors about you, Tenma."

Jaiman asked Jake about the rumors, and his eyes widened when Jake told him about Solomon and Marquis Sammons. He was about to ask me about it when a man suddenly appeared behind Jake and interrupted us.

"Hey, it's not like I mind, but did you forget about me?"

"Ah, I'm sorry. Tenma, this is Master Gantz, the blacksmith. He's said to be the best blacksmith in this town." The "master" I was being introduced to was a short man who had a muscular body and a shaggy beard. In other words, he was a dwarf.

“Nice to meet you. My name is Tenma.”

“Oh, I’ve heard rumors! I’m Gantz, nice to meet you too!” He held out his hand, and we shook. At that moment, he looked down at the muffer on my arm and asked, “Hey, did you make this?” in a low voice. When I replied in the affirmative, he exclaimed, “This is an insult to armor! This mythrill is crying because it was used in such a shoddy fashion!”

This commotion was so loud that even the customers inside the store came out, but once they saw the source was an adventurer and a dwarf, they shrugged it off as if they were used to it.

“I-Is it really that bad?” I asked, totally intimidated by him.

“First of all, the balance is off. Secondly, the size is all wrong. Also, there are problems with the joints. And the surface is jagged.” With one look, he pointed out all the things I’d done wrong.

I told him that, setting all those other matters aside, I thought the size was just fine.

“You’re naturally strong, so you probably don’t give a damn about the small fry around you. This mythrill is strong too, but by using it against nothing but weak opponents, you’ve probably compromised it without knowing.”

“I see...”

“Come to my workshop tomorrow! I’ll fix it in one day!” He shoved a map to his workshop in my hand, then stomped away.

“Goodness. I’m sorry you had to get yelled at like that...but actually you’re very lucky, Tenma. Master Gantz only deals with people he likes... It’s rare to be yelled at like that the first time he meets you!” Jake said. However, I wasn’t sure whether I could trust the blacksmith I’d just met. As if reading my thoughts, Jake continued, “You can trust him. If he doesn’t like something, he makes it known even if he has to make an enemy out of a noble to do so! That just goes to show you how many allies he has.”

Well, if Jaiman’s brother said so, it might not be a bad idea to go visit him.

We made small talk for a while after that, and then the two of them wanted

to see Solomon. I called him out. He emerged from the bag, cautiously checking his surroundings, then went behind Shiromaru.

Both of them were impressed to see a dragon for the first time, but they were disappointed that Solomon didn't want to be touched.

"Master Tenma, I've finished shopping!" Just as the two of them were being disappointed, Aura and Jeanne returned from shopping. I decided to say goodbye to Jaiman and the others and take my leave.

On the way home, I told the girls that my plans for tomorrow had changed—I was going to Master Gantz's workshop. In addition, since the master might be able to discuss their equipment as well, I decided to have Jeanne and Aura accompany me.

By the way, I put the groceries Aura had bought in my magic bag so I didn't have to carry so many things back home.

Part Fourteen

The next day, I decided to visit Master Gantz's workshop early in the morning. It was located in the eastern district, about an hour's walk from my room at the inn. It wasn't possible for me to use my carriage here either.

As the three of us approached the eastern district, we heard a lot of noise, even though it was early in the morning. Apparently there were many blacksmith workshops along the road we were traveling, and we could hear the sound of metal striking metal and feel the heat of the furnaces spilling out onto the street here and there.

About twenty minutes later, Master Gantz's workshop came into view.

"Is this really it?"

"I think so."

"That's what the map says..."

It looked like an ordinary house—so ordinary that we were confused. We had imagined a sturdy workshop with the sound of metal being struck echoing from inside. Maybe the map was wrong?

Just in case, I checked inside with Detection. I spotted Master Gantz and several other people from yesterday, so I decided to open the door.

"What are you doing?! The temperature of the furnace is dropping!"

"You're not striking the iron evenly enough!"

"You idiot! You can't let your guard down at the very last minute! It'll all be ruined!"

"I'm sorry, Master!" we heard three voices say in unison as the master barked at them.

"Hey there! If it isn't Tenma! Let's see your armor!" Noticing me, the master beckoned me over while wiping off his sweat. "Damn, the more I look at it, the rougher it looks! Why, at this rate you'll never become a top-notch blacksmith!"

"Well, I'm an adventurer, and I just made it during my adventures..." At these

words, the master froze.

“What! You’re an amateur?! No wonder it’s so sloppy!” He looked at me with surprise and started laughing out loud.

Apparently, he’d been laboring under the misconception that I was an aspiring blacksmith. When I asked why he’d misunderstood, he told me that although the metal items I’d used for the armor were poorly made, he could tell they were handmade, and since I had the skill to process mythrill, he thought perhaps I had a relative who was a blacksmith who’d taught me. Then he concluded that any adventurer who knew how to process mythrill and also used his own creations would probably be an apprentice blacksmith.

“Hey, you guys! Get over here!” The master summoned three dwarves, whom I guessed were his apprentices, and showed them my equipment. “Do any of you know how to make this?” They all shook their heads. “Now, how does an amateur—a child, no less—who has nothing to do with blacksmithing know how to do this and you don’t? Just what are you learning, anyway?” he lectured. Startled by his gusto, the apprentices shrank back.

“Well, no matter. I’m in a good mood today, so I’ll do you a special favor and show you guys how to do this!” He took his apprentices and started walking towards the back. “What are ya doing? You all come too!” he called out to us as he kept walking.

“Let’s just follow him for now,” I said. Jeanne and Aura nodded.

In the back room, there were tools that looked much more worn than those in the other room, and they were larger too.

“Okay, then let’s get started! Hey, Tenma! Let’s measure your arm first.” Master Gantz began to touch my arm and carefully examined its size and shape. “We’ll have to make a lot of adjustments, but the basic shape was fine, so it should be completed in three to four hours.” He took off the base and began to heat the back of the muffer.

He did this until it turned bright red, at which point he soaked the back of the muffer in melted silver, then hammered it down again to reforge it.

As expected of a master blacksmith, he was very skillful. He continued heating

it and hitting it, and when it cooled down, he heated it up again, dipped it in liquid silver, and hit it again... This process was repeated for about an hour and a half.

“Time for the other one!” He continued working without taking a break, using the same procedure as before, and completed it in about an hour.

“All that’s left to do is polish the surface and put ’em together, and they’re done!” he said, beginning to polish the surface with a file and cloth. “Oh, and if you have other things you made, put them on the table over there!”

Since he was offering, I decided to take out the *kogarasumaru* and Jeanne’s and Aura’s muffers. Master Gantz cast a sideways glance at them and said, “Hey, you guys! You just watched me do this! Now try to polish the surface!” He handed the mythril glove to his apprentice and came to the table while wiping more sweat from his forehead.

“Huh. Now this sword has an unusual shape... Was it not well made...?” He pulled the *kogarasumaru* out of its scabbard to examine it. I suddenly realized I was nervous. “Well, it’s better than the glove. You just didn’t temper it enough, though!” he yelled at me. After yelling at me for a while, he put the *kogarasumaru* into a furnace to heat it up and then started hammering it with great force.

“It’s a shape I’ve never seen before, but it’s a sword, and all swords are fundamentally the same!” He used a subtle amount of force to reforge it without losing its shape. “Look, it’s finished.” He had reforged it in less than an hour.

As he polished the *kogarasumaru* and sharpened it, it seemed like the color of the blade was darker than before. When I asked him about it, he said, “That sword was made from the metal plates that dragons have, right? If ya forge that metal right, the color gets darker and richer!” He smiled proudly.

Next, he picked up the magical iron gauntlet. “Was this the one for the girls? I can reforge it for you, but not today. Come back tomorrow!” I went to pay him for the day’s work, but he refused. “I’m the one who insisted on doing this. I can’t take your money!”

Of course I couldn’t allow that, so I forcefully handed over three kilograms of

mythril and ten kilograms of silver as payment.

He told me that three kilograms of mythril was too much, but when I said that it included the price of observing his work and the cost of the girls' gloves, he backed down. He had a faint grin on his face, and I had a feeling that as a blacksmith, he was probably happier to get his hands on the mythril than the money.

Gazing at the mythril, he muttered, "Now what shall I make with you?" We thanked the master and left his workshop.

By the way, Jeanne and Aura said it was too hot inside, so they had taken refuge in the parlor and waited there, occasionally bringing drinks to us.

"Good morning... Master?" The next day, I went to Master Gantz's workshop first thing in the morning, but when I opened the door to greet him there was no response.

Feeling guilty, I went in without permission and opened the back door...

"Master! It's morning! You'll get sick if you sleep out here!" I found Master Gantz and his apprentices sleeping on the floor of his workshop.

"Oh? Oh, it's already morning... Perfect timing, Tenma. I've finished fixing all the things you gave me... And as a bonus, I've prepared boots for the girls... They're over there, so take them... I'm going back to sleep now..."

