

SURVIVAL IN ANOTHER WORLD WITH MY MISTRESS

4 written by RYUTO
illustrated by YAPPEN
NOVEL



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SURVIVAL IN ANOTHER WORLD WITH MY MISTRESS

NOVEL
4

WRITTEN BY **Ryuto**
ILLUSTRATED BY **Yappen**



Seven Seas Entertainment

Goshuzinsama to yuku isekai survival Vol. 4
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Prologue:

Surviving with a Dragon in the Black Forest

HOWDY, THIS IS KOUSUKE, other-world survivor. Right now, I'm hiding with Melty near a small farming village called Almas on the border of Merinesburg, the capital of the former Kingdom of Merinard. As for why the two of us are in hiding, well, it'd take an entire novel to explain things, but to put it simply: Thanks to the efforts of a rat-bastard fox, I was kidnapped and brought to the city of Merinesburg, a stronghold of the Holy Kingdom. I was then tossed into a prison cell, which I subsequently escaped.

Underneath Merinesburg, I met the three slime girls, Lime, Bess, and Poiso, and they helped nurse me back to health. Afterward, I infiltrated the city in the hopes of finding mithril, so that I could build a golem communicator and get in touch with Sylphy and the others.

My search led me to an Adolist cathedral, and it was there that I ran into the Saint of Truth, Eleonora, just as she was about to be assassinated. I ended up saving her life, but I was fatally poisoned in the process.

Thanks to Elen's treatment, I managed to recover. Elen and I became rather close, and I earned her trust as a contact between the two conflicting sects of Adolism. Once I recovered, I promised that I'd see Elen again, and I returned underground to where the slime girls were waiting.

Or rather, that's how it was supposed to go. On my way back to the slime girls, I bumped into Melty, who had come to the city on her own to search for me. Suspicious of the fact that I'd gotten close to Adolists, she interrogated me. I got back on her good side and then went back underground, where I finally used a large golem communicator to get in touch with Sylphy.

With that taken care of, Melty and I said goodbye to the slime girls, as they couldn't leave Merinesburg. But not long after, we were spotted by the Holy Kingdom army at a farming village on the edge of the city.

This brings us to the present.

"You okay?"

“Yeah, no problems here.”

“Thank goodness.”

The leisurely voice of the slime girl, Lime, came through from the other end of the wireless golem communicator. After we got in touch with Sylphy, we left the large communicator there with the girls. We decided to keep in touch with each other while we were still in range.

“Are you certain you’re all right, Kousuke? You’re not exactly the picture of strength, you know.”

“Thanks, Poiso, but Melty’s got me covered on that end. If anything, I’d be more worried for anyone who tries to fight her.”

“Excuse me, but I’m just a weak maiden.”

“Now that’s funny,” Bess said, and the both of them giggled.

“Behave, you two.”

Bess sounded pretty serious, but she was kind and just concerned. The one who sometimes mixed insults into her sentences was Poiso. And then the person next to me with the big smile on her face was the powerful overlord pretending to be a sheep demi-human, Melty. She only just recently told me the truth about the overlord thing.

Apparently, I was the only one who didn’t know. I really wish she’d told me something so important sooner.

She used to have incredible horns on her head, but not anymore. When she chose to infiltrate enemy territory, she willingly cut them off so as to not stand out. For races with horns, losing them was usually the worst possible punishment they could receive, but she did it to save me. I needed to make sure I took responsibility for that.

“We’re currently hiding out in the cliffs,” I told the slime girls. “I made a room in here, so we’re getting ready while watching out down below. They’re not going to be able to find us here, and even if they did, they’d have no means of getting in, so we have plenty of ways we could escape. No worries.”

“If you say so, I’m not worried!”

“You know me. I can dig through dirt or rocks. Even if they surrounded us, I could dig to the rock cliff and escape out of the top.”

“And if things get really bad,” Melty added, “I can just beat the ever-living life out of them!”

“I feel for the soldiers of the Holy Kingdom. Just make sure you at least leave their bodies intact.”

“I have no intention of wreaking that kind of havoc,” Melty reassured Bess. “I’ll be careful, I promise.”

So, she has to be careful lest she tear them limb from limb? Gotcha.

“Anyway, once they leave, we plan on heading for the Sorel Mountains. It’s supposedly dangerous there, but if we can make it through, we’ll cut down on travel time significantly. I can’t be sure until I watch them for a little longer, but I don’t think they expect us to take that route. It’ll be perfect for shaking them off our tail.”

“No problem?”

“No problem,” Melty reassured. “I’m by his side.”

“And I can fight when I’ve done the prep work. Come nightfall, I’ll make a shelter underground so we can rest.”

“Gotcha... Be careful, ‘kay?” Lime said.

“Of course,” said Melty

“I’m also worried about you, Kousuke.”

“Seriously, I’ll be fine.”

“And Melty, take it easy, okay?”

“Huh? Me?”

Melty tilted her head in response to Poiso’s voice over the communicator. I did as well.

“Don’t play dumb. I know you’ve been going at Kousuke like a rabid beast.”

“Kousuke’s gonna dry out...” Lime said, with sincere worry in her voice.

“I want to believe she won’t go that far.” Bess interjected.

“I would never! Jeez! I’m hanging up!” Melty’s face turned bright red and she cut the transmission.

“I-I won’t go that far, I promise,” she attempted to explain as she turned around, beet red.

We’d been holed up here for three days. Let’s just say that when I woke up in the morning, my health and stamina gauges were down from 80% to 70%. If you can pick up what I’m putting down.

“Y-yeah, sure.”

“What kind of reaction was that?!”

I shrugged. “I just figured you’ve been holding back.”

Thinking back on the past few nights, it’s felt like she’d been restraining herself from going all out. Honestly, if she’d done otherwise I’d be dead.

“Do you want a taste of me when I’m serious?”

It looked like my reaction rubbed her the wrong way. Melty was glaring at me. This was bad.

“Wait, hold up just a second! I still have things to do today—”

“I refuse to wait. Take this!”

“Whoa!”

She pushed me down, preventing me from fighting back. How could a puny mortal like me resist an Overlord?

Chapter 1: Off to the Sorel Mountains

SEVERAL DAYS WENT BY, and we spent them digging deeper into the rock cliff, creating an exit above and cutting down trees up top to collect materials before we headed off into the Sorel Mountains.

“Looks like they’ve completely given up,” Melty commented, looking down below.

“Sure seems that way.”

At least from our vantage point through the peephole I’d made, there was no longer any sign of the Holy Kingdom soldiers who’d been chasing us. We could see Almas Village, but the barracks were all gone. The soldiers were nowhere to be seen.

“We’re about ready, so I guess it’s time to head off,” I said.

“Sounds good to me.”

I’d mass produced stone blocks and as much ammunition as I could. When I got kidnapped, I left all of my weapons, tools, and materials in Arichburg, but fortunately, I had lots of food on me, so on that front we had nothing to worry about. Hell, I even had sweets and booze.

“Please make sure you have easy access to your weapons,” Melty reminded me.

“You got it.”

I had the weapons registered to my shortcut key. First up were my short spear and short sword for close-range combat. I didn’t plan on doing any fighting, but if you wanted to be a survivor, you needed to set your close-range weapons to your shortcut keys, just in case. I also had a large knife equipped and easily accessible.

Other than that, I mostly had firearms ready to go. A .45 automatic handgun, a .45 submachine gun, a .12 gauge double-barrel shotgun, and a 7.62-mm

assault rifle. In terms of heavy weaponry, I had a .40 grenade launcher and an anti-tank rocket launcher.

That last one was kinda overkill, but who knew what might happen. Hell, a dragon might appear out of nowhere! We'd need heavy firepower in that case. Melty and I were going to be traveling through the monster-infested Sorel Mountains, so I was getting serious this time. No holding back.

I considered bringing a pump action model shotgun instead. When it came to continuous firepower, though, my submachine gun and auto rifle filled that slot, so I ended up focusing on immediate power and rolling with a double barrel shotgun.

All of those weapons were simple and dependable as well as easy to produce. They were kind of old-fashioned in that way, but I was getting the best firepower for my buck. I guess if I had one complaint, it's that I would've liked to have a semi-auto shotgun and a grenade launcher with a six-round circular clip. But, whatever—if I wanted to make those, I'd need specific materials, specific tools, and a lot more time.

I also had some grenades on hand. When it came to close-range combat, the more the merrier.

“You've got all kinds of weapons on you, huh?” said Melty. “Most of them I've never seen before...”

“Really? I guess that makes sense...”

I'd rarely ever fought on the frontlines. When I made my way through the Omitt Badlands, I went kinda buck wild with a pump action shotgun, but that's about it. I made the others use bolt action rifles. And at the fort, at most I'd used a small cannon.

“What do they do?”

“They pretty much all fire metal bullets,” I explained. “This fires seven in a row, and this fires the same size of bullet thirty times in a row. This one right here seems small, but it fires bullets about two times faster and has piercing abilities that can be fired thirty times in a row. This one can fire multiple bullets simultaneously, twice. It can also fire a single large shot. Now this baby, well,

she can fire a single explosive round, so she's a real beast."

"It's like a magic staff. Kind of thick, though."

Melty took the anti-tank rocket launcher into her hands. It was the kind of weapon that'd have you wanting to shout out, "Auf wiedersehen!" when you fire it. Or, wait, maybe that's what you say when someone fires a rocket at you? Hmmm.

"That'd be one horrifying magic staff..."

"They're pretty horrifying already, you know?"

"...Good point."

I thought back to that one time when Ira used lightning magic to take out a huge number of gizma. Melty was right—magic staffs were no laughing matter. In my head I always equated them with old dudes and sticks made of wood. Those did exist, but staffs made solely with wood were for beginners. Expert magic wielders had staffs made with mithril, magic stone, and all kinds of other materials to beef up the effectiveness of their magic.

"By the way, are you sure you don't need any practice with these weapons?" Melty asked.

"Probably not... What do you think?"

"If these are weapons you've never used before, you probably should. And since I'm with you, I'd like to understand how your weapons work too. It'd be safer that way."

"Excellent point, partner."

I followed her constructive advice and decided to take shots with all the guns I'd made before we set off.

"Is it just me, or have I seen that one before?"

"I've actually used it a few times," I said. "I'm pretty sure I made Sylphy test the revolver I gave her. That's probably when you saw it."

The first gun I test-fired was the .45 automatic handgun. It could hold a total of seven bullets, with an additional eighth in the chamber. Large-caliber bullets

were super powerful. They're also subsonic, which meant they go perfectly with suppressors, not that I had one equipped now.

"The bullets are rather slow," said Melty

"For real...?" Sure, they weren't invisible to the naked eye, but they weren't not so slow that someone could react fast enough to dodge one. "Actually, wait, I remember Madame Zamil and Sir Leonard talking about how they could probably deal with a bullet this fast."

"That's right," Melty said. "I think a skilled warrior would probably be able to react in time."

"And you?"

Melty flashed a smile at me. "I'm just a weak maiden."

She didn't say she couldn't react in time, but I probably shouldn't point that out.

Next up was the submachine gun, which used the same caliber of bullet.

"It looks the same as the last weapon, but the continuous firepower is amazing," Melty commented.

"That's what it's known for."

"Then why use that first weapon at all?"

"Continuous fire means lower accuracy, so a lot of bullets just don't hit the mark. If you have access to endless rounds, that's fine, but I don't."

"I see how that would be troublesome."

Next, I tried out the double barrel shotgun.

"It'd be quite hard to deal with so many bullets flying at you simultaneously," Melty said. "Not to mention it fires twice."

"If you get shot with this thing, dodging it is nearly impossible."

"You'd either have to get out of range or do your best to put up some kind of defense. That said, defense would be quite difficult with so many simultaneous rounds flying your way."

“I never even considered defending against it head-on.”

In video games, shotguns were typically only effective at close range, but in reality, they were actually quite accurate from further away, and more than capable of inflicting fatal wounds. We were talking a kill range of 50 meters or so. It'd be hard to use on a big battlefield, but at close range, it was basically unstoppable.

“Now then, next up is this.”

I whipped out the 7.62-mm assault rifle. It used a banana magazine that held thirty rounds.

“Talk about big.”

“It's as big as it is powerful,” I told her.

I popped the first round into the chamber, took aim at a tree, and pulled the trigger. The thunderous sound of the rifle echoed through the air, and chunks of wood went flying everywhere. I switched from semi-auto to full auto and held down the trigger. This model was modified, so it was pretty stable even when fired on full auto.

“...I think you only need this one,” Melty concluded. “The power, number of rounds, and accuracy make it the best of the bunch as far as I can tell.”

“Honestly, you're not even remotely wrong.”

It wasn't even that much heavier than the submachine gun, plus it could switch between semi and full auto. If I had to come up with a con, it was that it paired poorly with suppressors, so it was super loud. That was it, though.

“It's hard to explain, really. I guess I just like the idea of having options? But that's not it entirely. The handgun and submachine gun both use the same rounds, so the cost performance is really good.”

“I see what you're saying,” she said.

Last but not least came the 40-mm grenade launcher.

Kathunk!

The gun made a goofy little noise as the explosive round flew through the air

and exploded on its target.

“Amazing firepower.”

“Perfect for getting rid of a group of jackasses or doing damage to one big boy. But since it blows up, you gotta be careful not to use it in areas where you have friends fighting.”

“It would be bad to get caught in that blast,” she agreed.

“It might be good for the first shot. Y’know, taking out some small fry early on?”

It took a while to reload, and you couldn’t use it at close-range either.

“You’re not going to try this big one out?” Melty asked, pointing at the terrifying rocket launcher.

“I don’t have a whole lot of rounds, so testing it would be a bit of a waste. Let’s just say it’s even more powerful than the grenade launcher. It’s capable of piercing up to 5cm-thick armor and doing damage.”

“5cm...? Then, couldn’t it pierce a dragon’s scales?”

“Maybe. I couldn’t say for sure without actually trying.”

And just like that, we’d run through all my guns. We made quite a lot of noise doing it, so it’s possible the folks down in Almas heard us messing around. In fact, they almost definitely did. That rifle was mighty loud.

“Shall we get moving?” Melty asked.

“Absolutely.”

With our weapons tested, we left our hideaway and started making for the Sorel Mountains.

“She slipped through my fingers...”

A net had been cast on the road near Ignaat with the hopes of capturing the overlord demi-human woman and the suspicious man who claimed he was a mercenary. But they never appeared. No matter how hard the men searched the woods near the farming village, those two were nowhere to be found. I

presumed that they'd slipped through our net. But according to the locals, nobody had seen them.

It was difficult to believe that any of the locals or merchants would stick their neck out to hide them, which meant they truly hadn't taken the roads.

"Captain, I'm back."

Hannes didn't have a lick of drive in his voice. I'd ordered him to command the search, but it was clear he'd come up with nothing.

"...I suppose that's it, then. We're going to head back and report what happened."

"You mean back to Merinesburg?"

Hannes looked pleased as punch. He was likely thinking of the variety of taverns and brothels in the city. He was a simple-minded fool. A man with no pride as a soldier of the Holy Kingdom's army.

"No, we're heading to Glaiseburg. Get the troops ready to move."

"Huh, roger that," Hannes replied with clear disappointment.

Fortunately, he listened to my orders and began calling out to the other soldiers. Glaiseburg was by no means a small town, but it was nothing compared to Merinesburg. I was certain he was disappointed with the smaller scale of entertainment in his future. But that was not my problem.

"So, you're going through the Sorel Mountains, monster...?"

I turned my gaze toward the perilous Sorel Mountains. It'd be all well and good if they died up there, but an overlord wasn't likely to be bested in such a way. I'd be foolish to assume the wilderness would kill them for me.

Beyond the Sorel Mountains was Arichburg, the city that the self-proclaimed Liberation Army was using as their base of operations.

"...How annoying."

If there truly was an overlord in the Liberation Army's ranks, this would make for a deeply troublesome situation. What could I even write in my report?

I let out a deep sigh as I watched the soldiers prepare to march.

After digging our way out of the cliff, we began walking toward the Sorel Mountains. They were massive, so it was hard to tell just how far away they were, but I was betting our journey would be a long one.

“Walking is gonna take some time,” I said out loud.

“Yep. But there’s no reason we have to just walk, right?”

“Good point.”

After leaving Merinesburg, we had to be careful about who was watching, so we walked like normal people. But if we were taking a route away from the roads, then there was no point in holding back. Nobody was gonna freak out if I pushed my abilities to the max and got a move on, right?

My abilities weren’t limited to just crafting. By visualizing a direction and jumping in my mind, I could move without actually moving my limbs. I could basically slide along the ground, and I could even jump as high as my own height. This was on top of my normal movement speed, so if I really focused my mind, I could run significantly faster than a normal person. If I jumped and then visualized myself jumping, I could do a double jump.

“...You look so weird when you do that,” Melty said.

“C’mon, don’t be mean.”

“Look, I’m just being honest. I can’t help it, I get chills when I see you doing whatever it is you do.” She grimaced at me. “P-please stop.”

Since Melty was being a big meanie, I performed a weird dance while sliding across the ground. She had to hold back her laughter and look away.

C’mon, look at me. Do I look silly? Weird?

I folded my arms and circled Melty with a serious expression on my face.

“I get, I get it already! You win! Can we please get moving? We shouldn’t waste the time we have.”

“Good point. Let’s roll.”

I’d like to get back to Sylphy in Arichburg as soon as possible. I doubted we’d

get through the mountains in one or two days, but the quicker the better.

“Shall we?”

“But of course,” said Melty. “I’ll match your pace, so don’t push yourself too hard.”

“Roger that!”

I started at a jog, then proceeded to jump and slip into a strafe jump, upping my speed. From the outside, I probably looked like I was weirdly flapping in midair and gaining speed for no reason. Awkward. Anyone who saw me would doubt their eyes.

Meanwhile, Melty followed me with a calm and collected expression on her face. I asked her if she wanted leather equipment like mine, but she said she was fine with her current outfit. She had a tough haori on, so it probably wouldn’t get caught on anything.

“There’s a forest ahead of us,” I said. “Shall we go straight through?”

“Nah, let’s go left and dodge it. It’ll be easier to run in a field.”

“Gotcha.”

We changed direction and kept moving, but we soon spotted white smoke further ahead.

“Am I seeing things, or is that a fire?”

“It couldn’t be the Holy Kingdom, right? Do you think they cast a net near the Sorel Mountains as well?”

Did they anticipate us avoiding the woods, and if so, what was the point of the smoke? All they’d be doing is telling us they’re waiting.

“What should we do?” I asked Melty.

“Just to be safe, let’s do some recon.”

“Shouldn’t we steer clear? It might be a trap.”

They could have been using the smoke to nudge us into checking things out.

“No,” she said. “If this is the work of the Holy Kingdom, it’s a chance for us to

wipe these soldiers out. It's too dangerous to fight on the road or in towns, but we're far away from people. It'd be fine to slaughter them all, way out here."

"You're terrifying."

She wasn't wrong that there'd be no way for anyone to know whether they got annihilated by us or by some monsters. But she was, like, real excited about the prospect of slaughter in general.

"We're going to have to fight them eventually," she said.

"I mean, yeah, sure, but..."

I wasn't too into the idea, but it was a little late for that. I may not have seen the place with my own two eyes, but I did once blow away an entire fortress filled with thousands of soldiers. It was far too late for me to be complaining about fighting or getting my hands dirty.

"I'll do what I have to," I conceded.

"..."

Melty said nothing in response, and after moving forward a bit, we entered the woods and started to close in on the source of the smoke.

"It might be a trap, so let's be careful," she warned.

"Yeah... There's definitely someone here."

"A noisemaker...?"

Melty pointed out a trap running through some plants at an awkward height. It was made of vine and animal bones and other bits and pieces. The whole thing was designed so that the bones clapped together when the line was disturbed. A truly basic noisemaker trap.

"This definitely isn't the work of the Holy Kingdom."

"Agreed. We're talking either kobolds, goblins, or orcs. Given the height of the trap, likely goblins. What's the move?" I asked.

Melty turned toward me. Quite frankly, I'd have preferred to just ignore this place altogether.

"If we don't do anything, they might attack Almas, huh?"

“Well... Considering the distance, that’s certainly a possibility.”

“...Then let’s get rid of them.”

“All right.”

Being careful to avoid any other traps, the two of us made our way carefully toward the possible goblin settlement. It’d been a while since I’d gone all stealth mode. Needless to say, I did not have the skill set for that kind of thing, which was why I was doing this my own way.

In other words, I was sliding across the ground without using my feet.

“This is even creepier than usual,” said Melty.

“Then just ignore me.”

Just imagining myself doing it was enough to creep me out, too. But it was the most effective way of moving.

“If I let myself relax and look away from you, for some reason, I feel like I’ll completely lose track of you,” she said.

That was probably because of my stealthy movement, but there wasn’t much I could do about it.

Actually, you know what? Let’s hold hands. If we do that, maybe Melty will enter stealth mode too... Okay, well, I have no idea if she has or not, but I do know that holding her hand is allowing her to slide like I can. Gross? Weird? Who cares?

After moving along for a bit, we arrived at the edge of the settlement.

“Goblins,” she said.

“Goblins it is.”

A goblin with seemingly no intelligence, an awful face, green skin, an irritating voice, and some clothes covering its skin was just sitting there. It held some kind of crusty mace, or maybe it was a knife, or pick made of bones? Who knew.

“How are we doing this?”

“First...”

I pulled out a green apple—I mean, a hand grenade.

“What is that?” said Melty.

“A grenade. I handed stick types out to the Liberation Army a while back, remember?”

“It’s shaped differently.”

“This is a modified version that went into use later on. So first, I throw this little guy.”

“Ah, and then the goblin will get close to inspect before going kaboom.”

“Precisely.”

At first, I was concerned that there might be captives in the settlement, but even if there were, there was nothing we could do about them. We were going through the Sorel Mountains, which meant there was no way we could bring the injured or the sick with us.

I pulled out eight grenades from my inventory and rolled them on the ground. I was going to have Melty throw some as well.

“You hold down the safety lever while pulling the pin out,” I explained.

“Unlike the handle grenades, these won’t explode as long as you’re holding down the lever, so don’t panic. Stay calm and throw it. Once you do, the lever will release and in five seconds, it’ll explode.”

Actually, if you wanted to shorten the time to detonation, you could throw the grenade after releasing the lever, but if you weren’t used to using them, it might blow up before it left your hand, so I opted not to tell her that.

“Understood.”

“Just be careful. Don’t forget to shield yourself until the thing explodes. I’ll be throwing them nearby.”

“All right. Um, hold the lever down, pull the pin, then throw, right?”

“You got it. I’ll be needing you to throw the grenades deeper into the settlement.”

“No problem.”

Melty and I met eye to eye, and once I gave the signal, the two of us started to toss grenades. We could hear the safety levers releasing in midair.

“Gyaga!?”

“Gyaaaah!”

It sounded like the goblins were freaking out, but it was too dangerous to look, so we ducked down instead. The kill zone for the grenades was about fifteen meters, but shrapnel could fly as far as two hundred meters, so we really had to play it safe.

KABOOM!

The sounds of explosions blasted through the air, shaking the ground and our bodies. I couldn't check on their effectiveness, but I was betting the goblins were losing their minds.

“Let's keep it up!”

“You got it.”

And so the two of us carried on lobbing grenades into the settlement. While this was going on, a few confused goblins ran toward us, but I mercilessly put them down with my handgun. They were so small that it only took a single shot through the chest to send them flying. While I managed the closer goblins, Melty kept throwing grenades.

“All done!”

“Then it's time to charge in.”

I switched to my submachine gun, and the both of us entered the settlement, which was at this point a complete and total goddamn mess. The grenades had scarred the ground and there were goblin bodies all over. Many of them had missing limbs.

“Let's put them out of their misery.”

“R-right...”

My stomach was turning from all of this—it was awful to see. This wasn't some video game, this was real blood and guts. Hell, I could even smell the

scent of the goblins' blood and their insides.

"Kousuke!" Melty called to me all of a sudden.

A goblin came flying out from a drab little shed that must have been knocked over by a grenade blast. I tried to brush off my anxiety and pointed the barrel of my submachine gun at the goblin. I pulled the trigger.

POW POW POW POW POW!

The gun's powerful sounds rang through the air and the bullets went flying, blowing the goblin away. It was the same ammo as the handgun I used earlier. A gun's power depended heavily on the munitions used.

That wasn't to say that the gun itself or its construction didn't count for anything, because they did, but generally speaking a lot of it came down to the munitions. If two guns used the same type of ammunition, then on average, a gun with a longer barrel would yield higher destructive power because it ups the speed of the bullet.

"They're not done yet," said Melty.

"Watch my back."

"Of course."

She covered me as I took out the incoming goblins. Honestly, I used too much ammo on that first one. It only took two to three consecutive shots to the chest to put them down.

I was careful to fire in bursts since the submachine gun could only fire on full auto, popping each goblin with a few rounds.

After replacing the clip twice, the goblin assault came to an end. There might have still been more hiding, though... Just as the concern crossed my mind, Melty used her magic to ignite a fallen hut made of wood and vines.

"Uh...?" I raised an eyebrow at her.

"If we leave it intact, more goblins or other creatures might settle here again."

"Yeah, but what if there are people inside of it...?"

“There aren’t any.”

Melty continued to burn down the goblins’ housing, showing zero concern on her face. Was this some sort of special fire? The huts caught ablaze, but the fire didn’t spread beyond them.

“And even if there were, we wouldn’t be able to help them...” she added.

“...”

I didn’t know what sort of relationship humans and goblins had in this world, but... No, I got what Melty was implying.

“But there really isn’t anyone inside, so don’t worry. I know I said we wouldn’t be able to save anyone, but even *I’m* not so cold that I could abandon people in need at any old time.”

“I know. I trust you,” I told her.

“I appreciate that.”

Now that I thought about it, Melty was far more attuned to her senses than I was. If she said nobody was in there, then that was the truth. If someone really needed help, I could heal them and send them off to Almas, if nothing else. It wouldn’t take long for me or Melty to carry them that far.

“You think we should’ve rummaged through the huts before burning them, maybe?”

“Goblin housing is usually only filled with junk,” she said.

“All righty, then.”

Just to be safe, I dumped the goblin corpses into my inventory to confirm their demise. Nope. No survivors. Then I pulled up my menu and deconstructed their bodies, pulling their magic stones out. They weren’t worth a whole lot, but Ira told me they could be used as power sources for fire starting tools and the like.