That's all he said before he once again became a resident of the dreamworld. Apparently he had been working all night long. We thanked him and took the armor.

"Well, let's get to the dungeon right away." Although the schedule had been delayed by one day, I decided to get back to making golems, and headed for the secret base in the dungeon. We arrived there without incident, but I thought that at this rate I probably wouldn't have time to train Jeanne and Aura, so I decided to ask Rocket to capture an appropriate monster for them.

Rocket's body shuddered before he glided up the wall and into the ventilation hole. Right before he disappeared, I called after him, "Rocket! I want you to repair the hole too! Also, if you find iron scraps or weapons, please pick them

up!”

I didn’t know if he heard me or not, but a hole of that size was dangerous. If something like a slime, a small insect, or a reptile got in, it wouldn’t be much of a threat, but if we happened to let a black-demon-like monster invade, they might breed in large numbers without our knowledge, and I definitely wanted to prevent that.

Before Rocket returned, I gave Jeanne and Aura the gauntlets and boots that had been repaired by the master, and had them try them on.

“They’re the perfect size!”

“That man was a more skilled craftsman than I thought.”

They were both surprised. Their boots were mostly made of leather, and seemed lighter and softer than they looked. They looked quite comfortable to wear too. I decided that I would figure out how to thank the master in some way before I left for the capital.

When I was finished making my preparations for the golem, Rocket returned. I built a smaller version of Gunjo City’s arena at the edge of the secret base, and asked him to release the monsters he had captured there. However...

“Stop! Rocket, stop! That’s way too many!!!”

Rocket let out ten high orcs, thirty orcs, twenty high goblins, twenty goblins, and ten kobolds. That was only a rough estimate too, so the actual numbers might have exceeded a hundred.

At my cry, Rocket suddenly jumped into the crowd of monsters, which, having been suddenly ejected from Rocket moments before, were still confused. Rocket opened his mouth and swallowed all of the monsters up whole again except for five orcs. The rest went back into the dimension bag he had inside his stomach.

In other words, a slime—which was the lowest of the low among monsters—had just swallowed up orcs.

After Rocket finished swallowing the extra monsters, I decided to have Jeanne and Aura deal with the orcs while Shiromaru, Solomon, and Rocket watched

over them.

I wondered if five orcs were too much for them to handle, but given that the orcs were unarmed, I figured the girls would be fine.

In the meantime, I got back to making the golems, but I finished sooner than I'd expected. I added the function of a magic bag to the metal plate and stored the iron, which I was using as the material for the golem's body, within it.

Partway through, I ran out of iron. But after retrieving the iron ore that was in the dungeon, and getting the iron scraps I'd asked Rocket to pick up and extract, I managed to secure enough to summon the golem.

Even after all that, I still had time. I decided to make two simple rings using mythril and add basic functions to them. By the time I finished making everything, it was about time for lunch, so I called Jeanne and the others over to eat. For lunch, we had boiled rice—which was becoming standard these days—kebabs and fried food I'd bought at a food stall, and vegetable soup.

"I'm finished, so let's see if the golem can be summoned properly. If there's no problem, let's actually use it for a mock battle."

I handed them each a necklace, and while I was at it, I also handed each of them a ring. However...

"An engagement ring already...? And one for me too?! Master Tenma, not only do you wish to take Jeanne, but you also want me?! I didn't know you were such a womanizer..." Aura started to get excited, and Jeanne's face turned bright red. Meanwhile, Shiromaru and Solomon thought the rings I'd handed over were snacks, so they were sitting and begging next to me.

"No, it's a magic item. It's something that makes it easier for me to sense where the two of you are in case of an emergency..."

After my explanation, Aura dramatically pretended to wipe her eyes. "Sniffle... Poor Jeanne... To have her fiancé suspected of having an affair even before they got married..."

Despite these words, I could see the corners of her mouth were slightly raised, and that she was smiling. Jeanne didn't react to Aura's excessive acting; instead, she asked me how to use the necklace and ring. I ignored Aura, and

taught Jeanne how to use them.

Aura frowned once she saw we were both ignoring her, but she stopped pretending to cry, and started quietly listening to what I had to say.

“In other words, if you take off the necklace and imbue it with magic power, the golem will be summoned automatically...? Let me give it a try.” Using the procedure I’d taught her, Jeanne summoned the golem.

Basically, this was how it worked: You placed the necklace on the floor and made magical energy flow into it. The iron would come out of the magic bag attached to the pedestal of the magic core, and then served as the material for the body of the golem. The two of them were quite surprised to see that this golem was in the shape of a scorpion.

It seemed that the two of them had never seen golems other than the ones I summoned, so they thought that all golems came in the shape of humans. At first their reaction to this huge scorpion-type golem was negative, but when I explained how amazing it was and actually made it fight against the orcs, they changed their minds.

“It’s stronger than it looks...”

“Yeah. It might not look pretty, but the orcs are little more than trash in comparison...”

To be honest, the person who was most surprised by these golems’ strength was their creator...but I decided to keep that part a secret.

These scorpion-type golems were over six meters in size, with about half of that length being their sharp tails. They had three pairs of legs and a pair of large pincers each. They moved surprisingly fast (maybe over thirty kilometers per hour?) and slammed the orcs with their pincers and tails like a hammer, reducing the orcs to lumps of meat. They used their pincers to grab the orcs’ bodies and then tore them apart like rags. The way their pincers moved reminded me of pliers.

We were stunned speechless at that grotesque spectacle. After the scorpions turned the orcs into mincemeat, I just let them collect the corpses and incinerate them with Fire magic.

Not even Shiromaru and Solomon wanted to eat the mud-caked orc meat on the ground.

I'd intended to have Jeanne and Aura do a mock battle against the golems, but at this point that seemed way too harsh, so I called off those plans. Originally I'd thought the three of us could take on two of the scorpion golems.

"I guess we can call this a success for now, but maybe they're too strong to be bodyguards..."

The two girls just nodded in response. They both looked pretty freaked out, and now that they had seen how strong the scorpion golems were, they stopped criticizing their appearance.

When I instructed the golems to return, they froze on the spot and disappeared as if being sucked back into their original core necklaces. The girls picked up the necklaces and put them back on, looking slightly bewildered.

"How do they feel?" I asked. They tested the necklaces out by moving a little, trying to change the length of the chain.

"Fine... But it's a bit difficult to adjust the length."

Seeing Jeanne worrying about this, Aura piped up, "That's because you have long hair. You'll get used to it." She helped Jeanne adjust the necklace.

This time, I'd used a chain I bought at a store. I'd cut the chain in the middle, hardened one end with silver, and attached a small hook to the other end so that it could be hooked and adjusted to the desired length.

Jeanne had long hair and wasn't used to wearing necklaces, so I figured it would be difficult for her to reach behind and adjust it. I fixed the length of her chain so it stopped around her collarbones.

"Thanks." Just like other girls, she seemed happy to receive jewelry as a gift. That was the first time she'd ever thanked me in such a cheerful voice.

I wasn't used to being thanked by women that I wasn't related to, so I was a little embarrassed when she surprised me with that smile.

Aura smirked as if she wanted to say something. I had no choice but to turn around, pretending not to notice.

“Hmm... It seems like the golems are moving fine, so after I do some final checks on their magic circles, I'll be done with my plans. Is there anything else I should do?” I asked as I took the necklaces from them. I was changing the subject to distract from my embarrassment, but neither of them could think of anything else to be done.

For the time being, I decided to take a break, and thought about what else I needed to do to prepare.

“Hmm... All I can think of is securing and distributing food.”

“I suppose I can cook a bunch of food at once and store it in a magic bag for you...maybe?” Aura suggested.

It seemed both of us were thinking about food, but suddenly Jeanne gasped. “Hey! I'd really love it if you could renovate the carriage to include a changing room and a bathroom!” she said loudly.

Aura seemed to have some idea what she was talking about. “Come to think of it, neither of those facilities are in Master Tenma's carriage!”

Honestly, I'd never cared about this before because until this point, I'd only been journeying with guys. But now that Aura and Jeanne were with us, it became a priority for me.

There was space to put a barrel inside the carriage instead of a bathtub, but there was no space for changing, and I'd always just gone to the bathroom outside. If it was raining, I just used some empty container from my bag.

However, I was able to do this because I was the only man in the party. If I'd let a woman do the same kinds of things in my previous life, I would've definitely been sued for sexual harassment. I doubted it was permissible in this world either...

“It's certainly necessary...but the problem is how? If it were a matter of just making the interior a little bigger, I could definitely do that, but...”

As I was thinking about this, a scene popped into my mind.

“I know! It should be like a unit bath!” I blurted out.

“A what?”

“Master Tenma, what in the world is that?”

They were both very curious. Since it wasn't a secret or anything, I let them in on it.

“A unit bath is a single, self-contained room with a bath, a toilet, and a sink.” I began to explain the concept that came from my previous life. “That way, I don't have to make a separate toilet or bath, and if I make it the right size to fit inside the carriage, I can put it in a magic bag and carry it around! It'll be easy to use, even here in a dungeon!”

Just taking it out of my bag would be so much easier than using magic to create it every time. The only problem was how to clean up after using the toilet, but I didn't think that would be too difficult as long as I could use my magic effectively.

“But wouldn't the smell of the toilet leak out?”

“That's a valid concern, but what if I set out a pot for us to use as a toilet, and rigged the inside of it to function like a dimension bag? I could engrave Wind and Water magic circles on the seat, which would be enough to reduce the odors considerably. I think it's worth a try.”

For the time being, I decided to create a toilet bowl using Earth magic and alchemy, relying on my memory.

The first thing I made was a Western-style toilet. However, as I was making it, I was thinking of a famous manufacturer from my previous life, and inadvertently carved the letters for the name of their brand—which started with “T”—on the edge of the tank. In the end, I had to scrape them off.

“Pretty good for a first try,” I mused as I tried sitting on it.

Jeanne and Aura also seemed interested in the unfamiliar shape of the toilet bowl, but, perhaps reluctant to sit on it in the presence of a man, they both just stared at it.

Next, I took out the carriage. I expanded the rear part of the interior, and used Earth magic and alchemy to make a hut that was exactly the right size, but...

“I’m afraid the roof will fall down...”

Next, I tried to assemble it without a roof, but at this rate I wouldn’t be able to finish before we had to leave for the capital. I decided to compromise and changed the roof to be built-in instead of removable.

I made a wooden wall and door in the extended part inside the carriage, installed tiles on the floor in the same fashion as pottery, and fixed the toilet bowl by firing the one I’d made earlier and making it removable.

I also mobilized the golems for this job, so we were able to finish it in two days.

As for the bathtub, for now we’d continue using the same barrel, but I intended to find a better substitute in the capital when I had some free time.

Now all I had to do was add some finishing details and do some tests to make sure the magic circles were functioning properly.

The toilet had a magic circle engraved on the lid of the seat. When the lid was lifted, the pot activated, exhibiting the same ability as the dimension bag.

In addition, I set up a mechanism to create a layer of air with Wind magic in an attempt to prevent the smell from leaking out, but this was something I wouldn’t be able to test until I actually used it. Well, I’d put that off for now...

Inspecting it was simple, though. I lifted the lid and poured some water into the pot. If it didn’t overflow, it was a success. If it did overflow, it was a failure. There was a space of about five cubic meters in the pot, and I decided to pour in about ten liters of water. The result was...

“Nice! It didn’t leak, so I think it’s good to go!”

Since I hadn’t found any problems so far, I stopped messing around with it. Now all I had to do was finish up the sink and partition curtain, and dig the drain.

The drain port also had a pot that functioned as a dimension bag embedded into the floor.

After I showed the newly renovated carriage to the girls, I put it all in my magic bag and decided to return to the surface.

Part Fifteen

The following day, it was almost time for us to leave Sagan, so I planned to go around town today buying up ingredients. However...

“You two... We’ve gone to ten shops already!” I knew that women took a long time to go shopping, but both Jeanne and Aura had forgotten today’s objective. Instead, they’d dragged me around to look at clothes, knickknacks, and all kinds of ridiculous things.

“Just one more shop, Tenma!”

“I promise this is the last one!”

I’d heard that several times already. Shiromaru had finally given up and was resting in the dimension bag. He wasn’t interested in going anywhere that didn’t involve food, so he and Solomon begged for food before they went in. They both looked happy enough to receive orc bones from me.

Following this conversation, I heard “Just one more shop!” about five more times, at which point I finally gave up and went to browse a general store a few shops down from where the girls were, just to kill time.

Nothing really caught my eye apart from around twenty well-made pots of various shapes and sizes. The shop owner was thrilled when I bought all of them.

After I bought up all the pots, I was on my way back to meet up with the girls when I spotted a familiar ogre headed my way. It was Gulliver, of course. Since I’d never heard of any other ogre ever being tamed, any time I saw an ogre walking around town I automatically assumed it was Gulliver.

No one wanted to come near him, so there was always a gap in the crowd around him, making him incredibly easy to spot.

He eventually noticed me too, and for a moment a frightened expression crossed his face. He also took a step backwards, but quickly straightened himself up again.

Seeing an ogre be so polite made me laugh, but when he heard me laughing

that only seemed to scare him more.

“Oh? If it isn’t Master Tenma! Are you out shopping?” While I was distracted by Gulliver, Marquis Sammons suddenly appeared with his guards. The guards looked cautious at the sight of me and stepped forward, but the marquis raised a hand to stop them, upon which they fell back again.

“Yes. I’m actually being dragged from store to store by a few friends, so I have a lot of time on my hands,” I answered.

The marquis glanced towards the shop the girls were in and laughed. “One needs a strong constitution to accompany women on a shopping trip!” He added in a mutter, “When I was young, my wife always dragged me along like that as well...”

Seeing me and his master speaking peacefully, Gulliver finally relaxed. The marquis went on, “Gulliver is the strongest fighter amongst my guards and yet he balks at the sight of you, Master Tenma.”

Gulliver shrank back again at those words. Personally speaking, I found this whole exchange rather amusing, but I did feel bad that Gulliver was down in the dumps because of me.

“No—on the contrary, I think Gulliver is excellent. Ordinary ogres are violent and have low intelligence; they rush into battle without thinking. But Gulliver carefully assesses the situation before he fights. I can tell that he’ll only get stronger from here on out.”

Marquis Sammons nodded. “Yes, I’m certain of that as well. Just between you and me, I actually think he might be more intelligent than Gary...” He said this very quietly, but his argument was strangely convincing.

“Speaking of Gary, where is he?” I asked, hoping to myself that I wouldn’t run into him anywhere.

Marquis Sammons smiled. “That idiot son of mine was taken away by those louts who came after him. They’re currently beating him into shape in the dungeon.”

At any rate, I seemed to have avoided running into Gary, but it felt a little awkward to have Gulliver so afraid of me. I tried to come up with a way to get

him to like me, and the first thing that came to mind was my resident gluttons.

I took out a lump of orc meat and handed it to Gulliver, but nothing about his attitude changed.

“What are you doing, Master Tenma?”

“My greedy followers always get excited about meat, so I was wondering if Gulliver would too.” I suddenly realized that might sound very rude, but the marquis just burst out laughing.

“Ha ha ha! Master Tenma! Even though Gulliver is an ogre, he wouldn’t just eat raw meat out here in the street!”

I was shocked. My gluttonous followers would eat raw meat anywhere, no matter the time or place. Vivid memories of them leaping out of my dimension bag to seize a piece of meat no matter who was watching were burned into my brain.

Giving Gulliver food had failed. I checked to make sure that the marquis had a magic bag, then gave him ten orcs for Gulliver to eat later. I made sure that Gulliver could see them as I handed the meat over, but couldn’t tell whether that had made him like me any better or not.

“Well, hopefully my friends are done shopping by now, so if you’ll excuse me...” After saying my goodbyes to the marquis, I waved to Gulliver, but the movement of my hand only seemed to make him nervous again. The visible relief on his face from the fact that I was leaving had me feeling pretty down.

I went back to the shop Jeanne and Aura were in. I’d left Rocket behind to guard them, and once he noticed me, he slunk over and immediately crawled towards my bag. I petted him and gave him an orc bone before pulling open the bag. Glutton Number One (Shiromaru) reacted to the scent of the bone and immediately poked his face out and began begging. Of course, Glutton Number Two (Solomon) wasn’t far behind.

“If only Gulliver were this easy to read...” I petted both of them and gave them bones too. The three of them happily went back into my bag, and then I entered the shop, calling out for the girls.

“Jeanne! Aura! Are you about done yet?” Apparently they’d just finished and

were heading up to the register to pay. They'd chosen well-made and nicely embroidered overcoats in feminine colors, as well as tops, pants, skirts, and boots. They both had an armload full of clothes. After the sixteenth shop, they'd finally found what they'd been looking for.

They paid for their clothes and then put their items into their magic bags. I spotted a man in the shop staring suspiciously at the bags, so I stood in front of him and glared, hoping to intimidate those thoughts right out of his head.

On the way home I found a tavern, and bought five barrels of whiskey, each containing ten liters, as presents for Master Gantz and his crew. I also picked up six barrels of wine, each containing five liters.

This particular whiskey had an alcohol content of 40 percent, and was the variety most commonly drunk in this world.

Additionally, I bought three barrels of red wine and three barrels of white wine to go with whatever meal they were having at the time. After that, I began searching for rice. I bought whatever I could find, along with vegetables, spices, seasonings, and ready-made foods for emergencies. By the time I was done, I'd racked up about a hundred kilograms' worth of goods, but since I put them in my magic bag, they weren't heavy to carry at all.

"I have plenty of meat for my followers and enough food for six months... I won't have to buy anything else again for a while."