As for the meat and bones, they were worthless, so I just dumped them into a hole and had Melty burn them. Meat was meat, so I was sure if I prepped it right, we could eat it, but on a personal level I just didn’t want to eat goblin meat.

“Shall we?”

“Yes, of course.”

We'd spent a decent chunk of time on that, and all we had to show for it were some magic stones. Used up a bunch of grenades, too... It really wasn't worth it, and wouldn't have been even if we'd gotten rid of them with swords and spears. We'd definitely make it a point to avoid confrontation like this going forward.

After annihilating the goblins, the two of us kept moving until we eventually arrived at a forest at the foot of the Sorel Mountains.

“Well, can we get around the forest?” I asked.

“Hmm, I don't know,” said Melty. “As far as I can see, no.”

“Let's take a look from a higher vantage point.”

I jumped up in the air and placed a wooden block below my feet, then jumped a second time, planting another wooden block down, repeating the process until I had a high platform in the air. When it came to survival games, placing blocks that way was fundamental to getting a high vantage point.

“How does it look?” Melty called up to me.

“Hrm, there's no way around it,” I shouted back. “But if we walk over in that direction there are some big old boulders. We can rest there for the night before going into the forest!” I pointed at a bunch of boulders to the south of where we were, if we followed the edge of the woods.

After confirming their location a second time, I destroyed the platform beneath me with my axe and slowly descended to the ground, one block at a time.

“Welcome back!”

“Glad to be on solid ground.”

“Hey, Kousuke? I agree with resting for the night before going into the woods, but why are we heading for those boulders in particular?”

“I was thinking of collecting some materials while it’s still light out,” I explained. “I have plenty of stuff for making ammo, but I don’t have as much ore or wood as I’d like.”

When we were in hiding, I managed to get a decent amount of stone and ore, but I used most of it up making weapons. Plus, I was a little worried about the ammo situation, so I wanted to stock up while I still could.

“Ah, okay,” said Melty. “And it’s not like we’ll be in any position to go material collecting once we’re in the woods and on the Sorel Mountains.”

“Yeah, exactly. Once we get to those boulders, I’ll build a base for us to rest in for the night, then we can start gathering materials.”

“Sounds great. Then, while you work, I’ll protect you.”

“Much obliged.”

I was more than ready to protect myself, but I was definitely vulnerable to surprise attacks while I focused on gathering materials. Having Melty with me would be a huge load off of my shoulders.

It didn’t take long for us to get the boulders, considering how close we already were. There were a whole bunch of them all over the place. How did an area like this come to exist? Did one of the Sorel Mountains erupt and the lava hardened into these giant boulders? Were they meteors or something? Was there some sort of land slide?

What if this wasn’t natural, and was related to magic instead? The spirits might’ve been messing around. Either way, the place wasn’t just filled with huge boulders—there were large stones and all kinds of other rocks. It was the perfect spot for collecting stone materials.

“First let me build us a shelter,” I said.

“Where are you going to put it?”

“I can make one anywhere, but... It’d probably be better if it wasn’t right next to the woods.”

“Agreed. I’m sure we’ll be perfectly safe if we lock the entrance, but bugs could get in.”

“Right? In that case, I’ll build it somewhere with lots of stones so I can just collect materials from around us.”

“Okay.”

After talking it over, we ventured into the stony area. There were some weeds growing here and there, but there wasn’t a whole lot of green to speak of. Probably not a whole lot of water nearby. If there were no plants or water, then herbivores weren’t going to come anywhere near, which meant predators wouldn’t either. It could turn out to be a pretty safe spot.

“...We’re not alone,” Melty announced.

“What?”

“A monster.”

“For real?”

Just as I’d concluded that the place was safe, Melty immediately sensed a monster. It had to be pretty far off, because I sure as hell couldn’t see it.

“Where?”

“Over there.”

Melty pointed at a fairly large boulder, about a meter and a half wide. About half of it looked to be buried underground... That *was* a boulder, right?

“Try shooting it.”

“Uh, shooting the boulder?”

“Yes. Use that big gun of yours.”

“You mean the assault rifle? All right.”

Somewhat apprehensively, I followed Melty’s instructions and aimed at the boulder. Something was probably going to happen, so I braced myself.

One round on semi-auto.

KAZOOM!

A thunderous sound echoed out as the bullet collided with the boulder and cracked a part of it open. A green liquid came pouring out.

The boulder stood up and screamed into the air. No, it *looked* like a boulder, but it was actually a massive, bug-like monster with two scythe-shaped arms. It was like a giant praying mantis made of stone.

“It moved!” I screeched.

Melty was calmly saying something next to me, but I just kept firing at the stone mantis and screaming like a child. I switched over to full auto and immediately held my finger down on the trigger. The creature screamed.

The 7.62-mm rounds cracked its surface and breached its body. As a result, the thing was riddled with holes, and it collapsed in a bloody green mess. It was dead.

“...That was a surprise.”

“Um, just to repeat myself,” Melty said, “that was a type of monster called a rock mantis. It disguises itself as a boulder and waits for its prey to come to it. Its armor is as hard as stone, and it’s typically regarded as a difficult monster for adventurers to take down.”

“Well, it stood no chance against my assault rifle.”

“That’s because it’s weak against striking attacks and precision damage. Also magic. Bladed weapons can’t breach its tough armor, so most adventurers hate dealing with them.”

“Ah.”

I approached the corpse of the rock mantis with the barrel of my rifle still pointed at it, then slipped it into my inventory to check its status. Yup, dead. I pulled the corpse out again.

“It really is like stone.”

“Right? This is my first time seeing one in person, too.”

“Seriously?”

“I’m but a weak domestic affairs officer,” Melty demurred. “I hardly get the opportunity to venture into the dangerous wilderness.”

“Uh-huh.”

Knowing her true strength, I had a hard time accepting that excuse, but if she said so, I wouldn't pry. Melty might have been absurdly strong, but she didn't go around flaunting it.

"Anyway, I'll take it apart and... Magic stones, meat, armor, scythes... And the tendons. Hey, are stone mantises edible?"

"I've never heard of anyone eating a mantis, but if gizma are edible, then I don't see why not?"

"Good point."

We weren't hurting for food, but I saved it anyway. Better than goblin meat, right? Anything I cooked on my cooking workbench ended up delicious. All hail the workbench!

After defeating the rock mantis, we searched the surrounding area for more of them, put those down, and found a spot for our lodging right in the middle of a bunch of large boulders.

I quickly put down an underground shelter and fixed up the interior decor. Any sewage could just go into an underground sewage tank, and I'd dump it into my inventory when we left.

"When it comes to getting a safe shelter together, you really are absurdly fast," said Melty.

"That's kinda my thing!"

The interior was fairly simple. A couch, a table, and a bed big enough for two. There were two doors in the back for a toilet and a shower respectively. Well, by a shower, I mean I really just made a bathing space using my unlimited water source. There were some water bottles and other assorted eating utensils in the combined living and bedroom space, too.

I'd be pulling food from my inventory, so we didn't need a kitchen. I was initially going to use my torches for light, but Melty used her magic to illuminate the shelter.

"All right," I said, "after we rest up for a bit, let's go material hunting."

"Then how about lunch?"

“Sure. We can keep it light for now.”

“Sounds good to me.”

We ended up going with ham, cheese, tomato, and crunchy veggie sandwiches with some milk to wash it all down. I said we'd keep it light, but those ended up pretty filling if I could say so myself.

“Time to get to work!”

“Let's do it.”

With our stomachs nice and full, the two of us exited the shelter and got started. Since we were going to be climbing a bunch of mountains, we could skip out on grabbing lumber. There'd be plenty where we were headed.

“What can you get from the boulders here?”

“All sorts of stuff, apparently... Regular stone materials, topaz, spinel, obsidian, quartz... Iron, too. Doesn't look like I'll find much copper or lead, though.”

Quite frankly, I wished I could get some copper, lead, tin, or zinc. But I didn't really need that stuff given the situation.

Melty shot me an interested gaze.

“Interested in gems?” I asked her.

“I don't think there's a single woman in the world who isn't,” she replied.

“Good point. Everything I grab is going to be uncut, but I can show it all to you tonight if you'd like.”

“A-are you sure?”

“Of course! Hell, if you fancy any of them in particular, you can have as many as you'd like!”

They were pretty high value in this world, but to me, they were nearly unusable for crafting. That said, they do help fund the Liberation Army, so they weren't completely useless!

“As many as I'd like?” Melty gasped. “Really?!”

“Absolutely. I can’t make use of them myself, and honestly, I want you to have something nice considering you cut off your horns just to come and save me.”

“Th-then I suppose I’ll take you up on your offer, just a little bit!”

Melty’s lips formed a loose smile, which I was happy to see. I wondered if I could use my workbench to refine them for her. I’d have to give that a try tonight.

We finished material hunting before sunset, so I used the extra time to make ammo out of the materials.

From off to the side, I couldn’t help but notice Melty staring a hole into the pile of rough gemstones on the table. Her eyes were practically sparkling. She shined some magic light on the gems, tirelessly gazing at their dull brilliance. I’d never seen Melty so cute and defenseless before.

By the way, that pile she was staring at was only a third of what I’d collected. When I used my abilities on a random boulder, the rough gemstones just came pouring on out, even when the boulder very clearly shouldn’t have had anything of value inside it. That must have had something to do with my skill. If it was really that easy to get rough gemstones from this place, people would’ve already mined the hell out of it.

While Melty remained infatuated by the gemstones, I used my workbench and smithing setup to produce more bullets and perform maintenance on the guns I used today. Of course, that was just a matter of selecting a few options on my menu.

After setting the system up to do the work, I used my workbench to see if I could refine the rough gemstones. My creation skill allowed me to use my imagination to add new recipes to my crafting menu, but if I couldn’t picture something vividly enough, then it wouldn’t work.

“I wonder what would suit Melty the best...”

I compared the rough gemstones to Melty as she gazed innocently at the mountain of treasure. What color would look the best on her?

I don't really have a good instinct for that kind of thing, but Melty's hair is a beautiful shade of pink... I could go with a blue or green stone to match... Yellow might not stand out enough, or maybe it could? An orange-ish gemstone might match her quite nicely. No, but this crimson red one is really nice...

A little distance away, Melty continued to gaze at the stones while I pulled different ones out of my inventory to compare to her hair. Eventually, she noticed me.

“And what exactly are you up to?”

“I was just wondering what kind of gemstone would suit you best. In order to make modifications with my skill, I need a strong mental image.”

“You're going to m-modify them?”

“Right now I'm just testing to see if it's possible. I personally think this transparent orange gem and the crimson red one would really work for you.”

“Topaz and garnet, huh? I also happen to think they're quite lovely.”

In Melty's hand was a crystal-like stone somewhere between yellow and orange in color, as well as a deep red gem.

“Really...? Then lemme see if I can get a mental image of a modification on one of these...”

I had no knowledge about gem cutting and that sort of thing. Just a rough image of what a proper gemstone looked like in shape. But I knew Mr. Item Creation could do it.

He's got this handled! Heck, he managed to make guns for me even with my loose knowledge of firearms. I'm sure he can figure out gem cuts and the like! You got this! I believe in you!

I had no idea if cheering my skill along helped at all, but “gem cut modification” appeared as an option in my workbench crafting menu. I prioritized that process and gave it a shot.

“Now this ain't too shabby, if I do say so myself.”

After gazing at it using her magic light, I handed the stone to Melty, who carefully took it in both hands before squinting at it.

“Oh, gosh...”

“When we get back to Arichburg, let’s have it modified so you can wear it, yeah? This stone’s pretty big, so maybe a necklace would work best.”

“Yeah... But, what should I do?” said Melty, beginning to shift uneasily. “If I have this on me while we hike through the mountains and fight monsters, I might drop it...”

It seemed like she was imagining this exact scenario. I could tell she was totally serious, which only made it harder not to laugh.

“Sheesh! It’s not funny!” She must have seen the look on my face.

“Sorry, sorry. It’s just, I can store it in my inventory, and that way you definitely won’t lose it. If you want to carry it with you, I can always make a little bag for you to wear?”

“Th-that’s true... Hm, I don’t know what’d be better!”

Eventually, she decided to leave the stone with me. She then picked a few other rough gemstones from the mountain, which she planned to put into a bag of her own making. I whipped up a knitting set for her at my smithing station, along with cloth and thread and so on.

“You’re surprisingly good with your hands,” I said.

“Hey, what’s that supposed to mean? I’m a proper, educated lady, you know? Of course I can knit.”

“Is that so?”

Melty frowned angrily at me while handling the needle expertly, creating a small bag. She wrapped each stone in a cloth pouch before putting them into the bag, so that they didn’t rub up against each other directly.

“What do you think?” She held up the gem bag proudly.

“Helluva job,” I told her, clapping.

She put this together in no time at all, so she really did deserve the applause. As someone who relied entirely on my crafting ability, I couldn’t hold a candle to her talents. I’m reasonably good with my hands too, though, so maybe if I

actually practiced, I could get to be as good as Melty was.

“I get the feeling you and I should have a talk about this image of me you have in that head of yours, Kousuke,” she said.

“I mean, can you blame me? Up until you popped up in Merinesburg, I’d only ever seen one side of you.”

Until recently, I’d only ever seen her doing things like grinding stone mortars for food purposes, building massive living quarters in the Badlands, constructing roads, forcing Sylphy to get changed despite how strong she is, or even shutting up merchants with ties to the Holy Kingdom.

“...Well, um...”

“See what I mean?”

“Grr... You’re just a big jerk,” she pouted.

“Mmm-hm.”

Melty wrapped her arms around me all of a sudden and pulled me to her, pressing my face into her chest. I put up little resistance, allowing my face to be surrounded by her large breasts. What else could I do? She was being unfair. Such raw, uncensored violence!



“But I forgive you, since you’ve given me such wonderful gifts... To be honest, I’ve always dreamed of receiving gems from the man I love.”

She squeezed me adoringly.

...I’m glad I did this. I really am. But at this rate, I’m going to blissfully suffocate. Literally.

Help.

The next day, we made our way into the forest as planned. Since there were stone mantises in the area, I figured there’d be some nasties waiting for us in the woods themselves, but—

“The hell is that!?” I yelped.

“They’re called Tri-Eye Apes. They’re faster than they look.”

“Gyah! They’re coming right this way!”

The group of scary looking giant three-eyed apes came charging toward us.

“BUOOO!”

A wagon-sized boar attacked.

“A bull—*whattheheck!*?”

“A bull, huh? No, that’s a Big Fang Boa.”

“That snake’s *huge!*”

“That’s a baby Hydra. Let’s deal with it now.”

Melty took it out in a single blow.

Our journey through the woods was filled with monstrous encounters. Every monster that lived in the forest was huge, which meant that my handgun and submachine gun ended up basically useless. Those weapons were designed to take out humans who aren’t equipped with proper armor. They don’t have enough power to kill otherworldly monsters with powerful fur coats, ripped muscles, and bones as tough as steel. I was forced to rely on my assault rifle and shotgun, since they were both high in damage and piercing ability they were the

homies for the job.

“Monsters are damn terrifying.”

“For someone who’s scared, you sure don’t seem to have a problem taking them out,” Melty observed. “You know, you tend to talk about how you’re a non-combatant, or too weak to fight, but you’re actually quite strong, Kousuke.”

“You’re the last person I want to hear that from...” I sighed. “Here’s the thing. I’m not actually strong. My *weapons* are strong. Unlike you, when it comes to physical abilities, I’m bog standard.”

“A bog-standard person couldn’t double jump in the air or move at high speeds without using their legs,” she pointed out.

Nope! Can’t hear you! No matter what she says, I’m a totally average dude! I’m not even remotely abnormal.

“So today we’re going to go mountain climbing,” I said.

“Nice try changing the subject...” Melty grumbled. “But fine.”

“I appreciate that. So, mountain climbing... Where should we start?”

“There is no mountain trail, so we just have to aim for the top wherever we can.”

“We’ve got no plan then? Excellent.”

Both Melty and I were total beginners when it came to mountains. Maybe it was a bit naive to think the two of us could scale the Sorel Mountains all on our own.

“Things will be fine,” Melty insisted.

“You sure we’re not underestimating nature?” She asked.

“How about this? Let’s spend the day climbing, and if things don’t look good, we can consider another approach.”

“Hrm... All right.”

It’d be a waste to quit after coming this far. We had to give it the old college try for at least one day. I could double jump and make footholds, and Melty was

way more athletically gifted than I was. Plus, I could make as many warm shelters for us as I wanted. We could totally, maybe, actually pull this off!

In the end, we were worried for nothing.

“Didn’t I tell you?”

“Yeah, you were totally right.”

I’d built footholds in areas that looked difficult to traverse, then used my pickaxe to eliminate the difficulty. For Melty’s part, she just jumped right over those spots. She almost fell once, but she managed to thrust her hands into the stone mountainside, so she had no problems climbing up.

Yeah, you read that right. She thrust her hands into the mountainside.

Her bare hands. The stone mountainside.

“Oops, I made a mistake,” she’d say.

“Hah hah hah, you can be so clumsy, Melty,” I’d reply.

I couldn’t help that my laugh was robotic. Melty can be absolutely wild sometimes.

So, about the Sorel Mountains. They were the domain of monsters, which obviously meant that monsters lived there. Quite a few, actually.

“Miss Melty?”

“Yes?”

“Something’s flying this way. What is it?”

“Hrm, I wonder?” Melty looked into the sky, tilting her head at a cute angle.

“Given the size, I don’t think it’s a dragon.”

“Heh, gotcha... Not a dragon...!”

The large shadow descended from the sky, its bronze skin covered in scales. There were sharp claws on its back feet, and its front legs were connected to giant wings. Terrifying fangs jutted from its jaw, and at the tip of its long tail was a poisonous spike that reflected the light of the sun.

I'm sure anyone with a brain could figure out what I'm describing. That's right, the sort of beast that often appears in fantasy stories. Y'know, the ones that knights ride around on sometimes?

"Gyah! A *wyvern*!?"

I dodged and rolled to evade its attack, while Melty deftly avoided its poisonous tail, an amused smile on her face.

"Good luck, Kousuke!" She called over to me. "I believe in you!"

"Dammit!"

After putting some distance between myself and the beast, I used a shortcut to pull out my assault rifle. I pointed the barrel at the wyvern and held down the trigger.

A sound like thunder echoed through the mountains as the gun fired continuously, spewing out powerful 7.62-mm rounds at two times the speed of sound. The rounds smashed through the Wyvern's hard skin, annihilating its insides while it wailed in agony.

"Come get some!" I bellowed.

The body of the Wyvern convulsed in midair and blood splattered all over the place. After about three seconds of this, the beast fell to the ground. The whole area was filled with gun smoke and the thick scent of blood.

"What an incredible weapon."

"I've only got so many bullets, so it's not invincible."

I quickly pulled out the empty banana shaped clip and swapped in a fresh one while Melty watched me with a big smile on her face.

"Has your 'level' gone up?" she asked.

"Ah... Yeah, it has!"

I'd barely engaged in any direct combat since using explosive blocks to kill all those Holy Kingdom soldiers *en masse*. My level had plateaued at 20, but all the recent combat gave me a few levels more. This wyvern battle gave me another, so I was sitting pretty at 23.

That also meant I'd gotten my hands on some skill points, so I used those to obtain some new skills and level up a few old ones.

★ Skilled Worker—: Crafting time is reduced by 20%.

Dismantling—: When dismantling a crafting item, acquire 10% more materials.

Repair—: Item repair time shortened by 20%. Required items lessened by 20%.

★ Mass-Producer II—: When you make more than ten of the same item, the number of required materials is reduced by 10%. For more than 100 of the same item, the number is reduced by 20%.

★ Logger II—: Number of plant materials obtained is increased by 40%.

★ Miner II—: Number of minerals obtained is increased by 40%.

★ Dismantler II—: Number of materials acquired when disassembling a crafting item is increased by 40%.

★ Creator—: Lowers the difficulty level for item creation.

★ Heart Healthy—: Stamina recovery speed is increased by 40%.

★ Fleet-Footed II—: Movement speed is increased by 20%.

Iron Arm—: Close-range weapon attack power increased by 20%.

☆ Sharpshooter II—: Attacks with ranged weapons are increased by 40%.

*LVL UP!

★ Iron Skin—: Damage taken is reduced by 20%.

☆ Survivor—: Health is increased by 10%, and health recovery speed is increased by 20%. *NEW!

Combat Medic—: Healing item effects increased by 20%.

Reptilian Stomach—: Hunger speed reduced by 20%.

Camel Hump—: Dehydration speed reduced by 20%.

The skills I'd already acquired were marked with a ★, the ones I hadn't acquired yet had a dash, and the ones I'd raised the level of were marked by a ☆. I opted to raise my sniping power by upping my Sharpshooter level, and also nabbed the Survivor skill. I still didn't plan on fighting on the frontlines when I could avoid it, but I would like to raise my survivability, in case push ever comes to shove.

Thanks to all of this, I unlocked a whole mess of achievements.

- ★ First Craft—: Craft an item for the first time *Unlocks skill.
- ★ My First Dismantle—: Dismantle craft item for first time ✖ Unlocks skill.
- ★ My First Forage—: Forage for the first time ✖ Unlocks skill.
- ★ First Mine—: Mine for the first time ✖ Unlocks skill.
- ★ First Prey—: Obtain organic materials for the first time ✖ Unlocks skill.
- ★ First Repair—: Repair item for the first time ✖ Unlocks skill.
- ★ My First Workbench—: Craft at a workbench for the first time. *Unlocks the ability to upgrade different benches and items, adds status, skill, and achievement tabs to the menu.
- ★ First Smithing Utility—: Craft first Smithing Utility ✖ Item Creation Feature Unlocks.
- ★ Beginner Builder—: Place approximately 5,000 building blocks. *Unlocks the Mass Placement feature. Unlocks Mirror Mode.
- ★ Intermediate Builder—: Place approximately 500,000 building blocks. *Unlocks Blueprint feature.
- ★ My First Copulation—: Copulated with a member of the opposite sex for the first time. And you liked it too. *Increases Health and Stamina by 10 points.
- ★ Technician—: Satisfied your partner during copulation. Aren't you good in bed? *Attacks against the opposite sex are increased by 10%.
- ★ Lady Killer—: Become loved by over 20 members of the opposite sex. Nice Boat, baby. *Attacks against the opposite sex are increased by 10%.

★ Tough Guy—: Reach Level 20. Congrats, you're now basically an action movie hero. *Physical power increased by 50%.

★ My First Murder—: Murder a humanoid for the first time. You're a murderer! *Attack power against humanoids increased by 5%.

★ Assassin—: Kill 100 humanoids without being noticed. Congratulations, you're an excellent assassin. *Takedown feature unlocked.

★ Genocider—: Kill over 1,000 humanoids in one go. Aren't you a badass? *Attack power against humanoids increased by 10%.

★ Hero—: Kill 3,000 humanoids on your own. At this point, you're more than just a killer, aren't you? *Allies within 100 meters of your position get an overall 10% power boost. Affinity level increased easier.

★ Bomber—: Defeat 100 living beings with explosives. Kaboom! Now we're cookin'. *Bomb damage increased by 10%.

☆ Undergrounder—: Spend over 14 days underground. *Vision increased.
NEW!

☆ Poison Eater—: Recover without an antidote after being hit with deadly poison and return to the world of the living. *Poison damage decreased by 50%.
NEW!

I only got two new ones, Undergrounder and Poison Eater. Hrm, maybe I should go out of my way to behave more strangely?

Y'know, like jumping off of high places or getting seriously injured. Man, getting hurt sucks, though. What about trying to stay underwater for long periods of time? Hrm, drowning would suck too. Maybe I could get away with just swimming a whole bunch? I'd give it a shot later.

"That's wonderful," said Melty. "Then let's keep on going like this."

"I really would rather not, to be honest."

"You can do it! There's nothing wrong with being strong."

She wasn't wrong, but I didn't want to risk my life for the sake of more

strength. I was always the kind of gamer who would rather deck out their home base with traps and weapons and stuff, rather than strengthen the player character.

“We’ll be right near Arichburg once we get over this mountain range, so put a smile on your face!”

“Wait, it’s really that close?” I asked.

“Indeed, it is. If the weather is good, we might be able to see the city from the top of the mountain.”

“Huh... I guess Merinesburg and Arichburg are closer than I thought.”

“The actual distance is short, but you wouldn’t think so, because the Sorel Mountains are here between them.”

“The only reason this route is doable is because it’s us taking it.”

“It’s true—the speed of travel drops the more people there are. All things considered, you and I move quite fast.”

“Yeah...”

Melty was a given, but even I was pretty fast at climbing. I could double jump, and thanks to Tough Guy, my physical abilities are 1.5 times better than usual. I could actually pull myself up with my arms now. Hell, I could even increase my speed using my strafe jump.

“All right! I’m feeling pumped! Wyverns? Come at me! I ain’t scared! Anyone who gets in our way is gonna get *rocked!*”

Chapter 2: The Grand Dragon Grande

OR AT LEAST, that's how I felt at the time, okay?

“Yeah, I’m not sure about that thing.”

“It’s fine! I promise!”

A certain creature was blocking our path forward.

A one-headed dragon with a single beautiful horn towered before us. Its skin was covered in ochre scales. Giant, horrifying fangs protruded from its jaws, and at the end of its tail was a hammer-like protrusion. Its massive wings were a testament to its imposing nature. It was terrifying.



Ah, I've seen something like this before. Totally. That one game where you become a hunter and take down dragons and stuff. Isn't this that dude that explodes out of the ground in desert areas? You know the one.

“No. No way. That thing could just kill me by flexing. I doubt my assault rifle will work on it, either.”

Even with its piercing abilities, my rifle wasn't gonna get through those scales.

“What about that magic staff of yours?” Melty said, by which she meant the rocket launcher.

“I mean, that might work, but...”

I whipped out the anti-tank rocket launcher I'd readied just in case we stumbled upon an actual dragon. The thing was, it wasn't actually a rocket launcher. Basically, it fired rounds like a bazooka would, then those rounds sped up using the rocket motors inside of them. But, whatever, that was just details.

“Let me just get one shot off,” I said. “That big asshole'll probably stumble a bit, and then you can run in and finish the job. Sound good?”

“Hrm, well, if I hold back, I get the feeling it would kill you.”

Melty sure said some terrifying things. But I didn't plan on getting killed, even if we were talking about a real dragon. The tail on this bastard would crush me.