"That's right. Any more and it'll get to be too much to deal with. We can just go shopping again once we start running out of things," Aura agreed. I had items left over from my last shopping trip too, but at this point I wasn't sure what I had in stock. I really needed to take the time to organize my bag.

That night, we divided up the ingredients and food I'd bought today between all three of our magic bags, and ate a dinner prepared from the ready-made food.

A few days later, it was finally time to leave Sagan. I'd already said my goodbyes the day before, but Amy and her family, the Dawnswords, and the Tamers' Guild (which was their provisional name) came to see me off. I'd gone to Master Gantz's workshop yesterday to give him the alcohol.

Marquis Sammons had some business with the guildmaster this morning, so I'd said goodbye to him yesterday too.

"All right, Amy. Make sure you air out my room for me."

"I will! Leave it to me, Master!"

As I said my goodbyes, I was surprised to learn that the members of the Tamers' Guild (minus Amy) were also participating in the martial arts tournament. "We want to spread the word about us so that more people will join, and we can eventually become a huge guild!" Everyone was very excited about this idea.

When I asked Mennas if I could participate with my followers, she said that they were allowed, but followers were counted as members of your team. Not many people even had followers to begin with, so it was unusual to see people competing with any.

The members of Dawnsword and Tamers' Guild seemed to all have acquaintances in the royal capital, so they weren't worried about finding accommodations there. They told me that they would be heading to the capital one to two weeks before the tournament.

"All right. I'll see you there!" I said, and gave the signal to Valley Wind.

"Master! Jeanne! Aura! Have a nice trip!" Amy's cheerful voice called out as we set off for the royal capital.

"What?! Tenma went to the capital?!" Merlin's loud voice resounded throughout Sagan. Merlin and his party arrived there a week after Tenma and his party had departed for the capital.

After they showed the papers from the king to the guards, they were allowed special entry to the city via the gate that nobles used. They immediately headed to the adventurers' guild to gather information. There was a little girl there who had two tamed rockbirds. Once Merlin heard what she had to say about Tenma, he'd screamed.

"Eeeek! I-I'm sorry!" the girl apologized to Merlin, at which point he realized what he'd done.

“I-I’m sorry I raised my voice...”

“What’s wrong, Amy?”

“What did that old geezer do to you?!”

Some men came running downstairs at the sound of the little girl’s voice and stood in front of her protectively.

“Hey, geezer! What’d you do to Amy?!”

“Yeah, what do you want with her?”

Four men raised their voices at him, but of course Merlin wasn’t here to see this little girl. But he knew it was his fault for scaring her, so he apologized.

“This girl seems to know my grandson, so I asked her where he was. I shouted because I found out he’d already left town. I’m sorry for causing a misunderstanding. My apologies, young lady.”

Just then, a man who looked to be around the same age as Merlin came downstairs.

“It seems we misunderstood the situation as well. Please, everyone—calm down. I’m Agris Monacato, the representative of these men here. I’m honored to meet you, Sage Merlin,” he said, greeting Merlin politely.

“I’m terribly sorry for the ruckus. No need to call me ‘Sage,’ Master Agris. It’s nice to meet you as well.”

The two men exchanged a handshake. Suddenly, Merlin realized the guild was totally silent. The four men in particular were frozen in place, like dolls.



Merlin couldn't help but wonder what was going on. Agris smiled at him. "Apparently these guys didn't know who they were dealing with. You all can move now," he said, bonking them lightly on the heads with his staff.

"W-W-W-We're so sorry!"

"We never dreamed you'd be *the* famous sage!"

"Please forgive us!"

"I'm so sorry!"

The men juddered back to motion, throwing themselves onto their hands and knees upon the ground at an astonishing speed, with vehement apologies.

"No, I'm at fault here too. It's only natural that you'd try to protect this young lady. Please get up. Seeing youngsters like you groveling before me just makes me uncomfortable." However, the men didn't move a muscle.

Agris stepped in. "You guys are just creating even more of a commotion! Get up already!" Finally the men stood up, but they still had awkward looks on their faces.

At any rate, Agris urged Merlin to come upstairs with him and take a seat at the table. Merlin wanted to hear about his grandson's exploits in the town.

"What?! Is it true that Tenma tamed a dragon as his follower?!"

Agris told Merlin all about Tenma's adventures, like how he was clearing the dungeon at record speed, how he'd punched out a noble's son, how he made an ogre tremble with fear from just one look, and so forth. But the bit about how Tenma had tamed a dragon made the most impact on Merlin.

"That's right! Master's dragon is named Solomon and he's really cute!" Amy told him.

"Master?" Merlin stared at Amy with surprise.

"Yes! Master taught me the basics of taming, and so I was able to get these two as my followers." She called the two rockbird chicks from her bag and set them on the table, then began petting them.

"Ohhh, Tenma did that? Hm...? These two have more magical energy than

you'd expect." As he'd just mentioned, Merlin sensed greater magical powers than one would expect from chicks. He asked Agris, who shook his head.

"We thought it was strange too. These have even more magical energy than when one of our members' thunderbirds were chicks. It might have something to do with the fact that Tenma was the one who hatched them..."

"Well, it *is* Tenma we're talking about, so I suppose that shouldn't come as a surprise..." Merlin murmured. Everyone around him nodded. They all knew that Tenma had done things out of the ordinary before. "Still, when I came looking for my grandson, I never thought I'd find that he had an apprentice..." he said, looking at Amy.

"Ha ha ha! Come to think of it, if she's Tenma's apprentice, that means she's your grand-apprentice, Master Merlin!" Agris laughed.

Sorcerers nearby shot envious looks at Amy. Amy was so young she didn't quite understand the enormity of who Merlin really was, but since she knew that he was Tenma's mentor, she still figured he must be a pretty impressive individual.

"Master Merlin, if we want to catch up to Tenma, we should probably leave as soon as possible," Edgar, who had been quietly waiting behind Merlin, spoke up hesitantly.

"That's true. If we leave now, we might be able to catch up with him at the capital." And so Merlin and his party said their goodbyes to the Tamers' Guild and headed for the city gates.

Once they left the guild, they saw a familiar ogre standing before them. Merlin thought for a moment, then remembered whom he was looking at. "I believe that's Marquis Sammons's ogre, Gulliver."

Noticing Merlin's gaze on him, Gulliver turned and, surprisingly, bowed his head in a greeting. Honestly, Merlin had not had any idea that an ogre could possess so much intelligence and manners. He was so focused on the ogre that it took him a while to notice the marquis, who was standing next to Gulliver. The marquis's son was also behind him.

"Ohh! Master Merlin! What are you doing here?" The marquis rushed over to

Merlin the moment he spotted him. His guards immediately tensed up, but at the sight of Merlin they relaxed and then turned their focus to their surroundings once more.

“Marquis Sammons...? Well, I was trying to find my grandson in Gunjo City, but I just missed him. Then I came all the way over here to find him, and it seems I was still a bit too late. We’re now about to depart for the capital.”

“Goodness, I’m sorry to hear that. Is your grandson an adventurer?” The marquis wasn’t sure how to reply when he heard the sad tale, so he decided to ask a slightly different question.

“Yes—his name is Tenma. He seems to have been quite active around these parts.”

“Did you say Tenma?!” Marquis Sammons was shocked. His son, who had been quiet until now, also looked shocked—well, more like frightened—and, for that matter, so did Gulliver...

“Did my grandson cause some kind of trouble for you?” Merlin got a little anxious, wondering what Tenma had done this time.

“No, no, just the opposite. Actually, I’m the one who caused trouble for Tenma...” The marquis had an apologetic look on his face as he explained the incident between his son and Tenma, and what had happened afterwards.

“So not only did Tenma *not* cause trouble for me, he actually helped me.” The marquis glanced over at Gary, who seemed quite embarrassed.

“Apparently he’s merciless towards everyone...” Merlin muttered.

“No, my son was the one who made the mistake. His crime was so severe he could’ve even gotten the death penalty for it. But not only did Tenma forgive him, but he saved my son’s life after my son was kidnapped. Now I’m trying very hard to improve my son’s behavior.”

Come to think of it, Merlin noted that Gary *did* look fairly exhausted, and felt a bit sorry for the boy. “Well, don’t be too hard on him. Anyway, we’re about to leave, so if you’ll excuse me...”

“I’m sorry for keeping you. Safe journeys!”

And so Merlin's party departed for the capital—for real this time. He passed a group of four adventurers near the city gates who were all talking about Tenma this and Tenma that, but he ignored them and hurried out of the city.

"I'm *definitely* going to reunite with Tenma this time!" Merlin excitedly leaned out of the carriage and bellowed.

"Master Merlin! Please don't lean out of the carriage. It's dangerous!" Kriss panicked, frantically pushing the sage back inside.

Extra Story: Jeanne's New Daily Routine

"Jeanne, wake up. It's time." A familiar voice was trying to pull me out of paradise. Someone shook me roughly.

"Just a little longer..."

"I've already let you sleep in," the voice said firmly, and then the blanket that I was wrapped in was torn off. I almost fell off the bed, but something soft caught me.

"Oh, I'm sorry, Rocket. Jeanne, it's time to do our morning cleaning. Get up and get moving!"

Apparently, Rocket had supported me before I hit the ground. When I first saw him, I wondered why Tenma kept a slime, which was said to be the weakest monster, especially when he had a Fenrir and a dragon. But the more I got to know Rocket, the more I learned just how powerful he was. It made me feel ashamed for judging him.

Not only was he strong, but he also had above-average intelligence—I'm sad to say he's probably smarter than both me and Aura. He was amazingly attentive too. He'd felt that I was about to fall and immediately sprung into action to save me. Was he really just a slime...?

"Jeanne, your eyes are closing."

Uh-oh. I got lost in my thoughts about Rocket and was about to head into the world of dreams again. Tenma had given us an amazing degree of freedom that normally wouldn't be afforded to slaves, but we couldn't take advantage of that. I didn't want him to abandon us, after all.

I quickly changed and began to clean.

"Jeanne, there's no need to clean in here. Could you clean outside, please?"

It was just one mistake after another. Finally, I received my marching orders from Aura. I went outside reluctantly to look for a broom and saw Tenma in

front of the apartment, swinging a wooden stick. It seemed he was using it like a sword. Beside him, Shiromaru and Solomon were happily nibbling on a cow's horn.

I started cleaning quietly so as not to disturb Tenma, but since it was windy I was having trouble gathering up the trash. Not only that, but once Shiromaru and Solomon saw how much I was struggling, they misunderstood, thinking it was some kind of new game, and began running in circles around me. Under normal circumstances I would have gotten mad at them, but the sight of Shiromaru's fur rippling in the breeze was just too cute, so I petted him for a while. Tenma didn't say a word, but when Aura came to check on me, she gave me a stern lecture...

After that, we ate breakfast, I gave Shiromaru a few more pets, and then we went to the dungeon. As usual, we started on the early floors and slowly made our way downwards. But perhaps because we had gotten used to combat, we were able to progress much faster than usual. At this rate, I thought we might be able to go farther than Tenma had allowed us to go before! However, I was getting ahead of myself...

While I was in charge of the vanguard, I encountered a group of goblins and was nearly surrounded. Luckily, Shiromaru, who was standing behind us, knocked them out in one swipe. If it had been just me and Aura, we might have ended up with the horrifying fate of being taken off to the goblins' nest for breeding!

After that encounter, Tenma said we should take a break, and created a small room for us at a dead end, as usual. I always thought that was an unconventional way to rest, but I'd gotten used to it by now, so it no longer surprised me.

For lunch, we ate what we'd bought at the food stall outside as well as leftovers from that morning. I was happy to be able to eat hot food in the dungeon, but it was a bit painful to be forced to clean my plate when I didn't like everything on it.

After lunch it was time for an afternoon nap, during which it was customary to use the beds Tenma put out. At first, I was reluctant to lie down and sleep in

the dungeon, but it was true that sleeping on the ground wouldn't relieve my fatigue. I only slept for about an hour, but I felt refreshed and clearheaded afterwards.

When I woke up, Tenma handed me a wooden board with a memo written on it. Curious, I read it. Upon it was written a very detailed critique of my combat methods thus far, including how bad my technique was, and what exactly about it was disagreeable.

"From now on, try to remember these things," Tenma instructed. He had a board for Aura too. She sat a short distance away from me and read hers aloud over and over with a serious look on her face.

For the time being, the most important things I had to be careful of were not letting my guard down, moving more efficiently when attacking, and increasing the variety of my attacks. I also needed to put more effort into pulling off joint attacks with Aura.

I kept these instructions in mind as we resumed our dungeon dive. I felt that I was defeating enemies at a faster rate than before. We continued to fight until we grew used to our new circumstances, and then partway through, I exchanged weapons with Aura. I also switched from the vanguard to the rear guard, still careful not to forget Tenma's advice as we proceeded through the dungeon.

A while had passed since our lunch break, but we came upon a warp point just in time, so we called it a day.

Once we'd used the warp point to return to the surface, we met up with another group of adventurers who had also just returned from the dungeon. Although they stared at us and came uncomfortably close, none of them spoke to us.

Of course, Tenma knew other adventurers, but I thought that Tenma's notoriety had grown to the point that no one dared to approach us. Speaking of the adventurers in Sagan who were close to Tenma, I thought about the adventuring party called the Dawnswords and also the Tamers' Guild.

Both of them were famous in Sagan, but the Dawnswords seemed to be famous even in the royal capital. Although Tenma was friendly with such a

famous party, he sometimes went too far when teasing them. Because of this, other adventurers, who didn't know Tenma's true relationship with the party, got the wrong idea about him.

While I was thinking about such things, I suggested that Aura should go shopping, and Tenma gave his approval of this idea. Normally, chores such as shopping were something only slaves did, but Tenma also liked to shop and often came with us. He was quite popular with shop owners and food stall vendors because he tended to make lots of impulse purchases and bought things in very large quantities. However, the most popular individual in our group was Solomon.

Aura was basically in charge of shopping. Tenma just gave her money and didn't bother himself with what she purchased. It didn't even matter whether it was expensive; if it was something we wanted to eat, we were allowed to buy it. I was grateful for that, but to be perfectly honest I also didn't think Tenma knew the first thing about how slaves were to be treated.

Under normal circumstances, slaves were supposed to have no human rights. Even though it was publicly agreed that one shouldn't mistreat their slaves, how many masters would really go out of their way to protect you?

My previous master had never treated me as a sex slave, but his attendants and guards did look at me with lewd eyes many times. However, if I had been Aura's age and looked like her too—not trying to brag, but I think I'm above average in looks, while Aura has an above-average figure too—I wouldn't have been surprised if he had laid a hand on me the very first day. Fortunately, my previous owner preferred the company of men, and he'd also chosen our next owner for us. Perhaps another reason he never touched us was because he didn't want to damage what were essentially products, and lower our eventual sale price.

In any case, there was no doubt that I was now definitely living a better life than an ordinary slave.

When I finally departed from my reveries, it appeared that we had arrived at the shop Aura was looking for. It was no exaggeration to say that this was the beginning of one of the few hells of this life. After all, in order to find what you

were looking for, you first had to defeat hordes of housewives.

Aura was even more fired up than when she was clearing the dungeon. She pulled me by the hand and rushed into the crowd of housewives who were scouring the shop for bargains. Once, Tenma had told her that it was okay for her to buy something that was easier to obtain, even if it was a bit more expensive, but Aura firmly refused. She said her pride as a maid would not permit it. But to be honest, as the one who was dragged into that mess, I found that kind of annoying...

Ignoring my feelings, Aura pushed aside a group of housewives and headed deeper and deeper into the store. Since she was holding me by the hand, I was accosted by housewives the whole time. Finally, she abandoned me, letting go of my hand right in the middle of the mob. As a result, the wave of bargain-hungry homemakers pushed me all the way back to the entrance.

Once again, I had received my marching orders, so I decided to instead pet Shiromaru, who was sitting outside.

“Wuff!” When it came to petting Shiromaru, I was confident that I was one or two steps ahead of Aura, but I couldn’t really call that a slave’s duty. In other words, I was really just chipping in. I knew I should find something else that I ought to be doing, but I couldn’t think of anything at the moment. By the time I’d reached that point, Shiromaru had flopped over and I was now rubbing his belly.

“Aroooooooooo!” Suddenly, Shiromaru let out a noise that I had never heard before and stopped moving as if he were dead! No—it looked like he was alive because his limbs were twitching. Still, how had this happened...?

Hearing the commotion, Tenma looked at Shiromaru, then asked me what had happened. I told him everything I remembered, but because I’d been spacing out at the time, my tale was rather lacking in detail.

Regardless, Tenma seemed to have understood what was going on. He pressed a cloth to Shiromaru’s nose, and Shiromaru immediately stood up. I was surprised to see his outstretched paws as he lay there, but apparently he was fine. Shiromaru teared up a little and rubbed his nose against Tenma to show his displeasure. However, Tenma threw him some dried meat, at which

point he perked up again.

Concerned about the cloth Tenma had pressed to Shiromaru's nose, I asked him to take it out again. Tenma repeatedly told me it wasn't a good idea, but I was still curious, so I begged him to do so. Shiromaru hurriedly distanced himself from us, fearing that he might have the cloth pressed to his nose again.

I succeeded in getting Tenma to take out the cloth, and he put it close to my nose.

"Ugh!" I almost lost consciousness. Luckily, Tenma supported me, so I didn't hit the ground, but for a while my nose didn't seem to work properly.

"What is this smell?!" The pungent odor seemed to pierce through my body, and I couldn't stand up straight. Tenma helped me over to an empty box near the store to sit down. I asked him about the cloth.