“Hey, Melty, could you take that thing down on your own if you had to?”

“If I got in close without it sending me flying, I think so,” she said.

Remind me, why am I the one putting myself in danger?

But that wasn't fair. I couldn't just hide in her shadow.

“Where should I aim?” I asked her.

“The face, neck, or chest, I would say. Ah, the membrane of the wings works too.”

“Gotcha.”

I sure was glad we were downwind; otherwise, our smell would've given us away and we wouldn't be able to launch a surprise attack.

I steeled my resolve and looked for an opening to attack from cover. The beast was so big that I couldn't quite get the distance right. He must have been something like a hundred meters away—well within the rocket launcher's range.

The dragon was glancing around anxiously, looking somewhat unsettled. Every now and then, it surveyed its surroundings as if it was looking for something. Did it sense our killing intent at this distance?

“This thing's not built for sharpshooting,” I said. “I have no idea where the round's gonna land.”

“I'll handle it,” said Melty.

“Really? Er, okay. The blast behind it is dangerous, so don't stand up, okay?”

“All right.”

“Then here I go...!”

I released the safety and leapt out from cover, capturing the dragon in my sights.

The dragon noticed movement and turned to face me, looking almost puzzled.

“Er...?”

Something seemed off, but I couldn't afford to hesitate, so I pulled the trigger. *ZOOM* went the rocket.

VROOM! That's the sound of the motor in the round activating. The dragon roared, and someone yelled “Pardon me?!”

I could've sworn it was a girl screaming, right at the same time that the dragon roared.

Not soon after, the blast of the rocket echoed throughout the area. I couldn't see the beast due to the smoke, but it probably dodged the attack.

As I quickly tried to reload from cover, I turned to Melty.

“Something's weird! That thing sounded like a young girl!”

“Huh?!”

Melty skidded her feet along the ground as she slowed herself down on approach to the dragon, coming to a sudden stop.

The dust happened to settle just then, revealing the dragon's massive form. It must've dodged in an awkward way, considering the comical way its body was splayed on the ground.

"Uh..."

Melty had no idea what to do. Despite her bewilderment, there was an absurd battle aura radiating from her.

"It'll be dangerous if we don't finish it off."

"I know, but something's off. Just hang on for a sec."

I left my cover and took a look at the dragon, rocket launcher still in hand. The beast raised its hands as if telling me to calm down and wait. Was I imagining this, or what?

"It seems...scared," I said. "Like it doesn't want to fight."

Maybe it sensed Melty's overwhelming aura?

"Really?" Melty was dubious. "It seems to me as if it's taking up a battle stance."

"It looks more like it's gesturing for us to stop. Uh, quick question. Are dragons really smart? Like, can they communicate?"

The dragon desperately pointed one of its extremely small fingers at me as if to say *Yeah, that!*

"I've never heard any stories like that before..." Melty said.

"It clearly understands what I'm saying. Don't you?" I asked the dragon.

The dragon nodded its head.

"See? Look at that!"

"Wha..."

Melty's expression was beyond confused, understandably. Dragons were supposed to be mega strong and dangerous. But back in my world, there was

tons of fiction featuring intelligent dragons. Was it different in this world?

“Try talking to it,” I urged her. “Go on.”

“Then... Raise your right hand, please.”

Strangely enough, the dragon didn't seem to understand what Melty was saying. It tilted its head, unsure of what to do.

“You don't understand what she's saying? She wants you to raise your right hand.”

The dragon nodded its head and raised its right hand. *Hold up...*

“I think it only understands me,” I said.

“Really...?”

The dragon once again pointed at me as if to say, *exactly!*

“You can talk to dragons now? That's certainly a new skill.”

“It's pretty rad, but I doubt I'll get to use it much.”

There was no point in asking how or why this happened. My abilities were a complete question mark to me. If I had to come up with a reason though, I could take an educated guess.

“When I first came to this world, I was able to communicate with everyone, even though I was a Fabled Visitor.”

“That's true.”

“And for whatever reason, I can read and write the language here. I shouldn't be able to.”

“Ah, I get it. So as a Fabled Visitor, you're capable of speaking, reading, and writing all the languages of this world?”

“It's possible. What do you think?”

“Er, me?” Replied the dragon in a feminine voice. “Do you understand my words, human?”

To my ears, the dragon was speaking with a girl's voice while simultaneously roaring. Talk about loud! Ow, my poor ears.

“Could you speak a little more gently?” I asked. “Also, your breath stinks.”

“It *what*?! How dare you use such language with a maiden such as myself, human!”

The dragon opened her mouth in stunned shock. Those fangs sure looked sharp.

“Kousuke, I’m beginning to think this might be dangerous,” said Melty.

“No, no. She’s just speaking normally.” I turned back to the dragon. “Um, do you think you could let us pass?” I asked.

Suddenly, the dragon bared her fangs and cackled.

“You seek to pass through my territory, human? Do you not value your lives —”

“All right, nevermind, this thing might be evil. Melty, do your thing.”

“Kay!”

Melty took a step forward with a smile on her face, her hands glowing brightly.

“Wait, wait, forgive me!” yelped the dragon. “She’s an overlord, isn’t she? She’s super duper dangerous! I don’t want to get hurt! I don’t want to die!”

What happened to that haughty tone of voice?

And what was our next move?

“Could you please explain how we ended up eating lunch with a dragon?” Melty asked me.

“Now, now. I have an idea.”

“This is tasty!”

The dragon looked to the sky and roared in excitement. Our dining table was a wood block two meters in height, two meters in length and two meters in width. On top of it were a bunch of hamburgers that the dragon was stuffing into her mouth.

“And what idea is that?”

“Just watch,” I said. “If things go well, we might be able to shorten our journey big time...” I turned and spoke to the dragon. “Hey, have something to drink.”

“A drink?”

“It’s elven mead. Here, have some.”

I pulled the bottle out of my inventory, took the cap off and offered it to the dragon. She sniffed the bottle then grabbed it with one hand and took a sip.

“Delicious! And so sweet!”

The dragon began slapping her terrifying hammer tail against the ground, pleased as punch. With her other hand, she grabbed another bunch of hamburgers.

“Hey, where are your manners?”

“Ah, my apologies, human.”

The dragon tossed the crushed hamburgers into her mouth and licked the ketchup off of her fingers. That was also poor manners, but whatever.

“I suppose I’ll eat, too,” I said.

“Hah...” Melty grumbled. “Fine.”

We joined the dragon in her meal. The best way to get close to someone was to share a meal with them, y’know? She watched with great interest while we ate our hamburgers.

“It is quite bizarre for both humans and dragons to eat the same thing,” she observed.

“Is it?”

“Kousuke, what is it saying?”

“That it’s weird how we’re all eating the same thing,” I relayed to Melty.

“I suppose that’s true,” Melty said with a nod.

Was it? Humans, dogs, and even wild bears can all enjoy hamburgers. Food

was universal.

“But it’s delicious, right?”

“Indeed, it is! Are you a mage, human? Why can you produce things from nothing?”

The mead must have kicked in, since the dragon happily roared and began to ask me questions. *Could she get any louder?*

“I’m a Fabled Visitor, so I’m sorta special. I’m the only one who can make hamburgers, by the way.”

“Say...what?”

The dragon went silent in shock. Other people could make something similar, but they wouldn’t be able to make the exact same thing, and not so much at once. At least, not in this world.

“Do you want more?” I asked.

“Indeed, I do.”

“Would you like to eat them every day?”

“I would.”

“Then, do you want to come with us? I’m the only one who can make those hamburgers.”

The dragon nodded three times. “I would very much like that.”

Awesome, the food worked.

“Um, Kousuke,” Melty said under her breath. “I’m getting a bad feeling about this.”

“Ha ha ha, you’re imagining things!”

Melty sensed where this was going as she watched me and the dragon interact, but I just ignored her. Once we finished eating, she was in for a real surprise.

“This is unprecedented,” said Melty.

“Oh, yeah? I figured there’d be legends about this kinda thing here.”

“I’ve certainly never heard any before.”

“Huh.”

I pulled on the rope as hard as I could to make sure it was stable, and suddenly the ground shook hard.

“It’s all itchy,” Grande said.

“I had to put this together quickly, so just bear with it for now. Once we get to Arichburg, I’ll make you one that’s way comfier.”

“Mmm.”

The ground let out a sigh as if it’d given up. Well, not really the ground...

It was the dragon, the one who gorged on all those hamburgers a second ago. We were attaching a safety rope to her scales and getting ready for a flight through the sky. Us moving around on top of her was making the dragon kind of itchy, so every now and then she shook her body whole, stalling work.

“I can’t believe the thought of riding a dragon even crossed your mind,” Melty added.

“It’s a pretty common trope in fantasy novels—er, adventure stories.”

“Huh? Are there dragons in your world?”

“No, not at all. They’re imaginary creatures to us. Long, long ago there used to be similar kinds of creatures on the planet, though.”

Folks probably came up with dragons after seeing dinosaur bones.

“Really?”

“One of these days, when we’ve got the time, I’ll tell you all about it. All right, we’re ready to go! Grande, let’s fly!”

“As you wish. Hold on tightly, humans.”

The dragon had no name, so I named it Grande. She spread her massive wings and roared. She didn’t flap them at all, but a powerful wind erupted around us.

“Whew! Talk about breezy!”

As soon as the wind collided with Grande's wings, her massive body began to float in the air. It looked like dragons were like harpies: they used wind magic to fly instead of flapping their wings. I'd bet dragons used way more, actually. The wind surrounding Grande was like nothing the harpies had ever produced. It was hard to keep my eyes open.

Eventually, the upward wind settled down and Grande began to glide across the sky at a fairly tremendous speed. And yet the wind wasn't hitting us at all... Why?

"How is it, human? My wind repelling magic is quite impressive, is it not?" The dragon called back to us.

"Yeah, it's awesome! You're amazing, Grande."

"Aren't I? Both Father and Mother praised my skills as well," Grande replied happily."

I turned to check on Melty, who had been silent since we left the ground. She was trembling in fear, her face pale. Was she scared of heights?

"Do you know where Arichburg is?" I asked Grande.

"If you're referring to the large human settlement in that direction, then yes. I've seen it from afar multiple times."

"Excellent. Damn, what an amazing view."

"Hee hee, is it not? This is a world normally exclusive to dragons and birds. Enjoy yourself."

"I sure will!"

I needed to get in touch with Sylphy while I could. Otherwise, things were going to become chaotic once we arrived in Arichburg. Hell, they might even shoot us down. Since yesterday, we hadn't been able to get in touch with the slimes in Merinesburg, so we would be within range of Arichburg soon.

Everyone was gonna be mighty surprised when they saw us arrive home on the back of a dragon. I couldn't wait to see how they reacted.

POV: SYLPHY

I T'D BEEN A WEEK since Kousuke informed me of his departure from Merinesburg.

It would take about a month traveling by road to get here from there, so I knew it would be some time before I got to see him again, but whenever I had spare time on my hands, I couldn't help but wait in front of the golem communicator.

Everyone with a close connection to Kousuke seemed to feel similarly, since whenever I came to the communicator, Ira or one of the harpies was already there. There were a whole lot of harpies *familiar* with Kousuke, and not all of them went on recon at once, so whoever had been left behind usually kept tabs on the communicator.

Today, a small brown-winged girl was keeping watch. I believed her name was Pessa.

"Ah, Princess! Good day!"

"Good day, Pessa."

When I said the girl's name, she looked surprised.

"Why so shocked? Of course I know your name," I said.

"Eheheh, thank you!"

Apparently, that was something for her to be happy about. A bashful smile formed on her face. Of course I knew who she was, especially as a woman in love with the same man.

"I doubt we're going to get any calls soon, but I can't help but come here."

"Riiiiight? The last time he called, I was out on recon, so I haven't heard his voice in ages... I really miss him..."

"I'm sure you do... I want to hear Kousuke's voice as well."

"Eheheh, me and the princess are the same--"

And then, suddenly, the communicator's alarm began to ring.

"This is Arichburg."

"S-so soon...?"

Pessa extended her wings toward me, shivering, but I didn't have the energy to focus on her just then. I held up the speaker in my hands, ready to talk.

"Wh-whoa, that sure was fast, Sylphy."

"Kousuke!? What's wrong? Isn't it a little early for you to be contacting us?"

"Master?! Princess! Let me hear his voice too!"

"Oh, right. Sorry."

I placed the communicator on the table and put it on "speaker mode." Pessa would be able to hear him and we could all talk together. I lost my cool for a moment there, and couldn't help but feel a little bad about it.

"Yeah, well, thanks to Melty's guidance, we've cut past the roads. We're currently on our way down from the top of a tall mountain."

"Past the roads?" I repeated. "Tall mountain...?"

"You can't possibly be talking about the Sorel Mountains, right...?" said Pessa.

"Doubtful," I said. "That's a nest for wyverns, and there have even been sightings of a dragon up there. Even Melty couldn't... Er, maybe I'm wrong..."

Melty can be kind of loosey goosey. Ultimately, she'd end up making the best choice, but I really doubted she was dragging Kousuke through the Sorel Mountains. That place was as dangerous as the Omitt Badlands.

"No, she's right. We cut through the Sorel Mountains. But that's not important."

"I think it's *kinda* important!"

"Likewise."

"Anyhow, we became friends with a dragon up here, so we're riding her back to the city. We'll probably be there in about an hour."

"...Pardon me, but I didn't hear you quite right. Could you repeat yourself?"

“We became friends with a dragon, who we’re riding back to Arichburg with. We’ll be there in an hour and change.”

I began to massage the bridge of my nose in response to Kousuke’s unbelievable tale. I could feel a headache coming on. When I glanced off to the side, Pessa was frozen, incapable of speech. Which I understood—I probably looked the same way.

“Assuming you’re being literal, what do you need from us?”

“Prepare a wide-open area for us to land. Also, I’d love for you to let everyone know ahead of time, to avoid panic, and so nobody shoots us down. We’ll be coming in from the north.”

“All right, I’ll take care of it. Anything else?”

“Depending on how things go, Grande—er, the dragon I’m riding, that is, will end up staying with us, so could you prepare some wheat and also meat? A lot of it?”

“I get the meat, but why the wheat? Does the dragon eat bread or something?”

“She’s very fond of hamburgers.”

“...Hamburgers.”

If I remembered correctly, hamburgers consisted of flat pieces of meat cooked and sandwiched between bread. This dragon ate those? I couldn’t even picture such a thing.

“Yeah, hamburgers. Oh, and elf mead too. That’s all! Sorry to ask so much of you!”

“I-it’s fine. I’ll get started on things immediately,” I said.

“Thanks a lot, babe. I just can’t wait to see you again, Sylphy. I’ve missed you so much.”

“Me too, Kousuke...”

“Same here! I’ve been waiting for you, Master!”

“Oh, is that you, Pessa?”

“Yup! It’s me!”

Tears began to form in Pessa’s eyes as she nodded over and over again, clearly happy that he’d recognized her by voice alone.

“Sorry for worrying you, Pessa. I’ll be seeing you soon, so help Sylphy out, okay?”

“You got it! I’ll be waiting for you!”

“Awesome. See you girls soon.”

The call ended, and for a time, Pessa and I simply stared at each other.

“...Do you think he’s telling the truth?” I asked.

“I can’t think of a reason why Master would lie... But it is hard to believe,” Pessa replied, wiping her tears away with her wings.

She was not wrong.

“Yeah... It really is unbelievable, but this is Kousuke we’re talking about. All right, first we have to assemble the top brass. Can you get them together for me?”

“Of course!” Pessa responded with excitement and flew out of the communications room.

“I have to think over what I’m going to tell everyone...” I mumbled to myself.

Since Kousuke would be arriving via dragon within the hour, we had to clear a landing space and gather food for his new companion. We also had to let the citizens know and make sure nobody shot them down on their way in.

“I hope they don’t think I’ve gone crazy...”

Unable to figure out how to best explain it all, I let out a deep sigh. At this point, I might as well just say, “you know how Kousuke is,” and leave it at that. Everyone already knew that he lacked all common sense.

“I see the city.”

We’d been enjoying our trip through the sky on Grande’s back for about an

hour when Grande looked down toward the ground and let me know we were close. She took an hour to get somewhere it would've taken us days to reach on foot. Amazing.

“Dragon wings are the best. You're so fast.”

“Hee hee hee, indeed I am!” Grande roared happily. “Praise me more, human! I'm the kind of dragon who grows on compliments!”

It honestly felt real weird hearing a girl's voice overlapping with those animalistic cries. I wondered if I'd ever get used to it.

Huh? Am I into dragons too? Look, just because she sounds like a beautiful girl, that doesn't mean I'm attracted to her like that, got it? A dragon is a step too far for me, okay?

“What is she saying?” Melty whispered into my ear. For some reason, she was clinging to my body. Having her whisper in my ear gave me chills, but she was seriously squeezing me so hard it hurt.

“She says we're coming up on Arichburg,” I said. “When I told her how fast she was, she said she grows on compliments.”

“You mean like her neck or something?”

“I don't think she means it literally.”

“I know. This is just hard for me to accept.”

Melty's eyes were distant. The usually composed Melty making a face like this? Now I'd seen it all. Was flying through the air that much of a crazy experience for her? Apparently.

I was starting to suspect she was afraid of heights, but...nah, that couldn't be.

“They should've made a landing zone for us,” I told Grande. “Can you see anything like that?”

“Outside of the city to the west is an open area with torches lit, even though it's daylight. Might that be the place?”

“Probably,” I replied. “Land there. We shouldn't be attacked.”

“I am trusting you, human. If magic or spears come flying my way, I will not

hesitate to burst into tears.”

“No worries. Just trust me.”

“...I am still concerned.”

Despite her worries, Grande began to descend rapidly.

Whoa. I could feel my insides going all weird like when you fall from somewhere high up! Felt wild!

Also felt painful.

Melty was clinging to my middle tightly. Was she scared? She must have been. But if she didn't loosen up, my ribs were going to be in trouble.

Please, lay off a little? I give in!

While I was fervently tapping on Melty's arms for mercy, Grande finished landing. There was no turbulence at all; a perfect touchdown.

“We've landed, humans,” she announced. “Except, well, now we are surrounded, and they all have weapons. I'm terribly frightened, quite frankly. Please help.”

“Don't worry, I'll make them put their weapons away,” I said. “Just hold on a second.”

Despite Grande's almost regal way of speaking, she was quite the scaredy cat. Perhaps she had some sort of trauma related to humanoids...

I peel Melty off of me (her eyes were shut tightly) and undid the stabilizing rope before disembarking from Grande.

Melty climbed off with me, and her face was bright red. She must've gotten embarrassed after the fact.

“Don't worry about me!” I told her. “Go on, talk to the others.”

When she realized that I was staring at her bright red face, she hid it behind one hand and used the other to push me forward.

Heh heh heh, I've got ammo for days now! I can't go too far with it or she could physically annihilate me, though, so I'll have to be careful.

I came out from behind Grande with my arms held high, and the soldiers of the Liberation Army began to chatter loudly. Grande started to shake in fear. Just how scared was she?

“Hey, guys, I’m back! This dragon here is Grande! She’s kind of a scaredy cat, so could you put your weapons away? She’s my new friend!”

At first, the soldiers seemed uncertain of what to do, but nonetheless, they soon put their weapons away. Grande let out a massive, stinky sigh.

“Kousuke!”

A single person broke through the throngs of soldiers. Of course, I recognized her.

“Sylphy!”

We embraced each other, Sylphy gripping me tightly, almost painfully. Actually, not almost. It legit hurt.

Stop, stop! I’m going to break! I can’t breathe!

“Kousuke...!”

“U-ugggh, I-I missed you...too-”

It was my duty as a man to accept all this love, no matter how tough it was... Okay, no, this was impossible. My vision was going white.

I tapped rapidly on Sylphy’s back, but she didn’t seem to notice at all, since she was too busy sobbing. Her grip grew even tighter.

“C-can’t...breathe...”

I let out a sound like a bird being strangled, and soon after that I lost consciousness.

I heard Sylphy cry out my name from afar, but it was too late. I didn’t have the god-like skill, Grit.

When I came to, there was a familiar ceiling above me.

“You’re up?”

A girl with a single big eye gazed down at me. Her eye was a little bit red. Was she crying? My brain still wasn't in full gear, so I tried to piece things together as I wrapped my arms around the lovely creature in front of me.

“Hey, I’m back.”

“Welcome home, Kousuke.”

Ira buried her face in my chest and nuzzled me, and I gently caressed her head and back.

Yeah, I’m finally back.



“Kousuke!”

“Master!”

The harpies had noticed what was happening and all came running over. Everyone was celebrating my safe return, gently rubbing my head with their wings and shedding tears, as well as showering me with kisses.

Hey, did someone just lick me? Whoa, stop taking my clothes off!

I managed to avoid the harpies' string of attacks for long enough to get a question in. “B-by the way, where's Sylphy?”

“Over there,” said Ira, who was straddling my chest to protect her spot. She pointed at a corner of the room.

I sat up and looked in that direction, only to find Sylphy with quite the aura surrounding her. She was sitting like a child during gym class, her face buried in her knees, trembling.

“Sylphy, get your butt over here,” I called to her.

“No... I don't deserve to... I'm an awful woman who nearly strangled you after your long journey home... Leave me alone.”

Man, that dark aura of hers was wild. Was it being generated by a dark spirit or something?

“Don't worry about it, Sylphy. I know you were feeling overwhelmed.”

And I'm brittle as hell. Okay, well, maybe she did go a little too far. But now's not the time to say that. I have to be tolerant. You got this, Kousuke.

I gently removed Ira from atop me and hopped out of bed, drawing close to Sylphy in her corner.

“Sylphy, please. I want to see your beautiful face.”

“Uuugh...”

She did as I asked, and it was a mess. Due to her sobbing, her eyes were red and swollen. She also had snot running down her nose. *Not befitting a beauty like her at all!*

I pulled some cloth from my inventory and, after wiping her tears, cleaned her nose.

“I’m not angry, I promise,” I said.

I planted a gentle kiss on her forehead and held her close. She buried her face in right shoulder, which started to feel warm. Had she started crying again?

By the time she stopped, Ira and the others had left the room. They were all such sweethearts.

“C’mon, stand up and let’s sit over there, okay?”

“Okay...”

Sylphy removed her face from my shoulder, and I was pretty sure I noticed a line of snot extending from her nose and my shirt, but I pretended not to see it. We could just wash everything tomorrow. My priority was cheering Sylphy up.

“I missed you so much, you know,” I told her. “But it also hurts me to see you crying like this. I’m okay, I promise.”

Sylphy sniffled for a few moments before seeming to calm down. Just when I thought I heard her whisper something, a bright light suddenly appeared.

“Whoa!? What the heck!?”

When the light faded, Sylphy’s swollen and bloodshot eyes were back to normal, and even my shoulder was nice and clean. She must’ve used spirit magic to take care of it all.

“I’m sorry, Kousuke,” she said.

“I told you, I’m not angry. I know how worried you’ve been about me. If anything, it makes me happy.”

“Ugggh...”

Sylphy held onto me like she was about to start crying again, but instead she fell asleep from exhaustion. I put her to bed and made my way to the kitchen. I was pretty hungry, and I also wanted to feed her something, if possible.

Hrm, what should I make? Ah! I know. What about that kebab I first made for her? Or the fake burrito? Now that I have a cooking workbench, I should be able

to make a perfect burrito.

A burrito by itself would be kinda sad, so I'd make some soup, too. Just a plain old consommé with lots of ingredients would do the trick. I supposed I could make it without using my skills, but at the same time, I wanted it to be delicious. Either way, I'd technically have made it, so what did it actually matter?

Now that I thought about it, I had to take care of Grande, too. Given the placement of the sun, I hadn't been unconscious for too long. I felt bad for my new dragon pal, but I wanted to stay with Sylphy for a little while longer.

Eventually, she woke up on the bed and glanced around the room. She soon spotted me, and her face lit up.

"I made food," I said. "Let's eat together."

"Okay!"

It kinda felt like Sylphy had regressed in age, but whatever. She was adorable, so it was fine.

"I tried making the same thing I first made for you when we met."

"That brings me back..."

Sylphy narrowed her eyes at the burrito sitting on the plate in front of her. The soup was ready to go as well.

"Then let's dig in," I said.

"My pleasure."

The two of us bit into our burritos.

The first sensation that greeted me was the crunchy mouthfeel of the sliced vegetables. The next was the flavor of the meat topped with sweet and hot sauce, plus the slightly sour mayo-based sauce as well. This was a much more elegant flavor profile than the burritos I made before. Delicious.

"Hee hee, this is way tastier than the last time," she said.

"I've gotten better, right?"

I tossed out a fist and Sylphy happily giggled. Thank goodness. It looked like

she was feeling better at last.

“The soup’s also great,” she commented.

“Apparently, it takes a lot to make this sort of complex flavor from scratch.”

I wasn’t super familiar with the recipe, but I had seen or heard somewhere that it took time and a lot of resources to make consommé soup from nothing. Beef stew and curry were the same way—if you didn’t use store-bought roux and start from nothing, both of them took a whole lot of effort to cook. White stew is apparently easier, somehow.

“I’m so glad to be back, honestly. I’m just so happy to see you again, Sylphy.”

“Likewise... The fact that I almost suffocated you to death is a failure on my part...”

“That’s what happens when emotions reach their breaking point. As long as you’re careful next time, it’s no biggie!”

“I know...”

She was almost back to her usual aura, although she was still acting a little bit childish. Sylphy wasn’t quite stable yet. But I understood. Hell, I felt all over the place myself. I could start dancing, quite honestly.

As we ate together, the two of us talked about what happened when that fox bastard kidnapped me. Once we finished our food, I pulled out some mead and we continued to talk over drinks. We had so much time to make up for, and I knew for a fact she felt the same way.

“So, Lime and the others are still watching over Mother and the rest underneath the castle...”

Tears once again formed in Sylphy’s eyes when I told her about the slime girls and her family. Fortunately, it was good news.

“Father sacrificed himself to protect our family, and I’m going to free them no matter what. I swear.” Sylphy clenched her fists resolutely, the light of defiance in her eyes.

“About that...”

I was going to have to tell her about Elen and her group.

I hid nothing as I explained the entire situation to Sylphy. It wouldn't feel right keeping this from her.