"Oh—I was trying to create a new medicine, and this was a failed batch. It can be used like smelling salts in case of an emergency," he told me with an apologetic look on his face. Apparently, he'd been trying to make a new antiseptic solution and accidentally added something that caused an irritating odor, resulting in something like a powerful drug. However, the thing that was put in by mistake didn't have a pungent odor itself. Instead, it seemed to have reacted with the ingredients that were already in the mixture, thereby producing a strong odor.

Besides the horrible smell, it wasn't harmful to the body. Tenma hadn't disposed of it because he thought it would be wasteful to do so, but honestly I thought it might be possible to kill people with the pungent smell alone.

"Jeanne, please don't pet Shiromaru's belly in the future."

I didn't know why I was hereby forbidden from petting Shiromaru's belly, but apparently it had something to do with his dignity. I was told to ask Aura about it later.

"Big bargains, big bargains!" While I was drinking some water Tenma had given me, Aura returned, glowing with happiness. She was carrying an armload of loot today, which was more than usual. "Great job, Jeanne! Thanks to that incredible noise you got out of Shiromaru, everyone froze up, and I was able to

make my move and snag all the good bargains!”

I was suffering over here... Slightly irritated by Aura’s carefree remarks, I decided not to say anything for the moment. I’d get back at her later tonight.

By the time we returned to my apartment after shopping, it was time to start preparing dinner.

Aura quickly headed to the kitchen, and I followed behind her to help out. However, since she was in such high spirits from a successful shopping trip, she refused my assistance with a smile on her face... Maybe she thought I would just screw up and didn’t want me to ruin her good mood.

I had no idea what to do, so I tried to pet Shiromaru, but he ran away the moment our eyes met. I ended up being consoled by Rocket.

And after a more extravagant dinner than usual, it was time for my revenge. I chose the bath as my stage. My plan was to attack Aura’s weak point—her stomach!

The results, however, were bad. It was a crushing defeat. I succeeded in attacking Aura’s stomach, but due to counterattacks launched from her other parts, I ended up sinking into the bathtub. To be more specific, the attacks were from Aura’s breasts, which had grown even bigger recently, due to our recent training and better nutrition... I wondered why mine weren’t growing, even though we did the same training and ate the same food...

I asked Leena for advice, and from that point onwards, I added breast-enlarging exercises to my daily routine.

By the way, after that, I asked Aura why Shiromaru had fainted, but then once she answered me I decided to seal it in the depths of my memory. However, I had to relive my embarrassment frequently because Aura kept bringing it up and teasing me by calling me a “smooth operator” and “golden fingers.”

Extra Story: Amy Yearns for the Sky

“Wow!” I couldn’t help but cry out when I saw the thunderbirds flying over my head. I was so startled my mouth hung open, and I quickly closed it. But apparently I was too late, because everyone around me was staring at me. Luckily, I was surrounded by friends, so it wasn’t a big deal.

Right now I was outside the city walls of Sagan. Normally, a child like me wouldn’t be able to go outside, but I was accompanied by the people from the Tamers’ Guild and their followers, so it was incredibly safe. We were also gathered in a place close enough that we could still see the city gates.

The reason we’d come outside today was to relieve the stress of our followers. Since followers were monsters who obeyed the commands of their masters, they couldn’t travel around the city freely. They had a certain amount of freedom inside the dungeon, but it was hard for monsters like thunderbirds who flew in the sky to be comfortable there. So it was necessary to let them have a day of freedom outside the city every once in a while.

My followers, Rocky and Birdie, were bird-type monsters, but since they were still babies they couldn’t fly yet. Letting them out in my backyard and inside my house was sufficient to let them burn off their stress.

Honestly speaking, there was no reason for me to be here right now, but Agris had told me that it was better to get my birds used to the outside world while they were young, so that they could grow up and adapt to any environment.

Lately, I had been spending a lot of time with the Tamers’ Guild. Since I didn’t have as much opportunity to learn magic as I had before, I used this time to study followers.

At first, I thought that I could just have Master Tenma teach me about followers, but he said I would learn more from Agris and the others, and asked them to mentor me. Agris was more than willing to teach me, as he said it lined up with the guild’s principles. However, since everyone in the guild was an adventurer and had other jobs, they could only teach me in their free time. But

it was still a blessing, and I was grateful for the opportunity.

After that, whenever I had time, I headed to the adventurers' guild to see whether there was anyone available to teach me. The others there also greeted me when they saw me and began to take care of me in all kinds of ways, so I naturally became friends with them.

Since each of them had a different type of monster as their follower, they would tell me all kinds of interesting and useful stories, and stories about common mistakes. Agris had a long career as an adventurer here in Sagan and was a veteran; his stories were always very informative. So it was only natural that I began to ask him more questions.

Another person I often talked to was Ted, who had thunderbirds as his followers. Rockbirds and thunderbirds are completely different sizes, but since both are bird-type monsters, he often came to me with useful information. When we first started talking, I learned that Ted made use of his thunderbirds' flight abilities to use them as couriers.

When I first heard about this, I initially thought he had the birds running errands, and everyone laughed at me. But actually, Ted used flying magic, then grabbed onto one of his thunderbirds' legs to fly through the sky. If someone who wasn't aware of what was going on spotted him, they might have thought the enormous bird was flying around with their prey.

Depending on the destination and the items to be delivered, it could be both cheaper and faster than hiring a carriage or a merchant to deliver goods, so it was quite a popular method.

Ted saw it as a way to both relieve the birds' stress and to make some cash on the side. He actively sought out even the smallest of errands for his courier job.

Once he'd told me about this, I thought I might want to do that myself someday. It wasn't because I was after the money (although that would have been a nice bonus)—most of all I wanted to fly through the sky with Rocky and Birdie!

Ted told me that, setting aside the matter of becoming a courier, I should first ask Tenma's advice about magic. That evening, I waited for Master Tenma outside his room. It seemed like they were dungeon diving like usual, then went

shopping afterwards, so they returned home later than normal.

Once Master Tenma spotted me outside the apartment, he came right over and heard me out. Both Jeanne and Shiromaru looked utterly exhausted, but Aura's face was glowing. I was a bit concerned and asked about this, but he told me not to bother myself about it, so I dropped the subject.

Getting right to the point, I told him I wanted to fly through the sky with Rocky and Birdie, and would he please teach me flying magic? After thinking it over for a while, he agreed.

Apparently, however, the ability to use flying magic depended on the aptitude of the individual learning it, so there was no guarantee that I would be able to. I told him I didn't care, and that I still wanted to learn. He said that Rocky and Birdie were still young and that it would take at least half a year for them to be able to fly freely. Even if I learned flying magic first, I was strictly advised not to overdo it with the two of them. If I forced them to do too much while they were young, their bones would become distorted and they wouldn't be able to fly properly when they grew up.

"Yes, I understand!" I replied energetically, and Master Tenma nodded, proceeding to make plans for the future.

Basically, we would practice magic when he was free—that hadn't changed. From now on, though, in addition to my other magic studies, he was going to teach me the basics of using flying magic. The reason that he would only teach me the basics for now was that it was dangerous to fly through the air without having a solid foundation of basic magic first. But above all, it was because my magical power was still low.

Apparently, flying magic consumes mana constantly as you fly, so even if I learned how to use it today, I wouldn't be able to fly for more than a minute. What's more, if I developed any strange habits with regards to magic, it would be difficult to correct them later. That was why I was only allowed to practice the basics for now.

There was another reason too; Master Tenma didn't know when he would leave Sagan. But once I'd learned the basics, he said it was all right for Ted or Agris to become my teacher.

Since I had to wait for Rocky and Birdie to grow up anyway, I didn't mind taking it slow. I thought of this as my training period that would lead up to flying freely through the sky someday.

That night, I was so excited that I couldn't fall asleep. I opened the window and looked outside. There was a suspicious mood coming from Master Tenma's carriage (the bath), along with Jeanne doing some rather strange exercises outside in the middle of the night. Other than that, it seemed like any other night.

The next day, I got up earlier than usual, found Master Tenma in the garden, and immediately began my training.

Apparently, when you use flying magic you have to wrap your whole body up in magical energy. We started by having me practice doing that to just my arm. According to Tenma, this method could be applied in various ways, and he still practiced doing this daily.

I thought since it was the most rudimentary step in the process, it wouldn't take me that long to master, but I was naive. No matter how many times I tried to do as I'd been told, I couldn't do it with my fingers, let alone my whole arm... This made me quite depressed, but Master Tenma comforted me by saying that it was normal to struggle in the beginning. However, it seemed like he'd been much younger than me when he had mastered it...

At any rate, I decided to practice this technique whenever I had free time.

He prepared a list with exercises for me to practice as well as various precautions. I copied it down and put it in my room. Tenma's explanation of the list was simple, but when I told Agris about it later, he told me, "In a sense, this is a recipe containing the secret to acquiring magic, so take good care of it."

After Master and his party headed for the dungeon, I went to the adventurers' guild as usual and asked Agris and the others to help me with my studies.

Perhaps it was because I had been studying with the Tamers' Guild so much lately, but I'd come to think of the material at school as way too easy. That was a good thing, but...maybe that meant it was no longer necessary for me to go to school? When I told my mother and grandmother that, however, they got very

angry with me. They said that school is a place not only for studying, but for learning how to get along well with others, and for learning common sense. I realized they were right, and felt bad about my own shortsightedness.

I tried my best to practice basic magic for several days, but there was no sign of improvement whatsoever... When I consulted with Master Tenma, he told me that everyone learned at their own pace.

He recommended that I use visualization techniques whenever I got stuck. Apparently, visualizing your reasons for wanting to fly and how you would fly through the sky increased your imaginative power, which was important for improving your magic.

I gave his instructions a try.

First—why did I want to fly? Because I wanted to fly through the sky freely like Ted and his thunderbirds, and I wanted to see scenery that I had never seen before with Rocky and Birdie.

How would I fly through the sky? I'd thought about casting flying magic and then holding on to either Birdie's or Rocky's legs, but I'd been told that would be difficult. That was because rockbirds aren't as good at flying as thunderbirds and they're also weaker. Holding on to their legs might cause them to lose their balance in the air and fall to the ground.

My next thought was the possibility of riding on one of their backs, but that might have been even more difficult than holding on to their legs. Then I considered holding on to one leg from each bird, or even holding on to the leg of one bird and standing on the back of the other, but none of that seemed feasible.

I could never have imagined learning how to fly would be this difficult, but Master Tenma wasn't surprised I was struggling. He drew a picture on the ground to explain it to me. I wouldn't have said he was *good* at drawing, but I could tell what he was trying to explain.

Master's first suggestion was tying a string to the legs of the two birds (or having them hold it), then holding on to the string while using flying magic to fly through the sky. This method let you adjust the length of the string to allow the two birds to fly without colliding with each other—this was similar to one of my

ideas, but in mine the two birds would be too close to each other to flap their wings. This method would even make it possible to fly in a sitting position by attaching a board or platform to the string. My teacher called this the “Gegege” method, but I honestly didn’t understand what he was saying. However, the drawback was that they wouldn’t be able to fly well unless their breathing was in sync, and they wouldn’t be able to fly for long periods of time because their center of gravity would tend to lean to one side.

The next method was boosting the two birds with magic, then holding on to their legs to fly. To put it simply, the goal was to use Boost magic to make up for the birds’ weaknesses. In addition to that, you could create a sort of windbreaker by using Wind magic in front of the bird you were holding on to, which might allow it to fly longer distances than the other method. However, there was also a drawback, which was that I would have to use multiple magic spells at the same time.

That meant it would be much more difficult than the first method, since I had little mana and low magic skill. However, this method seemed the most reliable.

Those were the only two methods he explained, but he told me that if I improved them and combined them, I could come up with a better method myself. According to him, that was how magic spells evolved.

I was impressed with everything he taught me and resumed practicing focusing magical energy into my hands. Surprisingly, I succeeded! However, even though it was a success, I was only able to envelop my fingers in magic. Soon after, though, I was able to quickly envelop my palm.

I wondered why I was able to do it all of a sudden, but according to Master Tenma, it was because “your mind was too stiff, but now it’s relaxed and pliable.” He also said, “I think it’s because you thought about various ways to fly through the sky, so your mind became flexible for a while.”

Anyway, I was able to clear the first stage, so I was definitely one step closer to realizing my dream!

He told me not to get carried away, but I was in high spirits, and thought that I could do anything now. I tried to envelop various parts of my body with magical power. Because of that, the magical power I had maintained around my hands

without much effort began to dissipate. Panicking slightly, I tried to remember the feeling I'd had when I succeeded and challenged myself, and succeeded again!

Master Tenma got a little mad at me, but told me that he was glad I didn't make any big mistakes. I'd try to be more careful in the future.

But who could blame me for the huge grin I'd have on my face every time I remembered today's success?

Isekai Tensei: Reincarnated to Another World 3 / End

Afterword

Thank you for picking up volume 3 of *Isekai Tensei: Reincarnated to Another World*. Thankfully, I was able to get this book out safely. The reason I say that is because just before writing this afterword, I was hospitalized for more than two weeks, but I managed to get discharged. I went to the hospital with the intention of getting cold medicine—I never imagined my condition would be so serious that I would end up being urgently hospitalized. Not only did I freak out, but so did my family! Well, really it was only my family who freaked out, and that was because I was bedridden with an IV and on oxygen. Also, thanks to the tubes attached to certain parts of my body, I had many valuable experiences I never wanted to... Anyway...

There are many other things I want to tell you regarding my hospital stay, but putting that aside, in volume 3, we have a new follower, the dragon Solomon, and new heroines, Jeanne and Aura. Now that Solomon has appeared, Tenma has all the followers I originally thought of when I first planned to write this series. I'd like to explain why Solomon was just an egg in the dungeon, but I haven't gotten the chance to yet. I hope I will soon. (I haven't had a chance to write it in the web version yet.) Jeanne and Aura weren't characters I originally planned in the early stages of writing, but they came to mind when I was writing the dungeon scenes. I decided on a whim to include them, imagining them as female characters who would get closer to Tenma than the ones who appeared in volume 2.

Although I have Aura categorized as a heroine, her personality definitely contrasts with her appearance, so she's kind of a bonus heroine in addition to Jeanne...

This volume (equivalent to Chapter 3) ends with the story of Merlin, but in fact, this story of Merlin is the beginning of Chapter 4. So volume 4 will start from the middle of the first episode of Chapter 4 of the web version. For a while after this, the story will proceed with the royal capital and its surroundings as the central backdrop.

And as you can imagine from Merlin's story, Tenma and Merlin will finally meet again in the next volume. But before that, Tenma meets the relative of an acquaintance. These characters will continue to be important in the story. In addition, this volume will have many nostalgic reunions for Tenma. Other rivals will appear, and we'll get along with them as well.

Also, I have something else to report. The manga version of this series is underway! It was quite a shock when I received the offer to turn this story into a book, but I never thought that I would receive an offer for a manga adaptation too!

I don't have any details yet, but I think the publisher will tell me more soon. Please support the manga version when it comes out!

Thank you to all the readers who supported *Isekai Tensei*, my editor who helped me in various ways, Nemu who drew Aura much cuter than I ever imagined, and everyone from the publishing company. Thank you so much.

Kenichi

An illustration of three anime-style girls in a town street. The girl on the left has long white hair and wears a light blue dress with dark blue bows. The girl in the middle has short blonde hair and wears a dark grey dress with a brown bag. The girl on the right has brown hair in pigtails, wears a red headscarf, a red corset, and a white skirt with red and blue accents. The background shows a town street with buildings and a blue sky.

Aura

Jean

Amy

ISEKAI TENSEI:
RECRUITED TO
ANOTHER WORLD

3



Jin Geed

Mennas

Leena

Galatt

Bonus Short Story

A Huge Misunderstanding

“Wait, isn’t that...?” I just happened to be passing by a jewelry store when I spotted Mennas, whom I’d never pegged as having any particular interest in jewelry. Not only that, but she was in the middle of sighing.

“Master Tenma, what is that thing in front of Mennas?” Following my gaze, Aura pointed.

“Is it a wedding dress?”

Apparently, Mennas was sighing and standing in front of a frilly wedding dress that had a gemstone decorating the bosom.

“Does Mennas want to wear a wedding dress too?” Jeanne asked.

“No—I think she’s just thinking about marrying someone else,” Aura answered confidently.

“At any rate, let’s ask her and find out. Hey, Mennas!”

She looked surprised to hear her name and looked around before spotting us. Once she saw us, she quickly jumped away from the dress. “I-It’s unusual to see you all here.” Her gaze shifted from the dress to us as she walked over.

“True. What were you looking at in the jewelry shop?”

“O-Oh, that’s not important... Anyway, I’m really sorry about this, but something urgent came up so I gotta go. Bye!”

The moment I tried to ask her what she was up to, she broke out in a cold sweat and ran away.

“Suspicious.”

“Very suspicious.”

“Definitely suspicious.”

We all shared the same reaction as we watched a flustered Mennas scurry away.

“Master Tenma, it’s Jin and his party.”

A few days after we observed Mennas’s suspicious behavior, Jin and the others showed up to my apartment with unusually serious looks on their faces. Everyone besides Mennas was there, so we figured it must be related to the events of the other day.

“Sorry to just show up like this, but we need to ask your advice regarding Mennas.” Jin told me that he’d noticed a change in her behavior recently. He’d run into Aura in town and she’d told him about the episode in front of the jewelry shop, so he’d decided to come ask me for advice.

“You really shouldn’t be asking a kid for advice.”

“No one thinks of you as a kid, Tenma!” all three of them answered in unison. I thought maybe they were right, but hearing it said so firmly did hurt a little.

“Well, at any rate, it seems like Mennas is thinking about marriage. I don’t know with whom, but she’s got a lot of friends and she’s a skilled adventurer, so she’s surprisingly popular,” Jin said.