Back when we were communicating long distance, I'd told her that I'd made contact with a saint of Adolism, but I hadn't said anything about, well, *relationship* with her. It wasn't exactly something I could do over a call.

As I explained the Elen situation to her, her eyes narrowed coldly. *Aaah, this is terrifying!*

"I see," she said. "Hrm. I expected things with Melty to turn out that way, but I certainly didn't expect a saint of Adolism to be tossed into the mix. Hrm..."

Her cold stare prompted cold sweat to begin running down my face.

"Is she beautiful?" She asked.

"Yeah, I'd say so," I replied.

"Huh... But you told her I'm your number one, right?"

"Obviously. You'll meet her eventually, so you can confirm that with her then. She asked me if I'd make her my number one, and I told her that was impossible because that spot's already taken. You're my number one, Sylphy."

I gazed straight back into her eyes, expressing myself as clearly as possible. Honesty was best here.

"I-I see..."

Sylphy turned bright red and looked away from me. Thank goodness, it looked like I'd gotten through to her.

"Then, um, are you willing to prove it?" She glanced at the bed.

"Absolutely."

"B-be gentle, okay?"

"Leave it to me."

And so, my long night with Sylphy finally began.

The next day.

“My turn, now.”

Let’s just say I did my best.

The day after that.

“Now it’s our turn!”

I did my absolute bestest.

The day *after* the day after that.

“Hee hee, now it’s my turn, right?”

“Help me, somebody!”

“There’s no escaping from an overlord! Hee hee.”

“Gyah!!!”

I was forced to do my best.

“It’s tough love around here for sure,” I said.

“You have many partners.”

“By happenstance,” I insisted.

Grande looked at me with pity as she chomped on a gigantic cheeseburger. “Happenstance, you say...? Hrm, you seem out of it. Just take care not to work yourself to death. I get worried seeing you grow weaker by the day, Master.”

Let’s just say that after days of “exercise,” my stamina was at an all-time low. I was at like thirty percent. Any normal work felt like hell. Also, my lower body felt heavy. My muscles in particular.

“Ha ha ha, I’m okay... I’m built tough. I’m a pro at taking care of people.”

“Are you certain of that?”

The dragon flashed me a doubtful look. I was pretty sure that I was one of

only a few who'd ever been on the receiving end of one of those from a dragon. And, hold on, Ms. Dragon. Wasn't I literally taking care of you just now? I got that I was just keeping my promise and making up for not tending to her sooner, but still!

"So, Grande. How long do you plan on sticking around?"

"Hrm? Let me see... I suppose until I grow bored."

"And you're going to be eating burgers until that happens?"

"Indeed." She nodded like it was obvious. *I see, thanks for the expected answer.*

"Gotcha. Hey, so back in my old world, we have this saying. He who does not work, shall not eat."

"Hrm?"

Grande tilted her head, giant cheeseburger still in her mouth.

"In other words, we can't afford to feed people who don't work to earn their keep."

"But I am a proud dragon. Do you mean to make *me* work?"

Grande chewed thoroughly while looking down her snout at me. Since she had cheese and ketchup all over her mouth, her grandiosity really went to waste.

"It's *because* you're a proud dragon that you'd never accept rewards for doing nothing, right?" I said. "If all you did was eat and sleep, you'd be no better than cattle... Actually, no. Cattle can provide fur, meat, milk, and skins, so you'd be worse. Basically just a pet."

"A pet?!" Grande dropped the giant burger from her claws and looked at me in stunned shock.

"How dare you refer to me as such!"

"In other words, I want you to work," I continued. "Look, I'm not asking you to get on all fours and work from morning to night like us humanoids. I'm asking you to do stuff like maybe hunt down one or two wyverns a day and bring them

back here, or occasionally offer up some of your scales that fall off, or even provide a little bit of blood when going out is a pain. That's all."

"Hrrrm..."

Grande picks up the burger she dropped on the dining table (multiple wood blocks connected to each other) and brings it to her mouth while thinking.

"Plus, if you like hamburgers, just wait till you try some of the other food I can make for you."

Grande's tail freezes in place.

"For as long as you stay and work here, I'd be happy to feed you the good stuff. It wouldn't be fair if only one side benefits, right?"

"Hrrm... But if Mother or Father were to find out about this, they'd be very upset with me."

So that's what she's worried about?"

"That's one way to look at it. But couldn't you also say that you're being offered gifts for exerting the tiniest bit of your power?"

"Hrm, that is indeed true..." She chomped thoughtfully. It was a very weird sight. "All right, I agree to your terms."

"Awesome! I'm really happy to hear that. To start with, as thanks for taking us home, you can spend the next three days relaxing, including today. After that, you can begin work. How does that sound?" I asked.

"Mm, excellent."

And that was how the dragon Grande came to reside in Arichburg.

I would later speak to Ira, who would inform me that Grande was of a species of dragon particularly talented in earthen magics. In less than an hour, she could reduce smallish mountains to flat plains. When it came to that sort of thing, she was even more talented than I was with my mithril tools.

Needless to say, she could fly, but she could also dig her way around underground. Her scales were particularly tough, and her horns, claws, and fangs could all be used to make powerful earth-element magical weapons.

Armor and shields made from her scales would be incredibly strong and resistant to earthen magic.

Huh? Why am I just talking about her in terms of materials? C'mon, what do you expect? Up until now, dragons were considered powerful monsters. When one was defeated, people would gather all sorts of materials from their valuable corpses. According to my sources, their meat was delicious, and their blood and organs could be used to make extremely effective medicines. For example, one could make a medicine capable of regrowing missing parts.

“...”

Actually, Ira had been observing Grande from the shadows for a while now. Since I was the only one who could understand our new dragon friend, she hadn't participated in our discussions.

“Hey, Kousuke? The way that cyclops woman stares at me is terribly frightening.”

“It's probably fine. Probably.”

I averted my gaze from Grande. I doubted Ira would do something as bold as attacking Grande to harvest her blood and organs. I mean...right?

It had been five days since I returned to Arichburg.

While Grande munched on one of her giant burgers, I dragged Ira away to the meeting room.

“Grande's on board,” I told the assembled group.

“Incredible.”

“Indeed. Kousuke must be the first person in history to tame a dragon.”

“A dragon tamer instead of a slayer, eh? I'd expect nothing less from Kousuke.”

Sylphy, Ira, and Sir Leonard all praised my work. *Heh, keep piling it on, folks.*

“But are we sure this is a good idea?” Danan asked. “If she chooses to rampage, it would cause much damage.”

“Do you think we should come up with a contingency plan?” Madame Zamil said.

Danan and Madame Zamil still had their doubts. They were right to be concerned, though. If Grande suddenly developed a taste for violence, Arichburg would be toast. Given Grande’s massive size (twenty meters long, give or take), she could easily destroy the stone housing. And that thick, hard tail of hers would reduce anyone into mincemeat with one swing.

Then there was that terrifying horn. If she charged into the city gates, they’d be reduced to rubble.

“Then how about I build a dragon stable for her outside of the city?” I suggested.

“A what now?” Sylphy asked.

“A huge dog house, basically.”

“You’re going to put a dragon in a dog house...?” she replied, with an awkward expression on her face.

Ira nodded her head. “Now we know where Grande stands in Kousuke’s mind.”

“I plead the fifth.”

They were twisting my words a bit, but I was having Grande work in exchange for food. The dragon got to be happy, eating all she wanted. We got to have her help. Everyone was happy, so there was no problem. Right?

“Well, leaving anything involving Grande to Kousuke, our actual problem is the Holy Kingdom, as always.” Sylphy got back to business.

“Indeed. I’ve heard that Adolism isn’t exactly a united front, but...” Sir Leonard trailed off.

“We’re here to discuss whether we can coexist with Adolism, aren’t we?” Danan asked. “I think that’s impossible, quite frankly.”

Both Sir Leonard and Danan were of the mind that coexisting with those who worship Adol was impossible. It was entirely understandable, considering their families were murdered by the Holy Kingdom. Beloved wives and children, at

that. There were lots of folks with similar life stories.

“That being said, realistically, it’s probably impossible to kill every human who worships at the altar of Adolism,” said Melty. Ira nodded in his direction.

“Mm, agreed. In which case, it’d be easier to change Adolism itself as we see fit. Less blood spilled.”

Melty and Ira believed that dividing Adolism by using Elen’s sect would be the best course of action. This seemed less like an effort to reconcile with those who worship Adol, and more like an effort to make the two factions go to war with one another and thus cut down their forces.

“I agree with Melty and Ira’s thoughts on the matter,” said Sylphy. “Regardless of whether we can coexist, if those who follow Adolism are not united, using that conflict to our advantage would be a wise tactic. Our objective is still to take back the Kingdom of Merinard. To that end, I believe cooperating with the Nostalgia sect is the best road available to us.”

“But Your Highness...” Danan started to interject, but Sylphy cut him off.

“We must not close ourselves off to potential options by being stubborn,” she said. “Just as we accepted Kousuke into our ranks, we might also be able to accept the Nostalgia sect and these so-called original teachings that they’ve been looking into.”

Sylphy was using me as an example to explain things to Danan and Sir Leonard.

It was true that at first, I was nearly lynched by the folks from the Kingdom of Merinard. I still remembered how terrified I was at the time. We were all friendly and chill now, but my first meeting with the people of this world was not a positive one.

“Mrm... You are correct,” Danan relented.

“And Kousuke is the one who brought this possibility to us in the first place...” added Sir Leonard.

“I’m not saying we’re suddenly not at war with the Holy Kingdom. Our objective remains unchanged, and that is something I will not budge on. Once

we take back our country, we will likely be thrust into conflict with the Holy Nation itself. Abandoning my hatred for them in its entirety is something I am not capable of.” Sylphy’s expression was harsh. “But we can’t keep fighting indefinitely. We have to draw the line somewhere, and that time will come no matter what else we do. That’s why we must create a path where we can make contact with those from the Holy Kingdom, to communicate with them.”

Danan and Sir Leonard went silent in thought for a moment, but soon nodded their heads.

“As you wish, Princess.”

“We shall simply prepare in the meantime.”

“Excellent. Then we shall make contact with the Nostalgia sect and begin to negotiate with the Holy Kingdom. At the same time, we will concentrate our efforts on strengthening defenses and supporting our territories. We will not expand anytime soon. If the enemy attacks our land, we wipe them out. That is our current plan going forward.”

“Understood.”

The top brass of the Liberation Army nodded their heads in understanding. Things were about to get really busy for us.

With our direction decided, me and the rest of the team got to work for the Liberation Army.

Time for me to leap into action! Kousuke to the rescue!

“I want you to focus on feeding and taking care of Grande for now.”

“Whaaa?”

No anti-Holy Kingdom jobs were coming my way. Sure, we weren’t going to be actively blowing them away anymore. It was going to be politics. I was told I’d be coming along for the meetings due to my connection to Elen. Our pre-negotiations would be held through golem communicators using the slime girls, so they didn’t need my help.

Since the artisans had learned how to produce bolts for the crossguns, all I

really needed to make were aerial bombs for the harpies, ammo for the rifles, and grenades for the foot soldiers.

As it turned out, there had been no open combat since I was kidnapped, so there hadn't been a significant decrease in munitions. Obviously, some was used to take out monsters and the like, but that was all.

"In other words, you have been sidelined."

"That's not true! It's just, like, uh, I'm being saved for something important!"

I did my best to make up excuses, but Grande simply gazed at me with her kind eyes. *Stop smiling or I'm gonna call Ira over!*

On account of my previous kidnapping, I was assigned bodyguards who had to be with me at all times. That said, they were a little afraid to get too close to Grande, so they were on standby at a distance. That day, my guards were a pink-feathered harpy named Bron and an orange-feathered harpy named Fich.

"Anyhow, you're not crazy about being kept outside, right?" I asked Grande. "I'll build you a sturdy little house."

"I do not need such things," she said.

"Pardon?"

"I am a grand dragon. I can simply burrow underground should I require a place to rest. Fast and simple."

Grande then proceeded to dive horn-first into the ground as if it was a lake.

And just like a lake, ripples ran across the ground as Grande slipped underneath. After staying submerged for a bit, there was some shaking that eventually stopped as she opened a hole in the surface and emerged.

"See?" she said. "Simple."

"What the hell!?"

The hole in the ground was so deep that I couldn't even see its bottom.

"You see, grand dragons build their nests underground just like this. In the summer, it's cool, and in the winter, it's warm. The water that rises up keeps the dirt nice and hard, too."

Damn, she really was just like some dragon from a fantasy story. Digging holes was nothing for her.

“...Won't rain get in this way? I'll make a roof for you,” I offered.

“Ah, that would certainly help.”

I used stone materials to build thick pillars at each corner of the large hole, then created roofing so water wouldn't get in.

Hah! Now that I can put down batches of blocks, this is nothing.

How about I put bricks down at each corner and spell out “Grande” for her?

Hah!

“Well done,” she said.

“Thanks a bunch.”

Thanks to Grande's skills, the job I was given took me one measly hour. I was gonna build her a huge home, and instead she built a nest underground.

How dare she do this to me, the great Kousuke! ...I really should've seen this coming, huh?

She was a dragon. Of course she thought nothing of sleeping in the wilderness. If anything, I was more surprised that she built such a *nice* underground nest.

“I guess I can make you a dining room,” I said to her.

“Oh, that would be a delight! I would rather not indulge in wet hamburgers due to stormy weather.”

“Hrm. It won't be easy, making a dining room that's easy for both of us to use without letting in any rain.”

“I suppose that is true. Actually, I forgot to ask, but was it alright to build a nest here? Don't humanoids constantly increase their territories?” Grande asked, gesturing with a claw.

“Ah, good point. Let me get back to you on that.”

And so, Grande and I filled up her hole, got rid of the giant roofing, and decided to consult with Melty.

“That overlord female is terrifying...” Grande said to me.

“But wouldn’t it be more terrifying if she got mad because we did this without permission?” I pointed out.

“...Indeed. I leave this business to you.”

“Yeah, I figured.”

Grande was massive, which meant she can’t enter Arichburg without me, so I’d be heading there alone. And by alone, I meant with Bron and Fich.

“I’ll just hang back.”

“Likewise.”

Bron and Fich smiled, clearly excusing themselves from the oncoming conversation. Which was fine. It had nothing to do with them.

The three of us walked through the busy streets of the city, where members of the Liberation Army and citizens alike called out to greet us.

“Lookin’ good, pal! Must be rough havin’ so many partners.”

“Findin’ you was a real hassle, so don’t you go gettin’ kidnapped again, ya hear me?”

“Hey, it’s the dragon tamer! I wanna try what you fed her!”

Lots of people were chatting it up with me. Honestly, I way preferred this to people being all shy. I returned greetings to everyone until we eventually arrived at our destination. It was a proper public office, where former domestic affairs officers like Melty, or any other officials, could carry out their governmental work.

As the liberation of the former Kingdom of Merinard progressed, we were acquiring more and more talent in Arichburg among the former slaves. There were some elderly folks who hadn’t worked in ages, but that was fine too. The folks up top had been putting a lot of effort into training young people who wanted to get to work and had talent.

“Oh, if it isn’t the hero!” The goat beastman working the front desk said when he saw my face.

“...Pardon?”

A hero? Me? What the heck's he talking about?

“You ‘dance’ with the princess, with Lady Ira, the harpies, and even with Lady Melty. What are you, if not a hero? Imagine surviving all of that!”

“First time I’ve ever been praised just for being alive. But I suppose I can’t deny that anyone other than me would probably be dead by now.”

In fact, if my body didn’t have special properties, and I didn’t have my survival skill, my auto-healing wouldn’t keep up and I might have died ages ago.

“So, what brings our horny hero here?”

“Please don’t call me that,” I said. “I want to build a dragon nest and a dining room outside of town for Grande, the dragon I brought back with me. But I was wondering if there’s a specific spot we should use? Especially considering any potential city expansion plans.”

“I see. In that case, I’ll call Lady Melty. Please wait for a moment.”

The goat man headed into the back as I surveyed the activity around the office. There were quite a few people around doing paperwork. Businessman types, mothers with children, young men and women, the elderly—all kinds of humans and demi-humans living together without issue. At least on the surface.

Few days had passed since the Liberation Army occupied Arichburg and took control over the southern portion of the former Kingdom of Merinard. That was more than enough time for the issues between humans and demi-humans to escalate, but things seemed to be proceeding much more smoothly than I’d anticipated.

Whether that was because of Sylphy and her team handling things well, or because, to the citizens, things had just gone back to the old ways of the kingdom, I couldn’t tell you.

What I did know was that even after occupying another country, we couldn’t just expel the old residents or murder them all. Twenty years was a long time, but also not long enough for generations to have changed places. There were many humans who lived here when the old kingdom was in place. Maybe that

was why things were going the way they were.

“Kousuke, you’ve been summoned.”

Sandwiched between my two harpy guards, I sat down in a large chair and enjoyed the soft feathers to either side of me while waiting for the goat man to bring in Melty. The fact that she was wearing a casquette hat to hide her head pained me deeply.

Ira was currently gathering materials and doing some alchemy work to come up with a solution to bring back her horns. Supposedly, that’d be finished in a few days. All we had to do was get some of Grande’s blood, and we’d be good to go.

According to Ira, “Fresh blood from a living dragon is a tremendously coveted alchemic material. It’s the key to unlocking the secrets of alchemy.”

All hail dragon blood! Apparently.

I was also pretty interested in the stuff as a crafting material.

Sorry, Grande, but Ira isn’t the only one looking at you as a source of materials. I’m right there with her. Heh heh heh.

“Kousuke?” While I was busy grinning to myself, Melty had quietly made her way to my side.

“Ah, sorry,” I said to her. “You might’ve already been informed, but I’m here about Grande’s living arrangements.”

“Yes, the location, right? How big do you think it’s going to be?”

“Lemme see... Just to be safe, fifty by fifty meters would be appropriate. She doesn’t mind it being outside of the city.”

“I see... She’ll definitely need some space. It’d be one thing if this was inside the city, but I see no issues with it happening outside. Considering city expansion plans, the northwest seems best. There’s not much room for expansion in that direction anyway.”

Melty whipped out a simple map and pointed at the area in question. Arichburg had city gates on the northeast and southwest ends, so building it in the northwest would make it a bit of a trek to get to.

“Might I request a spot a little closer to the gates?” I asked.

“Absolutely not.” Melty shook her head. “There are enough people who would be terrified by the prospect of a dragon living just beyond the walls, never mind near the city gates or the road. People would stop coming here.”

How could I possibly argue against that? Once people learned that Grande was a safe dragon who just ate, slept, and chilled all day, I was sure she’d become a tourist attraction or even a great way to test one’s courage. And when that happened, I’d bet her treatment would improve. But she’d just have to hold out until then.

“All right.”

As for a shortcut, I figured I could just climb the city walls and jump down using blocks. I’d have to go home the normal way, though.

“I’m glad you’re listening. By the way, Kousuke. About tonight.”

“Yes?”

“I’ll be busy with work, so I’ll take care of dinner on my own, okay?”

“Sure. Do you want me to leave anything for you here? I have plenty of food that’s fine eaten cold.”

“Really? That’d be wonderful,” Melty happily replied.

I handed her a sandwich filled with cheese, ham, and veggies, then left the office. I had to grab something for Grande from one of the stalls on the way back.

And so me, Bron, and Fich munched on some stall food while making our way back to where Grande was.

“That’s about it,” I wrapped up.

“Not bad at all!”

Grande roared happily while slapping her wide tail against the ground.

Yup, she sure was loud. And the ground was shaking. Twice the vibrating for half the price.

In front of Grande and me stood a dragon...stall? Cottage? It was about the size of an airplane hangar.

The walls were made of stone three meters thick, and the ceiling was made from the same materials, only two meters thick. Since nobody was going to be building anything else out there, I decided to make this really big. I made the entrance forty meters wide so that Grande could go in and out even with her massive wings spread. It's also twenty meters high. The interior was nice and wide, sixty meters wide in fact. The outer appearance of the building was dome-like, and I made part of the ceiling out of a glass block so light could get in.

Cleaning the glass ceiling was gonna be a pain, but I could always ask the harpies to help, or just do it myself. I'd love to see a dragon try and clean windows, though. That'd be a riot.

"Go on, check it out."

"I shall!"

Grande waved her tail and entered the building. She really had to stop doing that tail thing, it was dangerous.

"It is gloriously bright inside," she said.

"The glass bits are delicate, so be careful not to hit them with your tail."

"I imagine at that height I'd have to be aiming to reach them."

Grande looked up at the window. To me, it was super high in the air, but since Grande was twenty meters long, all she had to do was stand on her hind legs and jump, then her terrifying horn would reach the glass.

"Somewhat drab in terms of décor," she mentioned.

"That's because you only have your nest hole."

Indeed, the only thing in there was the nest she'd dug up. I asked her if she couldn't just sleep in the building, but apparently, it's warmer underground and she felt comfier down there.

"Guess I'll make you a dining room next."

“Delightful! Where will you build it?”

“It’d be best if you could clean it with water when it’s dirty, so it should probably be outside, yeah?”

“I don’t need to clean it with water,” she said. “Should it smell, I can either purify it or burn it with my breath.”

“You have fiery dragon breath?”

“But of course I do. I *am* a dragon, after all.”

“Can’t blame me for not knowing. I’ve never seen you use it before, so I figured, y’know... Wait, purification? Can you use magic?”

“Obviously. I couldn’t fly without magic.”

“Right, right... Do you think you could show me your fiery dragon breath? I’d love to take a look.”

“Fine, fine...”

Grande emerged from the dome, her tail waving about joyfully. She must have been happy to get to show off her dragon skills. But please, I prayed, stop waving that tail. It was dangerous.

“Ready? Watch carefully.”

Grande took a deep breath, then blasted heavy flames up into the sky. Even though she was aiming straight up, I could feel the heat from where I stood below.

“Awesome!” I shouted. “Real dragon breath!”

I was thrilled, couldn’t help it! Anyone caught in that blast would be reduced to bones.

Hrm, so what would I do if I was ever on the receiving end of dragon breath? Lemme see, I’d use my abilities to build a wall, then probably dig underground. I think bricks have high heat resistance, but her breath seems hot as hell, so the heat might burn me even with a wall.

But if I went underground, would I be boiled to death? I guess making a thick wall is probably my best bet.

“Hah, hah, hah, amazing indeed! I am a magnificent grand dragon, after all!”

Satisfied with my reaction, Grande smacked her tail against the ground some more, setting everything to shaking some more.

This whole time, my bodyguards were sitting on the city wall some hundred meters away, watching from afar. They were probably too scared to get close to a real dragon.

“I guess I’ll make a dining table inside your cottage.”

“Kousuke, my friend. My abode shouldn’t be called a cottage.”

“Er, what would you like me to call it?” I asked.

“Something, you know, cooler. The current name makes it sound like the dragon version of a dog house.”

She had me there. But I didn’t want to give it a name that was too hard to say. What about the dragon dome?

“Not to mention, cottages don’t come this large,” she added.

“That is very true.”

I looked over the gigantic structure again. Calling it a cottage did seem pretty forced.

“What about ‘Grande’s House’?”

“How...normal.”

“Ain’t nothing wrong with normal, I’ll have you know.”

Hell, I could carve “Grande” into some stone and set it above the entrance.

After discussing the matter for a bit, I built Grande a dining table and set it off to the side of the entrance. It took multiple attempts to get the size right, but after a little bit of trial and error, we were both satisfied with the end result. It kind of looked like an offering altar, actually.

“Wanna have a snack?” I offered.

“What’s this now?”

“I bought all sorts of stuff from the stalls in Arichburg. My hamburgers are

mighty tasty, but other human foods are good too. I've brought plenty with me."

"Hmm, I am rather intrigued."

"Put me up on the altar."

"As you say."

Grande grabbed me with her claw and raised me up. I'd love it if she could be just a teeny bit more delicate with me.

"First, there's this bread stuffed with nuts."

"Ooh..."

Above the altar, she scratched her chin before picking up the bread stuffed with walnut-like nuts, bringing it to her eye level. She then drew close and sniffed at it.

Hey, if you sniff that hard, it's gonna get sucked into your nose.

"Give it a try," I urged her.

"Mm... Mmm, it's slightly sweet. And are these nuts? They're rather aromatic."

"I'm sure you've got room for more right? Here, try this."

Next I pulled out some kind of cooked meat. I didn't ask what kind it was, but it smelled good, and when I gave it a try, it was delicious, so I bought a ton. The stall runner shaved the stuff off a giant ball of meat. He offered to sell it with some bread, but I just bought all the meat instead.

"Ooh, meat I see? Mm, it smells wonderful."

"Go on, dig in. I have other stuff too."

Grande reached for the lump of meat and stuffed the whole thing into her mouth while I watched and pulled some more goods out from my inventory. A giant pot of soup was gonna feel like a little noodle cup to her, huh?

"How was it?" I asked.

"Delicious indeed! Your race produces excellent cuisine. Still, I believe your

hamburgers to be the most delicious of them all.”

“Ha ha, flatterer.”

I pulled out a giant hamburger made just for her. It wasn't super tall, but it was extremely wide.

Grande's eyes sparkled once she saw the burger emerge. She picked it up and began to chow down right away.

Man, this seriously feels like I'm feeding my pet or something, but she's way too big to be a pet.

“By the way... Being a dragon and all, how often do you guys eat?”

“A good question... We eat quite often. Whenever we feel like eating, one might say. But should we choose not to eat, we can go for quite some time without sustenance.”

“Huh... So, do you gain weight if you just gorge every day?”

Grande held her burger in place with her mouth wide open and started to tremble. After she regained her composure, she chewed down on the burger again, though at a much slower pace than before.

“I would say that it's certainly not *not* the case. Maybe.”

As I looked at Grande averting her gaze anxiously, I could just imagine her getting all plump.

“Heh...”

“You laughed! I just heard you! What were you imagining!?”

“Just an extra, jumbo-sized Grande, is all.”

“Th-that will never come to pass! I'm a young dragon maiden more than capable of controlling my eating!”

Grande roared and slapped her tail on the ground. That time it was her way of showing a foul mood.

“I'm choosing to believe you on this. So, how often do *you* eat? I imagine three times a day would be too much.”

“Mm... I’d say twice a day...?” she ventured.

“Twice?”

“N-no, once is fine...”

Grande looked clearly depressed.

“All right, then how about one meal in the morning and one at night? It should be fine if we just reduce how much you eat in one go.”

“Y-yes, right! That should be no problem at all!”

“So, two super large hamburgers then? Or three?”

“That should...work.”

“Just for clarification, how much have you eaten up until now?”

“...”

Grande turned away from me, but I continued to stare at her until she whispered in defeat.

“I usually cooked and ate a wild boar about this size, once a week.”

Mm-hm. So basically, if she ate three super large burgers twice a day, she’d absolutely gain weight.

“Fear not!” She exclaimed. “I also exercise!”

“But if you don’t have to hunt anymore, you won’t be moving around as much as you used to, no?”

“...”

Grande went silent.

Look, I’m fine with all of this, but... If she gains so much weight that she can’t fly anymore, it’s going to affect her the worst.

“I personally think it’ll be fine as long as you work off what you eat,” I told her.

“Me, work? In what way?”

“Well, it’d be a giant help if you could let us ride on your back to the Omitt

Badlands down south, or to the Black Forest further past it. We have our manufacturing base there, among other things.”

“Th-the Black Forest, you say? I suppose that would be fine.”

At the mention of the Black Forest, Grande looked less than thrilled. Actually, didn't someone say something about dragons living there? Maybe she knew someone in the area?

“That'd be a huge help.”

Our food manufacturing base was right in the center of the Badlands. If we could carry mass quantities of food from there, it'd be lifesaving. Being able to easily exchange products with the elf village would be a big deal too.

Truth be told, I thought Grande's strategic value to me was more as a means of travel than as a weapon on the field of battle. With my ability to transport goods and Grande's high speed movement, the Holy Kingdom had nothing on us.

“You're plotting something,” Grande accused.

“I am. I'm thinking of how to use you while tempting you with burgers.”

“I am aware that you are a Fabled Visitor, but you are also tiny. If you get too sassy with me, don't be surprised should I bite back.”

“Are you really in any position to say that when little old me managed to get you here with the promise of food? Plus, if you bit me, you'd get no more burgers.”

“Hrm... That *would* be a problem.”

“Right? That's why I'll offer you good food, and in return you lend me some of your strength. That sounds like a reasonable relationship to me. And to be quite honest, I have no intention of using food to force you to do something you don't really want to do.”

“Truthfully...?”

Grande glanced in my direction.

C'mon, I'm being for real! I won't force her. I might try and convince her real

hard before giving up, though. Tee hee.

“Well, I don’t intend to put you on the front lines of this war between humanoids. “

This was the truth. I didn’t plan on making Grande directly wage war with the Holy Kingdom. I might ask for her help transporting myself or a small number of us, but I’d never ask her to charge headfirst into their army or breathe fire at them. I would’ve maybe liked for her to serve as the harpies’ airborne base of sorts, though.

But Grande was a dragon who happened to be friends with me, the guy who was keeping her fed. It wasn’t like she owed me anything, and she had no reason to get involved with inter-human conflicts. I wasn’t about to force her hand. Er, her claw?

“Hmm, you had best keep your promise. If you do not, I will bite down upon you even if it means losing hamburgers.”

“It’s a promise, I’ll keep it. C’mon, have some mead. I know you like this stuff.”

“I shall indulge myself. Mm... It’s so sweet.”

I also indulged in some mead alongside Grande. Once you got used to how sweet it was, it tasted pretty damn delicious.

Now then, what was the plan for tomorrow? I watched Grande enjoy herself while thinking up the next day’s schedule.

POV: ???

...**T**HE SAINT, again? Why must she continue to haunt me?”

Far east of Arichburg. An angry voice echoed out through the office as light from the sun poured in. It belonged to an older man wearing white priest robes embroidered with gold and silver threads. It was clear at a glance that this man was a high ranking member of the clergy.

The man was staring at small pieces of note paper on which detailed characters were written. It was a report from the reconnaissance agent he'd sent to the Kingdom of Merinard, a western country they were occupying "Perhaps this is an opportunity."

He hadn't seen the saint in some time, so he had one of his men look into it, but he hadn't expected her to be out west. No wonder he couldn't locate her no matter how much he searched within the Holy Kingdom itself.

But if she wasn't back home, that meant this was the perfect opportunity to take care of her Nostalgia sect once and for all. They were a weak sect when separated from the saint of truth. The primary sect and the others would likely be happy to cooperate.

The Kingdom of Merinard's current circumstances presented an opportunity. Some group of bandits known as the Liberation Army were causing trouble there, but this was nothing but a small revolutionary force in a border nation. Should the Holy Kingdom send their true might in their direction, it would be simple to regain control. And on top of that, they'd be able to take care of that annoying saint and her Nostalgia sect all in one go.

"Foolish apostates... Your lives are forfeit."

The old man began to quietly cackle as he took his quill pen in hand.

Chapter 3:

Daily Life in Arichburg

“IN OTHER WORDS, you have lots of free time so you want me to hang out with you?”

“One could frame it in such a way, yes.”

The day after building Grande’s home, I visited Ira. We weren’t alone, though. I was at her place of work, the Arichburg branch of our research and development division.

Sykes wasn’t there. He’d been given the position of section chief at the R&D division’s headquarters at our former frontline base. He’d been working hard all day and night with his wife and his other ladies, apparently. Working hard in both senses of the phrase. I made a mental note to send him some stamina potions soon.

We pushed forward with our invasion of the former Kingdom of Merinard pretty quickly, so the base in Omitt had kind of fallen behind in terms of development.

With Arichburg as the new frontline base of operations, it’d take more than ten days to get back to Omitt on foot, and three or four days by carriage. To get to our middle base from there was an additional five days on foot, and then getting to the rear base was two *more* days on top of all that.

Plus, carriages couldn’t move at their maximum speed in Omitt, so they were as slow as walking. So, to get to the rear: ten whole days. That was a twenty day round trip, which made it a pretty major trek. At least we could use golem communicators to get information to and fro fairly quickly.

But that didn’t really matter at the moment. I mean, it was absolutely important, it just wasn’t important to me just then. The actual problem I was dealing with was that I had nothing to do.

“Relying on you for anything is hardly a good sign,” said Ira. “We’re absolutely

still going to need your skills going forward, but just not right now. Relaxing is important.”

“But I feel uneasy when I don’t have something to do,” I whined.

“You work too much,” she said.

“In my old world, it was normal to work from morning to evening every single day. I mean, sure, we had breaks once or twice a week, but...”

“Sounds like slave labor,” Ira commented.

“...That’s not exactly wrong.”

Working from morning to evening every day and sleeping like crap on your days off; it was more like living to work than it was working to live. Sure, on days off or after coming home there was time to enjoy one’s hobbies and the like, but... I should stop thinking about this. It only hurts.

“If you really have nothing to do, I have an idea,” Ira said

“Oh, and what’s that?”

“Follow me.”

Ira hopped off her chair and set off walking.

She’s so small that when she sits on a chair, her feet don’t reach the floor. Cute, right?

Anyhow, I walked behind her while other members of the R&D division followed after us with great curiosity. The Arichburg branch was composed of thirteen demi-humans, including Ira, and three humans, for a total of sixteen researchers. To break it down, that’s four mages, four alchemists, two pharmacists, three blacksmiths, one goldsmith, and two carpenters.

“Is this a storage building?” I asked.

“Mmhm. It’s where we store the materials we use for research. We also keep magnified materials here too.”

“...Oh, right! The bestowing workbench!”

“Yup. I was curious about it too.”

“Cool, let’s give it a try,” she said.

I took a look at the recipe for making a bestowing workbench.

Bestowing Workbench—Ingredients: Mithril × 5, Gems × 12, Magical Stone × 20, Magical Wood × 10, Magical Clay × 10 *No Ingredients

“Five bits of mithril, twelve gems, twenty magical stones, ten pieces of wood, and ten chunks of clay... Got it.”

“We can get mithril and gems out of the vault. Stones are over there, wood’s there, and clay’s in the corner,” Ira said, pointing around.

“Gotcha.”

While Ira was off opening the vault, I collected stone, wood, clay and the rest from their designated spots and slipped them into my inventory. The newer researchers watching me spoke up.

“Ooh, they vanished.”

“He really *doesn’t* have any magical energy flowing through him.”

“It’s just like Ira said. His skills are more like miracles than magic, I suppose?”

“How mysterious.”

I never got tired of those sorts of reactions.

“I’ve got what we need,” Ira said.

“Much obliged! Are you sure this is okay, though? These materials are pretty pricey.”

“You’re the one who got them for us in the first place, Kousuke,” she said.

“Ah, good point.”

These must have been the materials I took out of my inventory just before Cuvi kidnapped me. The magic-infused materials were probably put together ahead of my return home.

“Thanks a lot, Ira.”

“Mm.”

Ira smiled, her cheeks slightly flushed, prompting me to gently rub her head. She was so cute.

“Gosh, stop rubbing my head so we can get started.”

She was frowning, turning a brighter shade of red. She didn't want me treating her like a child, huh?

She was so cute it literally hurt me, but I battled through the pain so we could make a bestowing workbench together. Wasn't I heroic? I pulled out the improved workbench from my inventory and set it in place, then began working on the new one. Apparently...it was going to take two hours! I informed Ira.

Her eye widened with disappointment. “Aww... Bummer.”

Yeah, I feel you.

“Actually, there's something else I'd like to get your thoughts on. Not just you, Ira, but everyone else too,” I addressed the group.

“Mm, of course.”

“I'd be happy to help.”

“Likewise.”

Everyone agreed to offer their thoughts, so I left the improved workbench behind and headed back to the R&D room.

It was pretty spacious, and there were multiple workbenches all over the place. In the center was a large table for discussions. Even the table was capable of handling certain tasks.

After everyone grabbed a seat, I began.

“I'm actually struggling with how to raise my skill levels.”

“How so...?”

“Well, my item creation skill lets me make all kinds of new things, but ultimately, the key to my skillset is the workbench. By modifying it, I'm able to work on more materials and make more complex things. I can also make other stuff faster than before.”

“I see... In other words, you want to enhance your fundamental skills?”

“And you don’t mean that in terms of your own physical abilities, but rather those of the bench itself, yes?”

“But is that not rather difficult? When it comes to processing tech, rapid progress can’t be made in a day.”

Ira’s people started exchanging opinions on the topic. I was glad they already understood what I was getting at.

“I have a general idea of the direction I want to go in,” I said. “I think I probably need a powerful external power supply.”

“Hmm?” Ira tilted her head, and the rest of the researchers also seemed puzzled by my statement.

“I want you guys to take a look at this. It’s the original workbench.”

I pulled an ordinary workbench out of my inventory, pre-modification. It was a simple one made of wood, with a tool box and a clamp to hold down materials.

“And this is an improved workbench. Let’s just call it a Level 2 workbench.”

I whipped out the improved workbench, complete with a foot press lathe attached to it. By building one of these, I was able to reduce the amount of decay on materials and items significantly, upgrading my crafting abilities by a lot.

“As you can see, the biggest difference between the two is the lathe. I’m guessing blacksmiths and carpenters have used lathes before?”

“No, not at all,” Ira said. “What exactly is it?”

“Honestly, I don’t know a ton about it myself, even though I’m the one using it.”

I briefly explained what lathes could be used for. Basically, you attached a material to the rotating platform, and by pressing a sharp tool to it, you could carve off chunks of the material to modify it. For example, you could take metals and carve pieces off of them to create screws, open holes, and do all sorts of other things.

Since I made bolt action rifles with the improved workbench, it might also

have a milling cutter and other modified bits inside of it.

“Hrm, I see. It’s suited for mass production, then.”

“It’s not good for making swords or spears, but I’d imagine it’d be great for the complex parts of magic tools.”

“Depending on how it’s used, one could even use it to polish gems.”

The smiths and goldsmiths seemed quite interested in the lathe.

“I understand the difference between the two workbenches now,” Ira said. “So what is this external power source you mentioned?”

“Oh, right! Lost the plot for a second there. As you can see, this thing runs on manpower. I was wondering if maybe we could power it magically instead.”

Ira tilted her head again. “Why switch over to magic specifically?”

That was an excellent question, to which I already had an answer.

“Inconsistencies are unavoidable when things are done with human hands,” I explained. “For example, pressing the pedal too hard or too fast. That means the rotation of the lathe isn’t consistent either. In other words, quality begins to vary between the things getting made. If we use magic, we can set everything to a single output to rotate the lathe. What do you think would happen then?”

“You could make multiples of the same object with the same level of quality...?” One of the researchers ventured.

“Exactly,” I said. “Additionally, if you made its output variable, you could do all kinds of modifications. Hell, it’d be even better if you could have it so that the material cutting knife uses a set amount of power at set timing.”

“Are you suggesting we use a golem core to control output, and a golem arm to do the modifications?” Ira whispered, squinting at me. I knew she’d get what I was saying quickly.

“Bingo. Ideally, in its final form we’d be able to input data that it would then follow perfectly to make things for us. It’d be awesome.”

“Whoa, wait a second. That’ll leave us without jobs.”

The smiths had conflicted expressions on their faces. Understandable.

“You’re right. The world I was in had these kinds of machines working day in and day out automatically, producing mass quantities of items. That isn’t to say there weren’t top class artisans doing work too, though.”

No matter how much technology progressed, there would always be artisans who created with their own two hands. Maybe not as many as in the past, but still.

“So, basically we won’t be able to survive if we’re not incredible at what we do...” said one of the smiths. “Terrifying.”

“I know. Quite frankly, the power I have is a threat to every artisan of this world. But that’s why I plan to be careful with how I wield it.”

It wasn’t like I was there to leave them without work, homeless in a gutter somewhere.

“The reason why some of what was developed in R&D was put under fierce lockdown was that, when Kousuke’s involved, things can be world-altering levels of dangerous,” said Ira. “As far as lathes are concerned, magic powered generators and water powered generators are already in use at our rear base. If we use their research and combine it with golem tech, I think we can easily produce a variable magic-powered generator.”

“I see... Then can you move forward with that?” I asked. “I’d be happy to help.”

Ira nodded her head. “Leave it to me, Kousuke.”

Awesome. If things go as planned, I’ll be able to upgrade my workbench. All I gotta do now is wait for my bestowing workbench to finish... I wonder if I can upgrade my smithing station? I get the feeling golem tech could help me on that end too... I should talk to Ira about this when she has a free moment.

After collecting the parts we needed, we immediately got to work.

“You just need to be able to continuously spin this piece at a set speed, right?”

“Yeah,” I said. “Pumping this foot pedal makes the crank spin the wheel.”

The smith looked at the modified work bench, inspecting its design while nodding.

“Then we’ve got two paths ahead of us. We could take this step panel and control it via golem tech, or we can take this power generating wheel and replace it with golem tech.”

“Having golem tech control the step panel would be our easiest choice. It’s the same kind of territory as the golem ballista.”

“Indeed. We could just put an arm or a foot here. That said, if it’s going to be operating continuously, we’ll need to think about maintenance and fuel costs.”

“Since it’ll just be moving up and down, I don’t think we have to worry too hard about fuel or degradation. It’ll all depend on how strong we make it.”

“If we use a golem arm, we don’t need the step panel. We can have it move the crank instead.”

“The less parts, the less chance there is of something breaking. We should probably go over the design from the top, with the premise of using a golem arm.”

Everyone shared their opinions with one another while thinking up ways to modify the work bench. To help with this process, we took apart a modified work bench.

Eh, I’m fine with sacrificing one. I could easily make another if I needed to.

“If it’s going to be operating for long periods of time, providing it with magic power is gonna be rough,” I said. “I don’t have any.”

“Hm, that would make it impossible for you to use... But this should help with that,” Ira said as she set down a series of transparent crystal-like objects on the table.

“The heck are those?” I asked her.

“Magic crystals. They’re made from the overflowing magical power coming out of the vein at the rear base. The researchers there have finally stabilized their production. They sent these to us last week.”

“Oh, I remember now. We talked about that a while back.”

She'd mentioned them mass producing magic metals and magic guns or something. I wondered what was going on with those.

"What's the deal with the magic metal and gun development?" I asked.

"Mass production on the metals isn't quite there yet." The smith shook his head. "I had a look at the prototypes, but they weren't great. They did manage to produce magic iron and steel, but there were all kinds of inconsistencies in a single ingot. You could use 'em if you smacked them down, stretched them out, and homogenized 'em, but that'd take a lotta work."

So, they weren't fit for mass production.

"We learned that we need to homogenize the magical energy coming from the hollow, stabilize it, then irradiate the metal. We're currently in the testing phase."

"Gotcha," I said. "I don't know a damn thing about magic, but I think I follow what you're saying."

"Well, since we can make magic crystals now, I think they'll be available for practical use soon enough," said Ira. "We have to refine magical energy in order to create crystals, and I think we'll be able to repurpose that tech elsewhere."

"These crystals are the physical form of super pure magical energy, then?"

"Yup," said Ira. "You can use these as a power source."

"Then we'll have to design the golem workbench so that we can just swap out crystals when it runs out of juice," added one of the smiths.

It'd be a huge problem if we powered it using one of these crystals, but couldn't even get inside to take it out. A huge problem for me, that is.

Unlike previous workbenches, these new ones would have a set amount of time they could be operational, but even in games with crafting systems, the higher-level crafting workbenches tended to use more power or fuel, so it all made sense to me.

"If we also included the ability to fuel it with magic power directly, that'd be useful for people other than Kousuke."

"Good point. If magic crystals aren't available, someone with magic could use

Kousuke's workbench just fine. Let's include that functionality as well."

And just like that, we finished designing the brand-new golem workbench.

Its power source is magic. When powering the workbench, it can take magic crystals or be charged directly by a magic user.

The crank shaft that powers its systems is operated by a golem arm. Remove any unnecessary parts.

Must be able to control how many times it rotates, to a certain extent at least.

Considering long-term use, the carving knife should be made of magic steel or mithril.

"That about sums it up."

"We're going to need gears if we're going to adjust how much it rotates."

"We'll have to consider the strength of the parts too."

"If they weaken over time, we can just simplify them and make them more durable. Strengthening the golem parts or adjusting the control system is a simpler way of doing this."

"Valid. Let's try out all of our options."

The researchers bounced ideas to and fro while drawing up the blueprint. This would allow me to make the smaller and more complex parts immediately with my item creation skill!

We put the modified work bench back together and I produced the complex parts just as the blueprint instructed. One of the smiths and one of the carpenters then put those finished pieces together. Elsewhere, the mages and an alchemist modified a ballista golem arm and its core to create the golem system that would power the whole thing. Nearby, a goldsmith and alchemist built the system that would supply magical energy to the golem arm using magic crystals.

Taking a break from work, I pulled out hamburgers and hot dogs from my inventory and we enjoyed a good lunch before getting back to excitedly building the prototype. We'd been at this for about half a day.

"It's done..." sighed one of the alchemists.

"The prototype, anyway," said Ira. "I'd say we hit all the major requests."

"Yeah... But what am I supposed to do with this thing?"

We had indeed managed to make the golem workbench to spec. But... All of the improved workbenches were made by me upgrading normal workbenches through a menu. I'd never just made one from scratch.

Since I made them using my crafting ability, I was able to easily access their menus, but no matter how hard I tried to do the same with the one in front of me, nothing worked.

"Can't you do something with those skills of yours?"

"Yeah, well, I'm trying, but... Actually, wait a sec."

Something sprang to mind, so I grabbed the bestowing workbench I made and brought it over.

"This is a bestowing workbench made from materials charged with magic. What if we made the golem power generator with this and used it to upgrade the golem workbench?" I asked them.

"Can you do that?"

"No clue. This'll be my first time using it."

I set the bestowing workbench down in a corner of the R&D lab.

"Oh, wow," I said, looking it over. "This is certainly an aesthetic."

Seriously, it had all kinds of classic magic vibes. Complex crests and magic circles covered the thing, and there was a shining crystal ball perched on it. Colored gems lined the bench.

It had the same vibes as one of those curse workbenches from that one huge RPG series, in fact.

With inane thoughts running through my mind, I turned to Ira. For the first

time in what felt like ages, the light was gone from her eye. *Er, what happened?*

“Kousuke. What is this?” She asked me.

“Erm, a bestowing workbench...? Is something wrong with it?”

“It’s overflowing with magical energy,” she said.

“W-wow, that sure sounds useful, especially considering I have no magic powers.”

Wait, if this thing is overflowing with magical energy, couldn’t we use it as the energy source for the new bench? No, no, we wouldn’t have to do that. We might be able to make a reactor that can endlessly supply magic with this thing.

Dream big, kids!

“Now then, what can we make with this beast? Click!”

I left behind the alchemists and mages chatting away at a distance, and the artisans trying to use the prototype to do something, and quietly accessed my bestowing bench.

“Huh.”

It looked like I could also enchant with this thing. I decided to try out item creation first, though.

Magically Enhanced Stone—: Stone × 3

Magically Enhanced Wood—: Wood × 3

Magically Enhanced Clay—: Clay × 3

Magic Steel—: Steel × 3

Magic Iron—: Magic Steel × 2

Mithril—: Silver × 5

Magic Crystal

Magic Stone × 3

Magic Jewel—: Gem × 3, Magic Crystal × 5

Kinda plain. Actually, it might have just seemed that way to me since I didn't know the value of that stuff. If I explained it to Ira, it was entirely possible she'd say these were all incredible. In particular, turning silver into mithril struck me as potentially a big deal.

"How's it look?" said Ira.

"Apparently, I can take materials like stone, wood, and clay, and then magically empower them. Oh, I can also make magic steel with three pieces of normal steel, and magic iron from two pieces of magic steel, too."

"I see."

Ira didn't seem remotely surprised. I guess the trade-off wasn't anything special? But behind her, I could see the alchemists and mages chattering, stunned looks on all their faces.

"How long does that process take...?" The mage with the blue skin and checkered eyes asked cautiously. She was pretty clearly a demon.

Let's see!

"Um... Turning three stones into magic stones takes eight seconds," I announced.

It'd probably normally take ten seconds, but thanks to my skill, twenty percent was shaved off of crafting time.

I pulled out the finished magic stone and... Whoa! That was dangerous! It was way bigger than I'd expected.

"Th-this is the amount you get." I said.

"Er... Did you just make that?"

"Yup, sure did."

When I raise my head up to look at the mage, I find her black and white eyes staring back at me. She's kind of scary, actually.

"What...? You made that thing in eight seconds...?"

"Absurd... How are you not losing your mind, Ira?" said the human alchemist.

"This is Kousuke we're talking about," said Ira, with a victorious expression on her face. "I figured things would turn out like this."

Ira had spent so much time with me that she no longer called out my absurdities whenever they happened. She had really come a long way if this wasn't enough to freak her out.

"Oh, I can also make mithril with five pieces of silver," I added.

Everyone present went silent. The folks further away from us, who were tinkering with the prototype golem workbench, all stared in my direction.

"Five sil—guahgh?!"

I tried to repeat myself, just in case people didn't hear me, but Ira grabbed hold of me with incredible speed while the alchemist and mages closed my mouth.

"Kousuke, say no more." Ira turned to look pointedly at everyone else. "All of you, this stays here."

"Of course."

"There's no way you can actually make mithril from silver, right...? Are you certain of this?"

I nodded my head rapidly, my mouth still sealed shut.

"Kousuke, a piece of mithril is worth 1,500 times the amount of silver of the same weight."

"One. Thousand. Five. Hundred. Times."

"Kousuke existing in close proximity is enough to completely flip lives upside down..."

"Maybe I should join his harem..."

The female human alchemist holding my mouth shut and the female blue-skinned mage both shot suspect looks at me.

I'm a chicken that lays mithril eggs, apparently.

“Sorry, but I’m barely managing the women I have relationships with as it is,” I told them. “My body would fall apart.”

Seriously, come on: Sylphy, Ira, twelve harpies, and Melty. The harpies have a sexual culture of forming a harem around a single male, so they actually weren’t as tough to deal with as you’d expect, but Melty was insane. Ira was small and had standard stamina, so I could deal.

And Sylphy? She was a monster.

“This is all I can make right now,” I told them. “But I imagine more will be added to the list as time goes by. Doesn’t seem like I’ll be able to make a golem power generator, though.”

It really did appear to be a workbench for magically enhancing materials and the like.

Maybe I could use the upgraded workbench to make what we needed, if I could get the materials. After trying out the bestowing workbench a bit, I’d give item creation a shot, I supposed.

“Oh, there’s also a section for enchantments.”

Ira and the rest suddenly froze.

C’mon, there’s no reason to be so scared. I doubt it’ll be all that crazy. Probably.

“Chill, you guys,” I said, laughing.

“That’s an impossible request.”

“There’s literally no reason to chill.”

“Are you planning on turning a normal sword into a magisword next?”

The researchers in the room had all taken up combat stances. Were we about to practice hand to hand combat or something? Seriously, I doubted I can make a...

Okay, actually, I probably could make a sword with special effects. But that's all! It's totally different!

“Um, so, you set the item you want to enchant, set the catalyst, then use enchant. By enchant, I mean bestowing an effect or a curse or whatever.”

“What kind of enchantments can you perform?” Ira asked.

“Um...” I tried to check. “Doesn't look like I can choose. I wonder what happens, then? There's nothing I can pick from, so maybe it's random?”

“What...?”

“How odd...”

“I guess you'll just have to try it out,” said a smith.

Everyone nodded, and we started gathering up materials and catalysts to use.

“For now, we should pick stuff that won't cause any pain if something goes wrong,” I suggested.

In response, the smith pulled a bunch of blunted swords and old spears out from who knows where. When I asked him where they came from, he explained that they were collected from the Holy Kingdom's soldiers when they surrendered down south.

My initial impression was that their equipment must not be very good, but apparently this was all worn by soldiers hired locally. I figured their actual military had better equipment.

“Then that's it for materials,” I said. “Now we need a catalyst.”

“What's usable?”

“In terms of what I have on me...magic crystals, golem cores... Oh, mithril, magic steel, magic iron, wyvern magic stones, teeth, claws, poison tips, other monster bits and gems, it looks like.”

“Wyvern? Where'd you get those?” asked Ira.

“We took down a few wyverns while traveling through the Sorel Mountains.”

“Show me what you have later.”

“Sure,” I agreed. “I even have their bodies stored away.”

I set the iron sword into place on the workbench while I chatted with Ira.

“So, what do we go with for the catalyst?” I asked her.

“A magic crystal. A pure one, too.”

“Got it.”

I set the crystal into the catalyst slot and the enchantment began. Like with the other workbenches, there wasn't anything particular happening on the surface of the bench. We just waited for the enchantment countdown on the menu to finish.