“Lately she’s expressed an interest in feminine accessories and clothes that she never seemed into before,” Galatt said.

“Also, she’s been staring at my outfits a lot and going to clothing shops, then sighing when she opens her wallet,” Leena chimed in.

All of that, in addition to hearing the story from Aura about the wedding dress, led them to the conclusion that Mennas was thinking about marriage.

“If Mennas wants to get married, I’d raise no objections. Although I’m sure that if that happened, that would mean she’d have to leave the Dawnswords and we’d lose a valuable portion of our offense, but I guess that can’t be helped.”

“The question is, what can we do for Mennas? If she gets married, she’ll probably have to leave the adventuring business.”

“I want to get her something she can remember us by, but I’m just not sure what.”

That was why they had come to ask me for my advice. Personally, I felt sad at the notion that a fellow adventurer acquaintance of mine would be quitting the business, but getting married and building a family was something to celebrate. I decided to go ahead and dispense some advice to Jin and the others on the matter.

“First, I think it would be good to give her some kind of jewelry, as long as it’s not a ring.”

“Why not?”

“Isn’t that obvious?”

Jin and Galatt didn’t seem to understand why they couldn’t give her a ring. Leena enlightened them. “Traditionally, it’s the *husband* who gives his bride a ring. And since there are three men involved in this situation now, her future husband might not like his wife wearing a ring given to her by another man! Most of all, though, it would be weird for her to wear a wedding ring in addition to the ring we gave her.”

In this world, people from wealthy families exchanged wedding rings. Since Mennas had made a lot of money as an adventurer, one might assume that her groom-to-be would have a similar income to her.

After explaining this to the two men, they seemed to accept Leena’s explanation, but couldn’t think of anything else to get for Mennas.

“Other possible options are a bracelet or necklace. That way, it won’t overlap with what her groom-to-be gives her, and it won’t look like there was any sort of deep meaning to it either.”

“True. That’s the safest choice.”

In the end, they decided to get her a necklace. I would make the chain, and Jin and the others would supply the gemstones. I immediately set to work.

“That being said, I think it would have been better to buy the chain from a jewelry store, then have me make the setting for the gems...”

But since I didn't know what kind of gems Jin and the others would bring, all I could do now was come up with various designs for the setting. I wasn't very familiar with women's jewelry, so I asked Jeanne and Aura for help. The two were delighted to be able to chip in, and in the end, we came up with more than twenty designs in one day.

"Tenma, I brought you the gems."

The next morning, Jin returned with a diamond and a ruby, which were said to be the best quality items in the store, and which were quite expensive.

"All right, then. Which design do you like best?" After looking at the two gems, I showed them the designs we'd made the day before. They seemed stunned at how many we'd come up with. Leena immediately started looking through them and began choosing the ones she liked.

"No wonder you used to be a noble. These designs could be sold in a store!" Leena said, choosing a simple rhombus shape. I asked her why she'd picked such a basic design, and she told me, "It's difficult to match elaborate jewelry with what you're wearing, so it's better to keep it simple."

I was able to embed the jewels into the setting in no time, but it did take a lot of time to make the setting just right according to the design (mainly due to detailed instructions from the women). The sun had already set by the time I was finished. Moreover, I finished right before Mennas arrived at my apartment. Apparently she was worried when the others hadn't returned. Nevertheless, her sudden arrival made us quite flustered. She found our behavior quite suspicious, but Jin and Galatt managed to make sufficient excuses.

"Hey, if we're gonna give it to her anyway, why don't we just give it to her now?" I asked.

"Then it won't seem very special, though," Leena objected. Aura and Jeanne seemed to agree with her.

"I had a feeling you were all out messing around somewhere, and here you are at Tenma's house! Why didn't you invite me along? Come on, it's late. Let's go eat dinner. Do you want to join us, Tenma?"

So we all ended up eating dinner together. Both Jin and Galatt muttered, “As if she’s one to talk, since she was gone all morning...” but everyone ignored them.

On the way home from dinner, Jin said he would bring up the topic at hand with Mennas the following afternoon, and we all agreed with this idea. I gave him the necklace before we parted ways, but Mennas saw us sneaking around and we were afraid we might get busted. Jin quickly made up an excuse to get us out of it by saying, “Secrets between men are like treasures,” but Mennas started giving me critical looks after that. I was certain she wouldn’t forget this. By the way, she was giving Jin the same looks.

The next afternoon, I went to meet up with the others, and the four members of the Dawnswords were already there. But for some reason, Mennas was the only one who didn’t understand why she was meeting up with us, so she thought we were keeping another secret. As such, she was in a pretty bad mood.

“Well, now that we’re all here, let’s head into the guild. I’ve reserved a private room for us,” Jin said. We all followed him inside. The moment we got there, Galatt locked the door. This made Mennas even more suspicious, but she reluctantly took a seat after some prodding from Leena. We all sat in a semicircle around Mennas.

“Mennas. Are you sure you’re not keeping a secret from us?” Jin said.

“What do you mean?”

“You’ve been acting strange lately,” Galatt said.

“For example, you’ve been acting like you’re keeping a secret because you feel guilty towards us about something,” Leena said.

Mennas’s expression visibly changed once she heard this.

“We’re not the only ones who think this way. Tenma and the girls have noticed your strange behavior too.”

“What?!” Mennas exclaimed with surprise, but once she saw us nodding she

realized Jin was telling the truth.

“So you *are* hiding something. We’ve got a pretty good idea of what it is, but we’d like to hear it coming straight from you. We’re all friends here, right?”

“Yeah. You don’t need to feel bad. Everyone makes mistakes.”

After listening to Jin and Leena, Mennas seemed to make up her mind. “To be honest... Well... Ahh, I’m sorry! I used your favorite clothes to polish my sword and my armor, Jin! And Galatt, I accidentally drank the entire bottle of that alcohol you really like! And Leena... I ruined several pairs of your underwear!”

“...Huh?!” all three of them exclaimed at once.

According to Mennas, she had just finished doing maintenance on her sword and armor and happened to use Jin’s clothes to polish them. She didn’t realize they were his clothes until later because they were so dirty; she’d thought they were just rags. Once she was done polishing, though, they really had turned into rags. As for Galatt, she’d mistaken his bottle of alcohol for one she had bought, and gulped it all down. Then, she had accidentally washed Leena’s expensive underwear after it slipped into her own laundry. She’d scrubbed it so viciously it had ended up ruined.

“So the reason you were sighing every time you looked into your wallet...”

“That was just because I didn’t have enough money to pay you all back for the things I ruined.”

“Why were you going around to all those clothing stores, then?”

“I was looking for something similar to Jin’s favorite clothes.”

“Why were you looking at that dress?”

“Dress? Oh, that. I thought the underwear sitting next to the dress looked like Leena’s, but it was too expensive. I didn’t know if I should just go ahead and buy it or not, but then Tenma came up to me, so I got flustered and ran off.”

And that was that. Now, if that were all true, that would mean it was a terrible misunderstanding on our part. I was only out the cost of the chain, but Jin and the others had spent a small fortune on those gemstones.

“Anyway, don’t you think you’re going a bit overboard bringing me here to

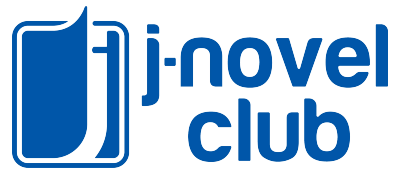
confess in front of Tenma and the girls too?” Mennas glared, but Jin and the others were so shocked they couldn’t even move a muscle. Mennas wasn’t sure what to do now since they were in this state, and looked at me for help. I ended up having to explain the whole situation.

“Ha ha... Pfft! Bwa ha ha! Me, getting married?! Talk about a huge misunderstanding! Ha ha ha!” She rolled around laughing for quite some time. Her laughter was so loud it seeped out of the room and a concerned guild worker came to check on us, but we were able to shoo them away.

“However, I will accept the necklace you all worked so hard on.” She quickly took the necklace from Jin and stowed it in her magic bag. Now the three of them finally came to their senses and tried to recover it from her, but after Mennas told them she had finally managed to get the alcohol and several pairs of underwear, Galatt and Leena seemed satisfied. Apparently she had gotten them way better items than what she’d ruined in the first place, so they had no more complaints. However, it seemed that Mennas couldn’t find clothes for Jin, and since he’d liked those clothes so much there was nothing she could do to make up for it, so he remained stubborn. However...

“It’s not my fault I couldn’t replace them! I looked all over town and couldn’t find clothes that ugly anywhere!” Mennas shouted, and Jin fell silent. Not only that, but her voice had echoed throughout the guild, so after that rumors spread among Sagan’s adventurers that Jin had terrible fashion sense.

From that day forward, Mennas could be spotted walking around Sagan looking a bit fancier than usual, wearing a gleaming necklace.



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Isekai Tensei: Recruited to Another World Volume 3

by Kenichi

Translated by Andria McKnight Edited by Momo

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