“Looks like it'll take three minutes,” I told everyone.

“Three minutes...”

“That's all it takes to enchant a sword...?”

Ira lost the light in her eyes, while the alchemist off to the side just looked baffled.

Seemed like usually this'd take more time, judging by their reactions.

“Oh, I forgot to mention, but I can make some kind of rare material using three gems and five magic crystals,” I told them while we waited.

“What kind of rare material?”

“Hm, I'm not sure how to read it... Lemme try making some.”

I think those characters said, “Magic jewel?” I wasn't not positive, and quite frankly, using three gems and five magic crystals was a high price to pay. Whatever it was, it had to be incredible.

Fortunately, I could still craft even while there was something being enchanted, so I put in the order. Twenty-four minutes, eh? That was pretty long. It normally would've been half an hour, though, so I couldn't complain too much.

“Oh, looks like the enchantment's all done.”

I pulled the sword out from the slot and took a good look at it. It didn't look

like anything had changed. There wasn't some magic crystal in the handle or anything.

"Doesn't look like anything's changed," I said.

"It's completely different," Ira insisted. "Put it here."

"Okay...?"

I placed the sword on the large table we were using to discuss workbenches earlier, and Ira and the others began to discuss the sword at length. The smith used a tiny hammer to tap away at the blade.

"Magical energy has been applied evenly to the entire object."

"This ain't iron no more. It's magic steel."

"I can feel the magic flow within it... It's definitely been enchanted with some kind of magical effect."

"It's a magiblade, through and through," Ira announced.

In response to her words, everyone turned their gaze toward me.

Scary!

"Kousuke, try some more stuff."

"If possible, please make two more swords using the same catalyst, and then three more different swords using the same catalyst."

"So...a set of iron swords instead of steel?" I asked, trying to follow.

"I'll go bring the equipment and magic crystals from storage."

Ira, the alchemist, the mage, and the smith all drew close while a few people ran outside to prepare materials.

"All right, all right already! Everyone calm down! Let's do this in order."

While trying to calm the crowd, I once again opened the enchant menu.

"I think I've got a grip on how this all works," Ira said with a nod, looking down at the enchanted swords lined up on the table. The rest of the researchers nodded in kind.

“When basic iron or steel is used as the base material with a magic crystal, it turns into high grade magic iron and magic steel,” she continued. “If a lot of magic power is used in the transformation, the magical effects granted to the end product are weakened.”

I nodded. “That seems to be the case.”

We ended up using something like twenty magic crystals total to perform enchantments, but the end results weren't what we expected.

The magical enhancements really weren't that great, and they weren't stable. Some weapons got lighter, some got more powerful against certain monsters, others had their physical attack power raised.

“When magic steel or iron is used as the base material, because no magical energy is used in the transformation process, the magic effects applied to the end result are more powerful. And if the magic crystal used already has an elemental alignment, that's passed onto the end product as well.”

“We still haven't performed enough trials yet, but that appears to be the case,” the mage agreed.

Magic steel or iron weapons were important for our forces, so we could only use three for testing.

Our theories about the magical effects getting stronger were pretty much proven true through Ira and the others' inspections and by tossing them into my inventory.

For example, enchanting a steel sword with a magic crystal resulted in “Magic Steel Sword +1 (Slicing Power Strengthened I).” But enchanting a magic steel sword with a magic crystal resulted in “Magic Steel Sword +3 (Slicing Power Strengthened III).”

“If the catalyst isn't a magic crystal, the material used doesn't change at all. Instead, any magic effects of the catalyst are slightly passed down to the finished product.”

“For example, when a wyvern poison tip was used, magical poison was applied to everything,” said the alchemist with a nod. “Fangs and claws usually resulted in piercing, cutting, or attack power going up.”

“And then when magic steel or iron was used, their toughness went up instead of transforming entirely,” added the smith.

“And so, I think the conclusion here is that Kousuke’s bestowing workbench is a mass production tool for magiblades,” said Ira. “If we wanted to, we could equip everyone with magic steel and iron equipment that have attack boosts applied to them.”

“That’s terrifying.”

“Our forces would be invincible.”

“Sorry, but I don’t think I’m following.” I didn’t really get the difference in abilities between a magic iron or steel sword and normal steel or iron. What sort of attack boost were we looking at?

“Let me put it simply,” Ira said to me. “Cutting through or piercing iron and steel armor with weapons made from the same metal is tremendously difficult. It only really becomes possible once you pass magic through the weapon.”

“I see...?”

“But with magic steel or iron, using a little bit of extra strength and no skills at all, you can cut through or pierce that armor. Now, imagine what happens when you magically apply attack power boosts to those weapons. Even a rookie would be able to break through enemy armor without breaking a sweat.”

“That’s wild.”

“Extremely wild. The battlefield would be littered with heavily armored troops cut down by standard infantry.”

A serious nightmare scenario for the enemy. Armor would no longer function as armor.

“Well, this workbench can do the same thing to armor, too.”

“How would someone even stop an army of heavily armored, magically enhanced troops?” One of the mages marveled. “It’s possible even their chorus magic couldn’t stop us.”

“...You might be right.” Ira agreed.

If I remembered correctly, chorus magic was the Holy Kingdom mage squad's trump card. I heard they caused major problems to the Kingdom of Merinard, but I'd never seen them firsthand. It was probably wide-area destructive magic cast by multiple people at once.

"We need to report this to the princess," said Ira. "I'll handle it tonight."

"Please do."

"We're counting on you."

The rest of the researchers nodded. Apparently, Ira refers to Sylphy as the "princess" in front of them. She was quite good at turning on her work face when necessary, wasn't she?

"Ah, looks like that rare material is done."

I pulled the magic jewel out from my inventory. It was actually finished earlier, but since everyone was busy looking into enchanted weapons and such, I'd decided the timing wasn't right.

"Whoa, this thing is glowing like crazy. We could probably use it as a light source."

The magic jewel I pulled from my inventory glowed beautifully. It wasn't just reflecting light, it was generating it. Perhaps because I used topaz, the color of the light was a slight orange yellow. It looked like a tiny sun.

"Kousuke, what is that?" asked Ira.

"A magic jewel, I guess? This is the rare material I made using three gems and five magic crystals. See?"

When I tried to hand it to Ira, she stepped back like she was terrified. *Uh, what?*

"What's wrong?" I asked her.

"Kousuke, you said magic jewel, right?"

"I mean, I think so? I'm pretty sure that's what the menu said."

"And that's it?"

"Yeah, probably."

Ira nodded. Her eye looked straight down at the object in my hand. The other researchers reacted similarly. That one human alchemist in particular was just glaring with their eyes wide open, almost bloodshot. The mage with the checkered eyes was similarly staring at it with eyes wide open, but I couldn't tell if they're bloodshot. The rest of the researchers, well, you could probably guess. Had they all reached nirvana or something?

"Kousuke," said Ira, "magic jewels are the gem equivalent of mithril."

"...Oh?"

"In other words, they're insanely expensive. Just a piece the size of your smallest fingernail would be of absurd value. You could build an entire mansion with that much."

"...You're saying this is super crazy?"

"So crazy you could buy a country. I'm fairly certain there's not a single person in this world who could buy that jewel."

"Pretend you didn't see this, pretty please?" I gave them a pained smile.

"Got it."

I definitely had to put something that dangerous away. Into the inventory it went! A few of the researchers looked bummed out, but I pretended I didn't see them.

"That being said, what's done is done, so let's put it to use," I said. "Is it usable as a crafting material?"

"Depending on how it's modified, yes. In terms of common use cases, you could increase magical power with it or even charge it," Ira explained. "A piece the size of the tip of a fingernail could be charged to hold enough magical energy for five of me. If we were to use it to increase magical power, it'd go from one to five or even six times more than the base value."

"Isn't that *mad* crazy?"

"Mad crazy," she agreed. "That's why they're expensive. To an alchemist or a mage, they're the most valuable of valuables."

Ira stared directly at me. All of a sudden, the alchemists and mages had

gotten close and were staring at me as well. There were four mages in the room and four alchemists. Being surrounded by eight people was, well, kind of terrifying. Wait...were there nine?

“I want to polish it so badly...”

The male goldsmith was staring at me from outside the circle of women, eyes crazy. *This is terrifying!*

“C’mon, wait just a second and calm down, you guys,” I pleaded with them. “Listen up. I said earlier that I can make magic jewels. Three gems and five magic crystals for one that size. As many as we want. In other words, as long as we have the materials, it’s possible to make them for research purposes. Right, Ira?”

“...If you’re involved, the budget for materials and the like should go through just fine,” she said with a nod, after thinking for a bit. “We’ll have to wait for magic crystals to be sent here from the rear, but we have a supply of gems in storage, and we can also buy them ourselves. Plus, Kousuke can dig for them in the right areas. If we can get what we need to make them, it should be possible to make a bunch for research.”

The light returned to the eyes of the crowd, and the crushing pressure I was feeling from them a moment ago dissipated.

Thank goodness. For a second there, I thought life in this world was about to get a whole lot worse.

“Perfect,” I said. “Then let’s all look for a good way to put this cool new material to good use.”

These jewels could serve as giant batteries or power increasing tools... It was time to dream big!

“I see. So that’s why you were in the research lab all day.”

“Yup,” said Ira. “I was with Kousuke the whole time, and as usual his common sense is anything but common.”

“Mithril from silver, magic jewels from gems and magic crystals, huh? The

economy is going to implode.”

“If we’re careful, the Liberation Army will never have to worry about funding ever again.”

After spending the entire day in the lab, we got everyone together to have dinner that night. Participants included myself, Sylphy, Ira, Melty, and the harpies. Of course, some of the harpies were off on various missions, so not everyone was there.

“How beautiful!”

“What a striking aura and wonderful light...”

“Liking shiny and shimmering things is basically a part of harpy culture.”

“When you think about how you could buy a whole country with one of these, it gets a little scary...” said Sylphy.

We turned our gazes to the things enshrined in the middle of the dining table: three silver candle holders. The problem was that the objects giving off light on top of them weren’t candles, but magic jewels shining all sorts of colors.

“If I didn’t know better, I’d think they were just magic tools for producing light.”

“And yet they’re actually valuable enough that they could be used to purchase an entire country,” said Melty. “Using them as lights sure is indulgent, huh?”

“Leaving aside their value on the marketplace, to me they’re basically free resources,” I said.

The gems required to make them were easily available to me whenever I did any kind of mining, and soon enough, magic crystals would start coming in regularly. Though I supposed it did cost a bit to produce the set up for magic crystal production, so it wasn’t quite free.

“Kousuke, you’re the last person who should be talking about the value of things.”

“When I think about how I can make something I’ve never seen as much as I want, well... In that sense, this is only possible because I don’t have the

common sense of this world.”

“That might be true, but... Anyway, what’s with the silver candle holders?”

“Ah, those aren’t made of silver. They’re mithril.”

“...I have a headache,” said Sylphy, rubbing the bridge of her nose.

No worries, there’s a rhyme and reason to everything, I swear!

“This is just so that you can get used to me making stuff like this,” I explained.

“Go on...”

“You know, mithril and magic jewels. We obviously can’t use magic jewels this big, but I do plan on eventually giving you all mithril and magic jewel accessories.”

Everyone went silent.

It wasn’t like I didn’t understand. If someone told me they were giving me an accessory with enough value to build a mansion, I’d freak out too. It was possible I’d panic. It’d be too pricey for me to use regularly.

“Ira’s working with me so that we can apply different effects to them, like protections or having them serve as magic repositories,” I explained. “Honestly, I’m not strong enough to protect you all on the battlefield, but I *can* make something that will do that for me.”

I came up with several ideas after hearing about how magic jewels could store magical energy and increase magical power. One of them was an accessory that protected its wearer. It could be a ring, a pendant, even a bracelet.

Something that produced a magic barrier would be good too, and so would something that just increased its wearer’s magical power. A magic repository that could store mass quantities of magical power for later use would be excellent. Any of those options would be effective for protecting Sylphy, Ira, the harpies, or Melty.

“I know they’ll end up being stupidly valuable accessories in this world, but I’m more concerned with protecting you all. If push comes to shove, then use them till they break. I’ll make as many as I need to. So, when I do eventually give you one, I want you to keep it on you at all times.”

“And this is your way of getting me used to the idea?” said Sylphy.

“Basically. I mean, it’s really just so you understand that for me, this is how I view these kinds of materials. So you don’t need to feel reluctant about wearing what I give you.”

“...All right. If that’s what you want. Understand, everyone?”

Everyone nodded in response to Sylphy.

“Accessories made from mithril and magic jewels...” mused Melty. “Kousuke, um...”

“I know. I plan on making that other thing separately.”

“Okay.”

Melty smiled happily, while Sylphy and Ira looked on with suspicious expressions.

“What are you two talking about?”

“Kousuke promised to make me an accessory from the gems he dug up,” Melty explained, pulling out the polished gem from her bag with a big smile.

Sylphy and Ira turned toward me.

“I figure it’ll be best if I practice making accessories using normal gems before graduating to magic jewels and mithril,” I told them.

“Mm-hm.”

“Yeah.”

“Needless to say, I have enough for everyone. Pick whatever gem you like.”

I laid all the gems and rough gemstones I had out on the table. I had enough for everyone there, including the harpies.

“There are all sorts...”

“They’re beautiful even before being polished...”

Ira and Sylphy weren’t the only ones looking on joyfully—the harpies were just as entranced.

Women really do like gems, huh? Hell, I like them too.

“Necklaces or anklets would make the most sense for us.”

The harpies quickly moved on to discussing what kinds of accessories they wanted.

“Earrings could work too!”

“We don’t have arms or fingers, after all!”

I’d have to take down all their requests later.

That night, perhaps as a down payment or a reward for my incoming gifts, everyone was a bit more rowdy than usual. It was hot and sweaty, to say the least.

“Now then, Grande.”

It was morning, a few days after I learned how to make magic jewels. Me and my new dragon pal Grande were talking about some stuff while she ate a super-sized teriyaki burger I’d given her for breakfast.

“What is it?”

Grande tilted her massive head at me as she bit into her burger. Okay, her head might be dangerous, but that little gesture of hers was pretty cute. The discrepancy between her terrifying physicality and her adorable gestures meant that every now and then she appeared oddly cute to me.

“You’re going to start working today,” I told her.

“Mm, I assumed as much. After I finish breakfast, I shall head to the mountains and hunt some wyverns,” she declared.

“Nah, that won’t be necessary.”

Grande once again tilted her head.

“Don’t I have to work?” She asked.

“Not like that. If possible, I’d like for you to share some of your blood with me.”

“Um...? Did I not explain that I despise pain?”

“I’ll make sure it doesn’t hurt, and your wound will heal up super quick. Please share some of your blood with me?”

Grande didn’t respond, and simply sank into thought as she munched on her giant burger.

“It depends on your objective,” she finally said. “I assume you wish to make some sort of medicine, but I’d prefer not to have my blood taken over and over again. Even ignoring the pain, the very concept disgusts me.”

“I get that,” I said. “Having your blood made into medicine isn’t exactly a feel-good prospect. If I were in your position, I wouldn’t welcome the idea either.”

In the sense that consent was being given, I supposed it was better than getting your blood sucked by mosquitoes or ticks or fleas or blood sucking leeches. But still, it was probably in the nature of all living things to feel pretty bad about something trying to eat you or suck your blood.

“Do you remember the girl who was with me when we flew here? Her name’s Melty.”

Grande thought back to her meeting with Melty and growled. “That overlord woman, yes?”

Grande wasn’t Melty’s biggest fan.

“Yeah,” I said. “After I got kidnapped and hauled off to another country, she cut off her own horns so that she could blend in with the humans and save me.”

“Oh. She rid herself of her horns to save a male? What fortitude. That takes bravery.”

“Right? That’s why I want to do something about it.”

“I see,” said Grande. “And that’s why you need my blood?”

“Yeah. Do you think you can help me out?”

Grande nodded in response. “Acceptable. However, do not expect me to give of my blood over and over.”

“Of course not.”

“Good. Then, once I finish eating, let us get it over with.”

“Awesome. And when I’m done drawing your blood, I’ll bust out a giant barrel of mead for you.”

It’d be bad if she had alcohol in her blood before I took any. Although it might not have amounted to anything since she was a dragon, and there was no telling whether the effects would show up that quickly, but it just felt better being safe.

“A giant barrel?” She asked.

“Yup. Even bigger than usual. Large enough for four of me to fit inside.”

“Now that *is* exciting!”

Grande clearly wasn’t exaggerating, because she was smacking her tail against the ground again.

Gah, the ground’s shaking! Actually, I could probably put something I needed smashed under her tail and it’d speed up my work. Maybe I can have her smash stones for road-building later.

Grande finished her breakfast soon enough, so we got started on the blood drawing.

“Now then, how should we do this?” I wondered out loud. “When it comes to humans, you usually just prick the tip of their finger.”

“The spaces between my claws are very delicate, so definitely not there...”

“This isn’t torture. I’d never do something like that.”

Needless to say, I didn’t have any dragon-sized syringes. I doubted whether I’d be able to pierce a dragon’s scales and skin even if they were available.

“I guess I could use this to cut your arm maybe?”

Grande looked at the sword I pulled out and nodded. “Mithril? That might be able to cut through my scales...”

It was the mithril short sword I’d made for myself a while back, before the kidnapping incident. I didn’t have a chance to use it before, so I felt like it was a bit of a shame that its first use would be wounding Grande.

But since I’d probably never be using it in battle, it would just sit unused in my

inventory otherwise.

“I’m not going to stab you, okay?” I told Grande. “I’m just going to cut you as shallowly as possible.”

“I understand. My scales are tough, and my skin is thick. If you’re going to cut, then do it as hard as you can. It’s more scary and painful if you have try multiple times.”

“Gotcha.”

Of course, I can barely handle a sword. If I held it in my right hand and visualized clicking with my left hand, I could let my command actions handle the heavy lifting, though.

I swung the blade while visualizing the clicking process, and after getting used to the sensation, announced that I was ready to go.

“Good. Come at me!”

I imagined clicking with my left hand and my body naturally swung the sword at Grande’s front leg...er, her arm. I could definitely feel it cutting into her, but her hard scales and thick skin prevented the cut from getting very long or deep.

But a cut was a cut—blood immediately started flowing.

“...Ow.”

“I’m sorry. Once I get the blood, I’ll heal you right up, okay?”

“...Okay.”

Grande sounded like she was on the verge of tears, and quite frankly, I felt awful. I didn’t want to draw it out, so I immediately collected her blood in a glass container and sealed it up. I ended up filling three 500-ml glass containers before pouring life potion onto her cut.

It closed up right before my eyes, and eventually it was as if there was never a cut to begin with. I also collected the scales that fell off when I cut her.

“It doesn’t hurt anymore,” Grande mused.

“Yeah, I used some medicine on you. Thanks a lot, Grande.”

“You are welcome.”

I gently caressed Grande's head when it drew close to check the wound. She licked the spot where her wound was to confirm it was fine, then cautiously began to move her right arm.

"Seems okay," she said.

"I know it sounds weird coming from me, but I'm glad," I told her. "Seriously, thank you. To apologize for hurting you, tonight I'm going to give you an awesome dessert with dinner, so look forward to that."

"Dessert?"

"Yeah, something sweet and delicious, just for you."

"I'll look forward to it then."

Grande smacked the ground with her tail. Looked like she was in good spirits again.

"Then first, here's that mead I promised you. Drink this and relax for the rest of the day, okay?"

"I shall."

I placed the large barrel of mead onto the dining table, and parted ways with Grande to make my way back toward the research lab. I had to have Melty make that regeneration potion for me. It was also possible I might get more brewing bench recipes. The blood I got from hurting poor Grande was extremely valuable, so I needed to make sure it didn't go to waste.

"Is that blood from a living dragon?! It is, isn't it?!"

"Those are pieces of dragon scales, right?! Be honest!"

The pharmacist and smith went nuts the moment I entered the lab with gifts in hand. I guessed that made sense, considering the mithril and magic jewel discoveries from yesterday did nothing for them. Well, that wasn't exactly true—the smith certainly got excited over the mithril.

"The lab's been mega busy ever since you got back, Kousuke."

"Isn't it good to be busy?" I said. "Our pharmacist pal here can use one

container of blood for research purposes. You guys can also use these scale bits as you wish.”

The two pharmacists and three smiths cheered and did a little dance as they grabbed the materials off the table.

Er, my dear pharmacists, are you okay? You're cheering about having dragon blood while dancing around. It's freaking me out. Oh, and if you drop that container, you're not getting more.

“You alchemists and mages can use this container of blood. By which I mean... it'd be lovely if you'd use it to make a medicine that can fix Melty's horns.”

Ira nodded immediately. “I figured you'd ask. Was this your goal from the start? How did you know that dragon blood could be used to make regenerative medicine?”

“Honestly, I became friends with Grande purely by happenstance,” I replied. “As for why I thought dragon's blood could be used to make a powerful healing potion, well, in the world I used to live in, there were a lot of fictional stories about dragons where that was the case.”

“Fascinating. There aren't any dragons in your old world, right?”

I'd told Ira quite a few fictional tales from my old world, as well as stories about things made by science, details of our history, what sort of animals and plants were there, and some things about creatures that only existed in fiction.

If I remembered correctly, I spoke to her at length about dragons shortly after our relationship began.

“Yeah... It's crazy—maybe our two worlds aren't as far apart as they seem.”

Actually, maybe living beings like me sometimes wandered back and forth between worlds. That could be the basis of all those legends and fairytales in my old world.

“In any case, I'll get you your medicine,” Ira said. “Things should go quite smoothly with fresh dragon blood. I've got all the materials I need right here.”

Things had kinda worked out perfectly for us, but it all made sense in retrospect. Arichburg has always been a hub for transportation, making it a

huge commerce center for the south. Goods from the southern regions all found their way there, so if you had enough money, you could get pretty much whatever you needed.

And on top of that, the Liberation Army was putting a lot of support behind its research and development division. My presence was likely a part of that. There were the crossbows and bombs I brought with me, the bolt action rifles, the golem communicator I made in collaboration with this world's engineers, and the golem-type ballista. These new technologies were playing a big part in supporting the Liberation Army.

With all that in mind, Melty and Sylphy had allotted a big chunk of their budget to R&D. Fortunately, that wasn't a problem, because on top of the mithril and gems I'd excavated, there were crops that I could harvest at an unnatural rate. Just by tilling normal ground, I could harvest the crops in two weeks. That meant twice every month. The cash could keep on flowing in.

"What are you going to do with the other container?"

"That's for my personal research. I might be able to make something with it."

I pulled out my brewing bench and checked my recipes.

Distilled Water—Materials: Drinking Water × 2

Small Life Potion—Materials: Herb × 1, Drinking Water × 1

Life Potion—Materials: Herb × 3, Distilled Water × 1

High Life Potion—Materials: Herb × 5, Distilled Water × 1, Ethanol × 1

Magic Potion—Materials: Herb × 3, Distilled Water × 1, Ethanol × 1, Magic Crystal × 1

Poison Potion—Materials: Poisonous Plant × 1, Distilled Water × 1

High Poison Potion—Materials: Poisonous Plant × 3, Distilled Water × 1, Ethanol × 1

Antidote—Materials: Herb × 1, Poisonous Plant × 1, Ethanol × 1

Panacea—Materials: Herb × 5, Poisonous Plant × 2, Distilled Water × 1,

Ethanol × 2

Regeneration Potion—Materials: High Life Potion × 3, Panacea × 1, Dragon Blood × 1, Ethanol—Materials: Alcoholic Drink × 1

Saltpeter—Materials: Manure × 1, Ash × 1

Powder—Materials: Saltpeter × 1, Sulfur × 1, Charcoal × 1

Powder—Materials: Saltpeter × 1, Ethanol × 1, Loom

“Ah, umm, it looks like I can make a regeneration potion too,” I announced.

“...Mm-hm.”

Ira must have known that from the get-go. Or at least, that’s what her glare was telling me.

Look, it wasn’t not my fault, okay? I honestly didn’t know if this had popped up because I acquired dragon blood, or if it showed up because I was thinking about whether or not I could make a regeneration potion. Either way, I figured I might as well give it a shot.

“Begin crafting!” I said. “Twenty-four minutes? That’s pretty long.”

“It usually takes three straight all-nighters to make a regeneration potion,” Ira informed me.

“...”

“Three. Days.”

“It’s not my fault!”

Ira looked up at me with her big eye.

There’s nothing I can do about the crafting times! It’s not like I decided on them...

“But, I mean, we don’t even know if this’ll be what I actually need?” I said. “Er, I guess it’s probably super likely, though, huh? But it might be different from the regeneration potion you know how to make!”

Since the recipe appeared in my menu, it’s highly likely that it’d do exactly

what I wanted it to. That meant that in terms of effects, it could also be entirely different from the regeneration potions of this world.

“Look, just make as many as you can,” Ira said. “I’ll be too scared to use any without testing them first.”

“Aye, aye.”

Thanks to my mass-producer skill, if I make ten at once, the cost for each dropped, so I canceled the current crafting operation and queued up ten high life potions and started them going. I’d get ten of them at the cost of nine. It did mean that the crafting time was longer, though.

“In four hours, we’ll have ten of these,” I told Ira.

“Mm. I’ll get the test animals together.”

“Er...”

By testing, you mean you’re going to cut off their limbs and grow them back, huh? I know doing this is a necessary part of the process, but I’d like to be absent for that! I’ve got empathy, all right?

I knew that was silly of me, considering how many Holy Kingdom soldiers I’d killed with bombs, guns, and crossbows, but I still didn’t want to see animal testing.

“We can’t just have humans drink this stuff without testing it out,” Ira insisted.

“Yeah, I know it’s important.”

Ira nodded. Back when we were in the Black Forest, Ira talked my ears off about this stuff. I remembered all too well.

“Now that we’re good on dragon blood... Next up are magic jewels.”

I didn’t go so far as to mass produce them the day before, but I did make quite a few, so I pulled some of them out from my inventory and lined them up on the table. Twenty-three in total. If we used them to make weapons of mass destruction, we’d probably be able to annihilate the Holy Kingdom. Obviously, we were not going to do that, and I wouldn’t let anyone else try, either.

Should I move forward with development as our trump card...? No, I can't. I need to use my skills for creation, not destruction. I can't imagine a happy end waiting for us all on the other side of all that death and destruction.

With great power comes great responsibility and all that.

"Kousuke, what are you doing?"

"I'm going to try using these jewels at the bestowing bench," I said.

"...For what?"

"I was thinking of using some for my mithril pickaxe."

The tools I used most frequently were my pickaxe, shovel, gathering axe, and hoe. I honestly barely used my weapons, even if I did do some fighting on my last journey with Melty.

"Why a pickaxe...?"

"No point in a weak dude like me wielding a magic weapon, right?"

"Kousuke, I don't know if you realize this, but it's absurd calling yourself weak when you made it through the Sorel Mountains without a single injury. Oh, and, you know, tamed a dragon."

"I'm not the strong one. My weapons are."

Anybody could shoot monsters with an assault rifle. Staying calm in that kind of scenario was probably pretty tough, maybe. Thanks to my command actions, my body moved exactly as I needed it to, though, so it was no biggie for me.

"Anyway, I'm never going to be the one leading the charge into battle, right?" I argued. "It'd be a waste for me to have such high spec modified magical weapons. It makes more sense to magically enhance the gathering tools I use on a daily basis."

I could just see a world where my magically enhanced weapons languished unused in my inventory. And if I did make anything, it'd probably be super specialized and ridiculous.

Harvesting materials wasn't a safe process, though, so it'd make sense to have some kind of easy-to-use enhanced weapon on me.

Ah, but I did want to test out whether I could apply an unlimited ammo enchantment to a gun. An assault rifle or submachine gun with unlimited ammo would be insane. Actually... The gun itself would probably overheat and break. Still worth trying, though! Even something like self repair or strengthened durability would be useful.

“Yeah... But using magic jewels on a pickaxe...? Really?”

Ira was fine with my logic, but she still wasn't totally sold.

I get where you're coming from, Ira, but just let this one go, pretty please?

“Let's get this party started.”

I slipped my mithril pickaxe into the enchantment slot of the bench, then set a magic jewel into it. Boom, process started.

As usual, it'd take three minutes. Was that time standard no matter what?

After waiting three minutes with Ira watching over me, the enchantment process concluded.

“It's done,” I announced.

I pulled the pickaxe out from the slot and inspected it.

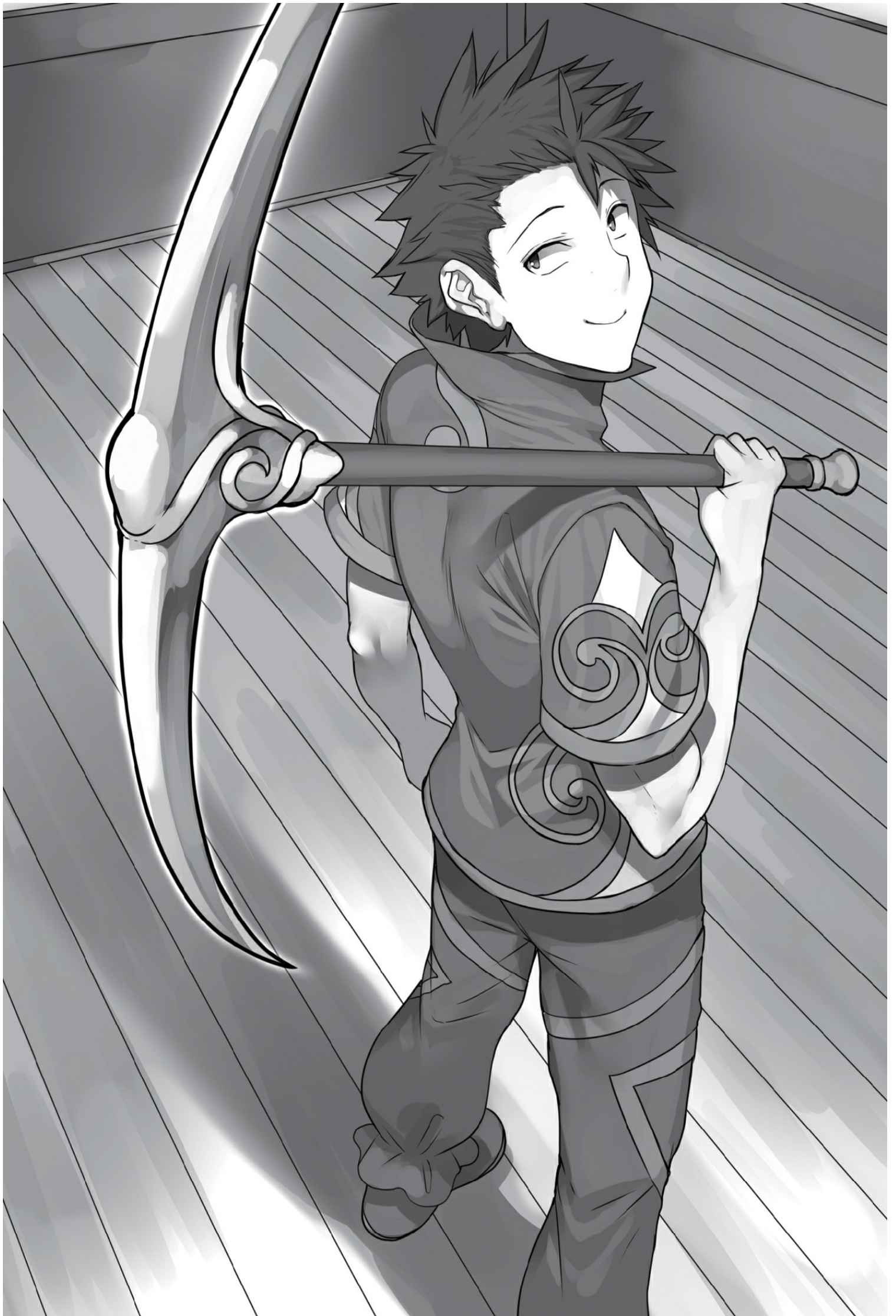
“The magical energy is crazy...”

“Um, let's take a closer look.”

Mythril Pickaxe + 9 (Auto Repair, Effect Strengthening III, Good Luck III)

“What does it say?”

“+9, apparently. It's got auto repair, effect strengthening III, and good luck III on it.”



The effects given via the enchantment were random, but it looked like whatever got applied was at least related to the item being enchanted. For example, swords had a high chance of being enchanted with cut strengthening, or with piercing strengthening as a close second. On the flip side, swords only very rarely got enchanted with a blunt force strengthening effect. Spears, on the other hand, were more likely to get a piercing strengthening effect, with a blunt force strengthening effect coming second, and a cut strengthening effect being uncommon.

Although the spears we used in our experiment were all standard short spears, so it was highly likely that long spears, which were usually used in large numbers, would get a blunt force strengthening effect instead of a piercing one. In Madame Zamil's case, her Shooting Star cut like a pro, so I got the feeling it'd get a cut strengthening effect. I imagined a sword made with blunt force in mind would get blunt force strengthening.

"What sort of effect is 'good luck'?" Ira asked.

"No clue. I'm guessing it raises the amount of materials you can mine, or it makes the likelihood of mining rare materials go up."

I was pretty sure I understood what auto repair and effect strengthening do, but good luck was a huge question mark.

"Guess I'll see what happens on shovels and axes."

"Mm, be my guest."

With Ira's permission, I pulled out my mining tools, dumped them in the bestowing bench, and put them in the queue. What was gonna happen?

"This...is whack," I said.

"It is indeed, whack," agreed Ira.

Stretching out in front of us was a vast, cultivated field. We hadn't measured it, so we didn't know the exact numbers, but it was probably something like twenty meters wide by fifty meters long.

"Th-the field, it's..."

“In one stroke...? Really...?”

Behind us were a group of farmers with stunned expressions on their faces and doubt in their voices. Understandably so.

“Where’d the stones and small plants and other things go...?”

They were probably all plowed.

“This area was smaller before.”

“It probably got bigger due to an area enchantment.”

I cast my gaze down at the glittering mithril hoe in my hands.

Mithril Hoe + 9 (Auto Repair, Effect Strengthening III, Area Strengthening III)

It looked like when magic jewels were used on mining and harvesting equipment, they were guaranteed to get auto repair and effect strengthening. It appeared as though the third effect could vary pretty wildly, but we couldn’t just experiment with larger numbers. Well, okay, technically we could, because I could make as much mithril as I want.

The question was, who was going to use this stuff? I was the only one who could use the enchanted tools, as far as I was aware. Although...that might not necessarily have been the case when it came to the enchantment effects. Someone else would have been able to use these tools, even if not to their maximum potential.

“Ira, could you give this hoe a try?” I asked.

“Huh? Um, sure, but I don’t have much experience with plowing. I don’t have the power you do.”

“I know, but I was thinking, shouldn’t anybody be able to take advantage of these effects? I’m curious as to how effect strengthening and area strengthening work in this case.”

“Good point. I’ll give it a try,” Ira replied with an earnest nod. Then she took the hoe from my hands and swung it down at an unplowed chunk of land.

Along with the gentle sound of the hoe hitting dirt, an area of about 1x11

meters of land ended up cultivated, rocks and all. The bigger stones and such were still there, though.

“Amazing! It even works for me.”

“I wonder what the difference in harvesting time will be between this and the area I cultivated.”

“Sounds worth testing to me,” she said. “I’ll plow some more.”

Happy that she was able to manifest the same mysterious effects as I was by swinging a hoe, Ira excitedly swung it some more. She was really enjoying herself, and I could totally relate.

In the end, it took her about an hour to cultivate the same area that I did with one swing.

“This is hard work,” she said, breathing heavily.

“You did real good, Ira.”

I pulled out a magical stamina potion from my inventory and handed it to her. She drank it thinking it was water, only to spit it out in surprise at the nasty medicinal taste. She eventually downed it once she realized what it was, but that didn’t stop her from glaring at me.

“Here, wash it down with this,” I told her.

“You should’ve offered that to me first.”

“I did it for your own good.”

The two of us took a breather as the farmers cleared up anything left in the land that Ira cultivated. Seeing Ira all exhausted was kind of funny, considering I only had to swing my hoe once. I hadn’t even broken a sweat!

“I’d like for you guys to grow some crops here and report back on how long it takes to harvest them,” Ira told the farmers. “Deliver the report to R&D, okay?”

“Understood.”

The farmers who kept tabs on the experimental fields were hired by the Liberation Army’s administration. They had their own fields to take care of, but they’d be keeping an eye on this one in their free time. As far as rewards go,

they'd be paid a separate amount from what they normally made, so they were super on board.

We said goodbye to them while they got hyped to start working, and then I led Ira toward the woods. Following behind us was the red ogre, Shemel, who recently made her return to the adventuring business, and what appeared to be the members of her party.

"Man, so, like, seventy percent of what makes farming so tough has been taken care of," Shemel said.

"Yuppers," said one of her party members, another red female ogre. "Once those hoes spread around, farming towns are gonna be in the clear."

"Ain't happening," said the ogre with the single eye, the third member of her party. "That thing's apparently made of mithril and magically altered."

After Arichburg was occupied and the southern region stabilized, Shemel left the Liberation Army and returned to being an adventurer. At the moment, the Liberation Army was offering the most work to adventurers, so even though her job had changed, she was still mostly working for us.

Ira and I wanted to check on how the enchantments went, but we weren't able to request bodyguards from the army's soldiers. Since Shemel and her people were free, we got them to guard us instead.

"You never change, do you?" said Shemel. "When I heard you tamed a dragon, I seriously thought I was in crazy town."

"And a grand dragon at that!" Added one of the others. "Crazy sauce."

"Let's just call it fate," I said.

The cyclops woman shrugged her shoulders, on which rested her giant mallet. "If that's how fate works, you must be adored by either the goddess of fate, good luck, or miserable luck."

"By the way, quite the unique party you've got here," I remarked.

"It makes things easier when everyone's the same race, you know? Don't gotta tiptoe around things."

"We're huge, y'know?"

“When we’re out camping, we might roll over and crush someone.”

“...Yikes.”

“Hmm...”

Ira and I stared at the three girls’ large breast plates. Ira’s gaze seemed somewhat jealous, while mine was born from pure scientific curiosity. Ira was staring particularly hard at the breasts of the cyclops woman, which were bigger than her head. I certainly wouldn’t mind being crushed by them.

“I’d prefer if you didn’t look at me like that.”

“Gonna slice ‘em off,” Ira mumbled under her breath.

“Wow, maximum violence. Don’t worry Ira, I still love you.”

“...I know.”

I could see Ira projecting a dangerous aura, so I gently caressed her back to calm her down. It was true that Ira’s chest was small, but that meant nothing. Big and small breasts were all still breasts. They were all great.

“You’re devouring the princess, Ira, and the harpies, Kousuke,” Shemel said. “You’re quite the omnivore. If we’re not careful, you might eat us too.”

“Huh?” Squeaked the other red ogre. “For real? Scary!”

“If you’re fine with cyclopes, then I’m in danger too.”

“Look,” I started to say. “I’ve never taken the first... You know what, never mind.”

Putting Sylphy and Ira to the side, the harpies and Melty were the ones to make moves on me. The slime girls too. Elen hadn’t made a move yet.

Our merry party eventually arrived at the edge of the woods.

“All right,” I said, “next is this thing.”

“This one has a gathering increase enchantment, right?” said Ira.

“Yep.”

Mithril Logging Ax (Auto Repair, Effect Strengthening III, Gathering Increase

III)

“What exactly is gathering increase going to do?”

“Increase the number of logs you can gather?”

“Sounds scary!”

I swung my ax at a random tree, and it cut through it in one blow like it was made of tofu.

“What the heck...?”

“I’m totally lost.”

“This is crazy.”

The tree fell over, and then a moment later, it went poof. Where a single tree stood, there was a pile of logs. Literally the second it hit the ground, it multiplied. There were clearly more logs than there was tree, in fact. Maybe three times as many? No, four. They’d basically formed a small mountain of materials.

“I want to know the science behind this,” said Ira.

“Any ideas?” I asked her.

“Not a single one.”

“I figured.”

Ira had a peaceful expression on her face, as though she’d come to terms with my madness. It was already absurd that I could just cut a tree and it’d turn into logs, but now there were even more. Three to four times more. Just thinking about it was pointless.

Also, depending on what direction it went, this could be dangerous. I could imagine someone getting crushed by the increased number of logs.

“Wonder what’d happen if a normal person used that ax.”

“Shemel,” Ira beckoned..

“You want me to do it? I mean, I guess I’m fine with that...”

Shemel took the ax from me and started to swing it. It was made for a normal

human, so when Shemel wielded it, it looked extra small.

“Man, this can really cut!” she said.

“That’s the effect of Strengthening III at work,” I said.

“I’ve never even heard of a magical logging ax before.”

“Not too many folks would think to make one out of mithril,” said the red ogre. “Never mind magically enhance it. Only weirdos.”

“Aww, thanks for the kind words.”

She looked at me. “They weren’t meant to be kind.”

Girl, you’ve got some ace comedic timing.

“...And there we go. Huh?”

It didn’t take long for the tree to fall...

“Why are there two of them?”

“The number of trees increased?”

“Oh, c’mon...”

The tree Shemel was cutting had split into two trees. The branches and stuff were still there, so both trees were twisted up in one another.

“It’s great that the number of trees increased, but this is useless.”

“Looks like I’m the only one who can do anything with this,” I said, shrugging.

Shemel returned the ax to me and I tapped the fallen trees, turning them into logs, which I stuffed into my inventory. It was cool that I could get more materials with the axe, but it was kind of awkward to use. The hoe, on the other hand, was useful even in other people’s hands.

“Next up is the pickaxe,” I said. “I wanna look for some large stones or a stone wall or something.”

“Then come right this way!”

The ogre with a big battleax on her shoulders led the pack forward.

“I’m startin’ to get hungries!”

“Let’s eat when we get there,” I offered. “My treat.”

“Oh, I like the sound of that! It’s been a while since I’ve had your food.”

“Kousuke’s food is always tasty.”

“For reals?”

“I’m looking forward to it, then.”

The red ogre and the cyclops had never eaten my food before. Sounded like they hooked up with Shemel after Arichburg was occupied, so that’d explain why. What would I treat them to?

“Shemel, have you got any requests?” I asked.

“Those tightly packed sticks of meat I had a while back were real good.”

“Sausages it is, then! I’ll also grab something else out of the old inventory too. Ira, you want anything in particular?”

“Hmm, I want pasta,” she said. “Pasta with meat sauce.”

“Pasta with meat sauce and sausage. Right. I’ll also put together a nice little side salad.”

“We’re eating by the rocks, right?” said the red ogre.

“Can you really make that stuff?” asked the cyclops.

They both tilted their heads in doubt. Normally speaking, it’d be impossible to make meat sauce in that kind of environment, but I was special in that way. I had some in stock already, and I could always use my crafting skill to make more if needed.

“Whoa, this is quite the rocky spot.”

After about an hour of walking, we’d arrived at a rocky area with huge boulders all over the place. I couldn’t even begin to imagine how a place like this took form, but it was perfect for testing out my new pickaxe’s abilities.

“First, we eat!” I said. “Everyone okay with pasta being the main dish?”

“Extra-large for me, please.”

“That’ll be kind of hard, so just ask for seconds.”

I could probably make an extra-large if I put my mind to it, but I'd never actually done it before. All of the meat sauce spaghetti sets in my inventory were the same size.

I placed down a wood block to make a basic dining table, then set down some modified logs as seating. I then handed everyone some cloths to wipe themselves off with. The red ogre and cyclops looked baffled as I pulled object after object out of thin air.

"Shemel told us about you, but seeing your weirdness in person is something else," the red ogre said.

The cyclops agreed. "I've been surprised plenty of times by magic, but this is on another level."

Ira nodded. "Even mages find it bizarre," she said. "It's impossible to understand."

Even I didn't get how it worked, so I couldn't explain it to them. But I'd never felt like I needed to understand it, so that was fine.

After we'd eaten, it was time to test out the pickaxe. Once that was done, I'd shift over to my shovel.

Mithril Pickaxe + 9 (Auto Repair, Effect Strengthening III, Good Luck III)

After once again checking the name of the item in my hand, I started swinging it down.

"This sure is painless."

"I saw this one coming."

With one swing, a stone larger than my whole body immediately crumbled and disappeared. Suddenly, all kinds of rocks and metals and gems and ores appeared in my inventory. Being able to bust up rocks quickly meant I could acquire materials like crazy. It was like I was playing a Warriors game against rocks.

"This whole area is going to be completely empty soon..."

“This is crazy. Like, insane.”

“I honestly thought it was an exaggeration when people said you built a fort in a day, but now...”

Shemel watched me with a smile, since she'd grown somewhat used to my insanity, but the other two were seeing this absurdity for the first time and looked dead. Honestly, if I was in their shoes, I'd probably look exactly the same.

“How's good luck working for you?” asked Ira.

“I'm definitely acquiring more gems,” I replied. “Maybe two times more? Might actually be three.”

I was also getting more stone. Possibly even more than triple the amount. It wasn't even that it was breaking apart the large stones into more, smaller materials at a higher rate. It was clearly just making more than what was there to begin with.

I mean, it shouldn't come as a surprise that my abilities are picking a fight with the laws of physics, right? ...Right?

“From stones to gems, huh?”

“This has gotta be some kinda joke.”

“It sure doesn't look like one.”

“If Kousuke says it, it's certainly no joke,” Ira said. “Show me.”

“Here you go. Hup!” I pulled out all the gems and stones from my inventory and piled them into Ira's hands.

“Wh-wha...”

Ira clearly wasn't expecting them to just come piling out like that. She panicked and formed a platform with her hands. I kept spilling more materials into her hands, creating a mountain of colorful stones.

“Shemel, give me one of your hands.”

“Huh?”

Shemel held her hand out and I did the same for her, a pile of colorful stones

and gems forming in her red palm.

“H-hey, wait a sec!”

Shemel started to panic, tossing her large staff away and cupping her hands together the same as Ira in order to hold all the stones. Fortunately, her hands were many times larger than Ira’s, so she was able to hold on until I’d emptied my inventory.

“This is everything I got just from that one large rock.”

I could see the light in all four women’s eyes fade. It’d be one thing if it were just Ira, but seeing Shemel like this was pretty uncommon.

“Girl, we’d be set for life if we kidnapped this guy and worked him to the bone,” said the red ogre.

“And turn the witch of the Black Forest into an enemy?” Replied the cyclops. “There’s no way he’s worth it. Well. Actually...?”

That was a dangerous discussion. What exactly did they plan on doing to me? What did they mean by working me to the bone? I was kind of curious.

Shemel seemed to notice Ira’s terrifying one-eyed glare. She stepped in to talk her comrades down. “Cut it out, ladies. Ain’t no reason we gotta take him all for ourselves.”

“...”

“Fair point.”

“I guess we could always slip into his harem.”

The other two clearly noticed Ira’s glare, too, since they hurriedly walked back their plans.

Yup, you really shouldn’t say stuff like that in front of her. Hell, she’s even terrifying me right now.

“In any case, right now is impossible. It’s something to consider if things change for us.”

“Yeah, no point in rushing, I guess! We’ve got a long road ahead of us, after all!”

From what I'd heard, red ogres and cyclopes had long lifespans. I wondered what they mean by "things" changing... Did they mean sexy time? I mean, it's only a matter of time before someone got pregnant, considering there was no protection in this world. But apparently, that was particularly difficult between different species.

Anyway, I couldn't just leave the girls holding all that stuff, so I popped out a decent-sized table and had them dump it all there.

Lots of green rough gemstones in the bunch.

"Pretty."

"They barely seem real when there are this many."

Ira's eye was glittering like the gems themselves, while Shemel and the others had dazed looks. Large women with large weapons they might have been, but at the end of the day they were also *women*. When faced with so many gems, I guess even they forgot their positions as adventurers.

"If you want, you can each take two or three with you," I offered.

Their eyes turn into dots with greed and wonder.

"They're valuable to most folks, but do I look like someone who needs that sort of thing? I know you're getting paid for this gig, but this is my personal way of thanking you all."

"A-are you sure?" One of them asked me.

"Absolutely," I said. "Pick whatever you like. You too, Ira."

"Thanks, Kousuke. I'm going to use them for magic catalysts."

I nodded to them, and the four girls began sifting through the mountain of rough gemstones with glittering eyes. Since this would probably take a while, I decided to start testing out the shovel.

Mithril Shovel +9 (Auto Repair, Effect Strengthening III, Area Strengthening III)

The last one gave me a really bad feeling.

But first things first. I thrust my shovel into the ground, and it cut through the dirt and rocks with zero resistance. That much was the same as before I enchanted it, so no surprises there. It was what came afterward that had me nervous.

“Hee-yah!”

I put all my strength into scooping up some dirt, which was when a crazy sound echoed through the air.

BA-BOOM-SHAKA-SHAKA!

“Aw nuts.”

It was just like what happened with the hoe. Starting from where the shovel was, there was a one-meter-deep hole that ran 20 meters wide and 50 meters long. All created in an instant. The sound came from the large chunks of stone that lost their support, smashed into each other, and crumbled to the ground. If anyone had been nearby, they could’ve gotten crushed.

Actually, even without the massive stones, if the ground suddenly fell out from under them, they wouldn’t be unscathed from the fall. This was basically a map-wide weapon, huh?

Turning around, I made eye contact with the girls who were digging through the rough gemstones. Needless to say, they’d stopped what they were doing.

C’mon, please don’t look at me like that. I realize you all expected this, but so did I! Especially after that hoe stuff.

“I’m gonna go clean up,” I said.

“Good luck with that.”

I switched over to my mithril pickaxe so I could rid the area of any dangerous rocks and stones, hopping into the crack in the ground.

Ten minutes later, the table aboveground was filled up with even more rough gemstones, causing the girls to squeal with glee.

After digging away with my mithril shovel and collecting a whole bunch of

rough gemstones, we wrapped up for the night.

“I have a request for the Liberation Army, if that’s cool,” I suddenly stated in front of everyone gathered in the living room that night.

“What is it?” said Sylphy, tilting her head. “Don’t be shy.”

She was sitting next to me polishing her kukri knives. That pair of blades was the first gift I ever gave her. Since they were made of steel, they rusted if they weren’t taken care of. The fact that Sylphy always made sure to keep them looking brand new showed just how much she treasured them.

“So, uh, I dug up a whole bunch of rough gemstones today. Again.”

“Again?”

“Yup. Again. I plan on giving them to the Liberation Army, so I was hoping I could ask for a favor.”

“As long as it’s within our means, absolutely,” said Melty, from the opposite side. “I can’t guarantee any more than that.” Between the two of them, I was sandwiched in the center.

You girls sure about that? For sure, sure?

“I want a week off with Sylphy so that we can have some lovey-dovey private time.”

Sylphy’s eyes turned into dots.

“...Huh?”

“So that’s what this is about,” said Melty, folding her arms.

The fact that they didn’t immediately reject my request meant it was possible, right?

I hadn’t really had much time to be alone with Sylphy lately. When she got home at night, sure, but then in the morning she and I both had to go back to work. I didn’t think we’d really rested a single time since I got kidnapped.

Melty stared at me. “I’ll allow it under a few conditions.”

I nodded confidently. I’d do whatever I could to get this request passed.

“Hey, um, Kousuke? Melty...?”

There was an adorable little animal off to my side turning bright red in a panic, but I didn't care. I was doing this so I could shower that little creature with all of my love.

Chapter 4:

Returning Home to the Black Forest

MELTY GAVE ME three conditions to clear before I could take a week off with Sylphy.

First, Sylphy had to finish up several assignments. Things to do with managing the southern region of the Kingdom of Merinard, and negotiations with the Nostalgia sect. Some of that stuff could be passed off to Melty and the others, so there wasn't too much that needed doing.

The second condition was that we be prepared to answer any summons, should the worst come to pass. I'd have loved an uninterrupted week with Sylphy, but you never knew when either of us might be needed. In case of an emergency, Melty needed a means of getting in touch with us.

The large golem communicator I made in Merinesburg would solve that problem. And since we had so much mithril and so many magic jewels, it was possible to make an even higher-spec golem communicator.

I ended up passing off its development to R&D. Of course, I offered to give them plentiful mithril, gems, and magic jewels in exchange.

I swear I'm not buying them off. Promise.

They'd be using multiple crafting benches simultaneously to make large golem communicators. If we put them at our bases, we'd be able to get in touch in the case of an emergency. That said, these were important machines that we couldn't allow to leak to the enemy, so I wasn't going to have them placed just anywhere.

And then came the final condition.

"So, you're going on a one-week trip, are you?"

"Yup. Me and Sylphy... My wife and I are going to get all lovey-dovey."

"So you're saying you won't be able to offer me food during that period of time?"

"Yeah, unfortunately. That said, you don't have to do any work while I'm

gone, so you can just chill.”

“Hmm...”

According to Melty, since I wouldn't be around to take care of Grande, it was my duty as her friend to talk to her about it. She was totally right.

“See, she's been working nonstop, so I really want to give her a break,” I explained.

“I see... That sounds delightful to me,” said Grande. “Where do you plan on taking her?”

“I haven't decided yet, but...”

Truthfully speaking, I wanted to take her back to her home to the Black Forest and spend time with her there, but even if we moved at our fastest, we were just going to end up getting back to her house before we had to turn right back around.

“Now that you mention it, you did say that part of my duties might include flying you to the Black Forest, did you not?”

“Yeah, that's because the elf village is there. That's where I originally came from.”

“In that case, why not go to the Black Forest?” Grande said. “I'll fly you both there.”

“Are you sure? I mean, that'd be a huge help.”

Sylphy would really be able to relax there. Plus, I thought she might have some catching up to do with the elders and her friends there. That was where her home was, after all.

“I was also thinking of taking a trip home, you see,” said Grande. “Plus, if we're both in the same neighborhood, I can keep eating hamburgers and those fluffy things.”

“Pancakes?”

“Yes! Pancakes, indeed! Does that work for you? Pretty please?”

“Sure, okay.”

As thanks for giving me her blood the other day, I made Grande some giant pancakes and loaded them with cream and strawberry jam on top. She'd grown quite fond of pancakes after that—it was possible she liked them more than hamburgers.

“I'll talk to Sylphy about it. So, you're saying you'll fly us to the Black Forest and then fly us back?”

“Indeed. I'll be expecting hamburgers while you're there, my friend.”

“I know, I know. That's no skin off my back.”

I was glad I wouldn't have to worry about leaving her alone, considering I was the only one who could communicate with her. Melty and the others would be relieved too.

Good idea, Grande! I need to go talk things over with Sylphy, ASAP.

“The Black Forest, huh? If Grande's flying you there, that'll take a huge load off of my shoulders. We can avoid any...untoward incidents.”

Melty responded rather positively when I talked to her about it. She'd been worried about potential trouble between Grande and the citizens of the city. If my new dragon friend lost it, there'd be a total bloodbath.

I was sure that Grande would rather dig her way underground or flee into the sky, though. She was quite the coward, and she was smart to boot. I thought she'd choose to run away before doing something dumb like hurting people and causing tons of damage.

“Are you okay with this, Sylphy?” I asked.

“Of course. It's been a while since I went home.”

Sylphy smiled peacefully while looking over some papers on her desk.

Ever since I requested time off, she'd been in an extremely good mood. In fact, she'd been smiling and speeding through her work at a faster rate than usual, so she must have been looking forward to this.

“Oh, and I also have a little gift for you, Melty,” I added. “Are you okay for

time right now?”

“Um, me? Sure...”

“Good, good. Could you sit on the couch and relax for me?”

Melty made a confused sound, but obediently sat down on the couch. I circled around her and started to caress her head.

“K-Kousuke?”

“I should’ve asked for permission before I started touching your head, sorry.”

“It’s fine, but, ummm...”

I could feel something hard at the tips of my fingers. This had to be where one of her horns was. I parted her hair to the side, revealing the stump of her horn.

“Kousuke, that area’s kind of sensitive and, mm...”

“My bad. Just hang in there.”

“O-okay... Mn...”

Every time my fingers brushed over the stump, Melty raised her voice and trembled.

I’m doing this for medical purposes, I swear.

“This might feel a little shocking, but just hang in there,” I advised her.

I pulled out a test tube-shaped bottle of medicine from my inventory and poured the shimmering amber liquid onto her stump.

“What do you mean shocking?” She asked, just before screaming.

The sound of fizzling filled the air as the liquid seeped into the stump on Melty’s head. Next was the other side. And another shriek.

The regeneration potion was absorbed into the stump yet again, fizzling and all.

Man, how does this all work? What shape is her skull? I’m so curious!

“How do you feel?” I asked her.

“Ah... Ah...”

Melty's face trembled, bright red. It must have been more of a shock than she anticipated. I hoped she was okay. Actually, I hoped using this potion on her head didn't cause any damage to her brain. I probably should have worried about that earlier.

"H-hey, are you okay?" I asked again.

Sylphy hurriedly got up from behind her desk and came over, concern written all over her face.

"According to Ira, the animal trials went fine. It should've been okay—"

"Mm...ooow?!"

All of a sudden, two horns popped out from the sides of Melty's head.

Wait, that's how it works? Seriously? I was expecting a slower growth process or something. Did they seriously just pop out???

Melty was panting like she'd just run a race.

"W-was that supposed to happen?" Sylphy asked.

"Sorry, but I have no clue."

Melty's horns were back and looking beautiful, but she clearly was not doing okay. She was trembling with an expression on her face that one might describe as...lewd.

"M-melty, you okay?"



“I’m... Whoa... M-my horns are too sensitive... Just moving them a little or touching the air makes me...”

“I see...” Struck by the desire to tease her a bit, I gently blew on her horns, but

—
“EEEEEEK!?”

Her response was intense.

This is hilarious—I mean, uh, not good. What if she tries to get revenge? She’s like this now, but she’ll get used to it eventually. And when that happens, who knows what she’s going to do to me... I’m starting to scare myself.

“Um... Sylphy, you’ve got this, right? Peace out!”

“Wh-what!? Hey, wait! Kousuke!?”

I sped out of the office while Sylphy panicked and Melty shot me a wrathful glare. If I was going to run, now was the time, since Melty couldn’t really move. It was usually impossible to flee from an overlord, so I had to grab my only chance!

Just gonna keep running until she chills. If I put some distance between us and dig my way underground, even she shouldn’t be able to follow me!

Clank! Clank!

That was the sound of someone knocking on a steel door. With each knock, the thick door contorted more and more.

No way, no way! How does she know I’m in here!?

CLAAANK!

A fist smashed through the steel door.

Filled with nothing but fear, I whipped out my mithril knife and backed away from the door.

Oh, shit, all I’ve got is a wall behind me! I never thought she’d find me in here, so I didn’t build a way out other than the front door!

Maybe I can build one now—

Melty pulled back her fist and peeked her face into the hole like a certain fictional serial killer.

“You’ve got a guest, Kousuke.”

I screeched.

No one could run from an overlord. I paid a heavy price for my sins.

“Are you sure?”

“I’m going to have him all to myself for a straight week, and tomorrow is Ira, then the harpies. I’ll just use the time to prepare for the trip home. Plus, I know you’re just being all shy and cute.”

“Today’s my turn.”

“I feel like I heard you say that a few days ago.”

I played with Melty all day the day before, so it was Ira’s turn. I’d be away from Arichburg for a week with Sylphy, so I had to do my time with the others while I still had the chance.

“That said, what’s the plan?”

“Hm...”

“Though, I suppose it’s not like we have to do anything super special.”

“Yeah. Let’s just do like we always do.”

We nodded and sat down on the couch next to each other so we could chat. We mostly ended up talking about what I was up to when I was away, and about Grande, and what Ira and the others were doing while I was kidnapped.

“It was crazy hard stopping Sylphy from running off to get you herself,” said Ira.

“I can totally imagine that.”

After using Ira’s detection magic to figure out where I was, Sylphy apparently

tried to slip into Merinesburg all on her own. Honestly, that might've been possible, but considering her position, it would have been a bad move.

“Ultimately, Melty was the one who ended up going. She cut off her horns, shaved the fur on her ears, and wore a hat and hood. She didn't look any different from a normal human, either. Sylphy's ears are long, and if anyone looked at my face, they'd see I'm a one-eyed demi-human.”

“Makes sense... And thank you for stopping Sylphy.”

“Mm, it was super-duper hard.”

Ira wrapped her arms around me from the side.

“No more going off and disappearing, okay?”

“Yeah. I'll be more careful.”

Talking about the time I was gone must've reminded her of how sad and lonely she was then. I wrapped my arms around her in return.

Mm, Ira's so warm. I wonder if her body temperature is so high because she's so small?

“...I like this. Feels comfy. Hold me tighter...”

“You got it. But if I go any harder, I might hurt you.”

“Just do it,” Ira replied, and squeezed me tighter, so I did the same.

Since she didn't say anything else, I held her like that for a few minutes. She started breathing really heavily.

“See, I told you I might hurt you...”

Ira's face was bright red.

“I-I'm fine. Just a little more...”

“Are you sure?”

I ended up squeezing her tightly until she was content.

“Kousuke!”

“Master!”

“Master.”

“Yeah, yeah.”

After spending time with Ira, I passed the next two days with the harpies. They were pretty direct when it came to showing their affections. A whole lot of skin to skin, basically. Lots of hugging, stroking me with their wings and feathers, singing and dancing for me, being fed the food they prepared for me themselves. Honestly, it was the classic harem lifestyle.

“When you ladies treat me like this, I can’t help but wonder if I deserve all of the love.”

“To us, you’re our savior.”

“Precisely. The only reason anyone pays attention to us now is because of you, Kousuke.”

“Plus, you’re one heck of a provider... Here, open wide.”

One of the harpies filled my mouth with fresh grape-like fruits as I wondered if that was really the case. It was true that their status went up once I developed the harpy airborne bombs and golem communicators. Their influence within the Liberation Army had risen significantly, compared to back in the day.

“Also, this has always been a big part of our culture.”

“Is that so?”

“Yup! Our mothers were also like this. Heck, half the girls here are my sisters from another mother.”

“Whoa, for real?”

A bunch of the nearby girls replied in the affirmative.

Man, for real? But, like, not all of them, right?

“Me, Ingrid, and Aja all have different bloodlines.”

“M-my dad’s the same as Capri’s. Aja and Rei are half-sisters with different moms, right?”

The brown-feathered harpy named Aja and the black-feathered harpy named Rei both nodded in response to Flamme's query. It sounded like all fifteen of the harpies could be divided into three groups with different mothers.

"Even if our dads or moms are different, with Kousuke, we're all one big family."

"Right, right!"

"A family, huh...?"

I didn't have many fond memories associated with the concept of family. I wasn't going to say too much, but I was an only son, and when I came of age, my parents got divorced. By the time I was that old, their relationship had soured, and I was basically raised entirely by my mom. My dad went off and had a lover elsewhere... Actually, thinking about my current situation, his blood really does run through my veins, huh?

"Kousuke?"

"Ah, sorry. It's nothing."

My feelings must've been clear as day on my face, given that Pirna was looking at me worriedly. I gently caressed her head in an attempt to play it off.

"Then we'd better be one big happy family, yeah?" I said.

"...Yeah!"

I'd seen how families can go wrong, but that just meant I could be more aware of the pitfalls myself. Marriage in this world and the old one were fundamentally different. I'd just stick to the rules and traditions here, and work so that everyone I cared about was happy.

"Then we'd better grow our family."

"Yup, yup."

"For the prosperity of our family!"

"Okay, I get it. Just calm down. I don't have any complaints with any of this, but could we take this a little more gently? Let's nurture our love, fill our hearts, y'know?"

“Yup! You’re certainly gonna fill something!”

Pessa happily leapt onto my chest.

Hey, hold up! I can’t handle all of you at once!

“My *everything* aches.”

“Are you okay, human? Would you like to touch my tail?”

The morning three days after my night of madness with the harpies, I went over to Grande’s to prepare her breakfast. I was super happy that she was worried about me, but touching that terrifying tail of hers wasn’t going to do much for my drained body and soul. Her concern was more than enough for me.

“Your mates should really learn how to take it easy on you,” she said.

“I think they are, probably.”

It was just that there were too many harpies. Melty was trying to cover for how shy she could be, but Ira was gentle with me. Actually, Ira had grown so fond of playing the older sister type in the relationship that whenever we were being lovey-dovey, she was always like that.

“My heart’s nice and happy, and everyone’s mega kind to me. It’s just that my body is taking a beating.”

“I see... Do you need my blood?” Grande asked.

“I’m fine. I’m not going to harm you for a silly reason like that.”

“...Oh.”

Grande smacked her tail against the ground while munching on a hamburger. She was in an excellent mood as always, thanks to the burgs.

My aches and pains would heal a bit, once I could rest. It wasn’t that big of a deal. It wasn’t like I wasn’t getting any sleep or anything. When I woke up, either Ira was keeping me nice and warm, or the harpies were around me, having formed a natural bed of feathers, so I really had nothing to complain about.

I did wish Melty would take it a touch easier on me. But she was so inexperienced and fresh faced and she got all crazy. I needed to work on getting better at leading her. Sylphy and Ira were both like that at first too, so she'd get used to things eventually.

"Now then, when are we leaving?" asked Grande.

"Tomorrow morning. After we have breakfast, we're flying outta here. We'll make a few stops along the way, okay?"

"Not a problem. I've recently grown quite fond of seeing where tiny folk live up close."

"Not something you can do too often, is it?"

"Indeed. All manner of magics, arrows and spears come flying at me. Most of them are ineffective against me, but occasionally they do hurt, so getting too close is unwise."

Grande cleared her throat. Whenever I was exhausted, I found that I ended up chatting with Grande. Was this what pet therapy was like? She was a little big for an animal companion, to be honest.

"Anyway, that's the deal," I said. "I'm counting on you tomorrow."

"I understand. I shall see you again, come dinner. I wonder what I should hunt today..."

After saying goodbye to Grande, I headed off toward R&D. In the last three days, we'd gotten a good read on how to make a golem workbench, so I wanted to wrap that up before I headed out.

We'd nearly finalized the design of the golem workbench.

"This is the brand-new magic jewel reactor."

"Oooh... It's a box."

Ira showed me a silvery, white cube. It was about as big as a Rubik's cube, and Ira could hold it in one hand.

"Yup," she said. "Its insides are incredible. Pure mithril magic cords and three

large magic jewels are loaded into this thing. Its outside is also made of mithril. It'd be impossible to measure just how valuable it is."

"I bet."

The large magic jewel was the first one I developed, about as big as a ping pong ball. Just one of them was enough to purchase a nation, and inside the cube were a whopping three of those suckers. It was insanely valuable. Plus, both its insides and outsides were pure mithril. This was probably more valuable than any national treasure that existed in this world.

"Even crazier are its specs," Ira continued. "It can infinitely produce magical power."

"Well, that's unsettling."

"It is. Depending on how it's used, it could annihilate a huge area. A distance you could walk in four days, all rendered nothing but desolate flatlands. Who knows what kind of an effect that sort of explosion would have on this world..."

"That's terrifying."

A day of walking was something like 30 kilometers, yeah? So, slightly less than four days would be something like 110 kilometers. All gone. This could destroy the world, couldn't it?

"Suddenly, I'm too scared to hold this thing."

"I've already handed it to you, so deal with it."

Ira crossed her arms and backed away. Actually, now that I looked carefully, all the members of the R&D division were huddled in corners with shields up.

Look, that's not gonna protect you if this thing explodes, guys.

"Couldn't we have made something slightly less terrifying?" I asked.

"It's in the nature of an alchemist to make the best thing possible with the best materials available."

"Is that so...?"

I looked at the shield-wielding researchers, and from the gaps between them, I could see them holding out their hands to give me a thumbs-up each. Weirdos.

“Anyhow, as long as I keep these in my inventory, they should be fine,” I said.

“Indeed. We’re counting on you.”

“Aye, aye.”

I slipped the magic jewel reactor into my inventory. Didn’t look like anything strange happened. I kind of hoped that maybe I’d awaken to some magical powers or something the moment I added it to my inventory, but alas.

“We’re going to use this as a material to see if we can upgrade the improved workbench, yeah?”

“That’s right,” said Ira. “Even if we make a high-spec golem workbench, it’s meaningless if you of all people can’t use it, so I think it makes more sense for you to upgrade the workbench you use.”

“I suppose that makes sense.”

But it’s kind of mysterious, y’know? Back when I was still living in the elf village, I was able to draw grain flour from the quern that Melty had. That was fine, but golem workbenches are no good, huh? What’s the logic behind that?

“Anyway, guess I’ll give it a go.”

“Mm. Good luck.”

I pulled an improved workbench from my inventory, opened the menu, and then searched the upgrade tab.

Improved Workbench Upgrade: Magic Power Generator × 1, Magically Enhanced Wood × 10, Magically Enhanced Clay × 20, Magic Iron × 5, Magic Steel × 10, Mithril × 20

“Hell yeah!” I yelled out excitedly. “I can do this!”

“That’s good to hear,” Ira said with a smile.”

It looked like I could get the materials together too, which meant I could finally get my workbenches to the next level.

It was going to take a large amount of mithril, but I could use the stuff I got from testing out my mithril pickaxe. I'd also produced a fair amount of magically-enhanced materials when I made my bestowing bench, so that wouldn't be an issue.

"All right, it's upgrade time!"

"Mm, how exciting."

"Ah, it's probably going to shine really brightly, so watch out."

"I've got protection," Ira said before pulling her tricorne hat down deep over her face.

God, she's just so adorable.

"Let's do this thing."

As soon as I selected the upgrade option, a blinding light enveloped the area. It kind of felt like I got hit with a powerful shockwave or something, but maybe that part was just my imagination. It didn't look like any of the equipment in the R&D lab was physically affected, but...

"Eehh..."

Ira was on her back, her eye going in circles. Multiple researchers who were holding shields in the corners had also collapsed.

"Wh-what's wrong!? Are you okay?!" I asked, concerned.

"E-everything's fine. I was just surprised by how strong the magic wave was."

"Magic wave," I repeated.

The bright light from previous upgrades wasn't magical, so was this the effect of the magic jewel reactor? That was the only thing I could think of.

"Kousuke, you should check the new workbench," Ira said. "That's more important."

"Y-yeah, right. Are you sure you're okay?"

"All good."

Ira stood up on her own and walked over to a chair. Seeing her sit down on

her own was a relief. It didn't seem like she was too messed up.

“Lemme see... Oh, wow.”

The finished product was definitely pretty mechanical. Since the parts that were actually going to be moving were golem bits, its color was the same, but various parts of it reflected light, since they were made from magic iron and steel. As far as the cutting parts were concerned, they looked like they were made from large quantities of mithril.

For example, the cutting blade, the platform for holding the materials being modified, and the other moveable bits were all made with highly durable mithril.

Let's open the craft menu...

“Huh, not as many new options as I expected,” I reported.

It didn't really look like there were more things I could craft. I decided to try making something. Some kind of annoying mechanical part that would take a lot of time to make. Something that'd take thirty seconds per piece on my usual workbench.

“...Oooh!”

Two seconds per piece! Man, talk about a time reduction. I'd be able to make items faster *and* in larger quantities. Especially the time-consuming ones.

“How is it?” Ira asked from her seat.

“Pretty damn good. A real step up for productivity. As long as I have the materials, I should even be able to mass produce bullets.”

The bottleneck to powder manufacturing had always been in acquiring saltpeter, but a giant city like Arichburg had plenty of dirt used for toilet purposes. If I could cut down on crafting time for bullets by a large chunk, mass production wasn't a dream anymore. I might or might not end up actually doing that, but it was still cool.

“I might be able to futz around more freely when it comes to item creation,” I told Ira. “Crap, there's so much I want to try out! I can't wait. Thank you, Ira!”

“Mm, I'm happy for you,” she briefly replied with a nod and a smile.

As I gazed at Ira's smile, I thought to myself.

I'm gonna have to repay her for all of this in the near future. I should find a gift for her while I'm on vacation with Sylphy.

The next morning, Sylphy and I prepared our luggage for the trip and had breakfast with Grande.

"Cheeseburgers today?" Grande asked.

"Yup. It might be a little heavy for the morning, but you'll be burning calories when you fly, right? Cheese will be good for that."

Grande nodded at my explanation and let out a low roar. "I see..."

Meanwhile, Sylphy was sitting next to me as I looked up at the dragon and munched on my burger. The expression on her face as she looked at me was hard to describe.

"It just sounds like she's roaring to me, and yet you're actually having a conversation," she said. "Weird."

"I know, right? Whenever she roars, I can hear a female voice layered over it, and I guess she understands my words as they are."

"How bizarre. Actually, now that you mention it, it's not like you're speaking our language either."

"Yeah! As far as I can tell, I'm speaking the language of my home country. And when you guys speak, I hear it in that language. Grande's the same."

"Huh, I see... You know, there might be other races that we could get along with if we could just speak to one another," Sylphy mused.

"Before you even ask, goblins were a no-go."

"Aw, really? I thought they might be the perfect example."

"Yeah, it was a total bust."

They just sounded like nasty little gargles. They had the intelligence to use basic weapons and equipment, so why couldn't we communicate? It was odd. Not odd enough for me to want to do the research on it, though.

“Kousuke, where should I fly you today?” Grande asked. “Straight to the Black Forest?”

“Nah. First I need you to stop by the fortress on the territorial border with the Omitt Badlands. We gotta drop off a large golem communicator there.”

“Hm... I do believe I know the facility you speak of. It’s the one with lots of human soldiers located close to the Badlands, yes? I saw it when I left the Black Forest.”

“Yeah, that’s the one. There are three of them, but I want to put the communicator in the central one.”

“That should be fine. What comes after that?”

“Once we’re finished there, I need to hit up our base at the center of the Badlands. Once I set up a communicator there, then it’s straight on to the Black Forest.”

“Understood. What is this ko-myu-knee-kay-tor you speak of?”

“It’s a device that allows you to talk to people far away from you. It’s like if you magically developed the *hell* out of a signal fire.”

“Oh... How does it work?”

Apparently, my explanation grabbed her interest. Her eyes were actually sparkling with intrigue. Grande didn’t usually get like that.

“Well, I don’t really know the specifics, but it uses magic to shoot out code created by magic waves, and the golem communicator on the other end translates those codes into words. Want me to bring someone who knows the details, next time I get the chance?”

“Hm, I would be quite grateful for that. If I can understand that code you describe, I might be able to communicate with the humans myself.”

“...Huh. That’s a good point. Heck, I might be able to make a translator for you or something.”

“Translaytore?”

“A device that automatically translates your words for you. So, your dragon

words would be turned into human words, and vice versa.”

“That would be quite the handy device.”

Grande excitedly smacked her tail against the ground. It’d be a huge breakthrough if I could make something like that. A device that lets you talk to dragons? Now that was the dream right there.

“Kousuke, you seem to be rather close to this dragon,” Sylphy commented.

“Hm? Yeah, I guess so. She’s my friend, after all. She was terrifying at first, but once I got used to her, she comes off as kinda cute to me nowadays.”

Even if she looked terrifying, her little gestures were pretty adorable. No matter how dangerous her appearance was, when I saw her relaxing in the sun, rolling around, yawning, or using both claws to eat a burger, I couldn’t help but think she was cute. It *was* pretty odd.

“Even a species capable of putting fear into the hearts of men the world over comes off as nothing but a pet to you, eh?”

“Hey, don’t put it like that. Grande’s not my pet. She’s my friend.”

Heck, if Grande ended up turning into a young dragon girl, I got the feeling I’d end up with another wife. But according to Ira, there was no history of dragons transforming like that, and she didn’t think any measure of magic could alter someone’s size or shape.

In other words, there was no chance of her becoming a cute dragon girl. Unless God whipped out a miracle for us. Or unless I did something unnecessary. Since my abilities were practically miraculous, it was entirely possible I could accidentally make an item that turned her into a human. If magic couldn’t do it, a miracle might.

At the end of the day, turning a non-human into a human was as close to a miracle as you could get.

“Mm, delicious,” said Grande. “Now then, shall we get going?”

“Sounds good to me. You good to go, Sylphy?”

“Yes, I’m prepared.”

“Don’t worry, it’s not scary at all,” I reassured her. “Er, well, landing is a little bit terrifying, but that’s all.”

“I shall make sure not to descend speedily without warning,” Grande added with a nod.

Seriously, the descent part of flying is terrifying. My stomach gets all weird. You get it, right?

“Plus, I’ve also made a saddle just for the occasion,” I added.

I used the leather that Grande got from hunting wyverns and had an artisan in Arichburg make me a killer saddle for a fair price. The poor artisan looked like they were going to freak out when they were measuring Grande, but the idea of being able to say they’d made a dragon saddle with wyvern leather was too good to pass up.

The wyvern leather wasn’t enough for the whole saddle, so I also used some other leather I had in storage. Maybe one day I’d have them make one made of only wyvern leather.

“And it’s attached. Grande, does it hurt at all? Easy to move still?”

“It’s quite fine,” she said.

“Great. Sylphy, let’s get on.”

“All right.”

I created a simple step with stone blocks and hopped onto Grande’s back.

“Take my hand, Sylphy.”

“Oh, thank you.”

I grabbed her hand and pulled her up on the saddle.

Hm... This is, well...

There were protrusions like bike seats for people to sit on, five in total. There were also stirrups so you could stabilize your posture, and seat belts for all five riders. On the side with no people was a space for locking down luggage, also equipped with belts.

Basically, if I could make it so other people could communicate with Grande,

we'd be able to transport up to five people and cargo without me around. This thing would be pretty resilient, but just to be safe, I wrapped a safety rope around Grande's body and the two of us. If things went bad and Sylphy and I fell from the sky, we'd be goners.

Well, we might have a chance. Sylphy had her magic and I had my blocks, but there was nothing wrong with playing it safe.

Everyone said their goodbyes when we left the main office, so no one was around to see us off, although the harpies were watching us from the city walls. There were some other folks with them too, I saw from a distance.

"See you all later!"

"Hold down the fort for us!"

Sylphy and I waved in their direction, and everyone along the wall responded in kind, waving hands and wings.

"All right, Grande. Let's go!"

"Mm, this should work. Hold on tight, just in case."

Grande bent her long neck to check on us, then let loose a powerful roar before sprinting and spreading her wings wide, setting off into the sky.

As soon as we lifted off, I could feel my body being held down. Looked like everything went according to plan.

"Oooh..." Sylphy gasped. "So this is what things look like from atop a dragon... It's incredible."

"Right? I honestly never get tired of the view."

Grande's flying speed wasn't particularly fast at first. According to her, she could speed things up, but while her magic would protect her, it wouldn't be particularly fun for us.

"She's so fast... We'll get to the fortress in no time at all."

"We don't have to follow any winding paths, so it doesn't matter what the roads are like. Flying really is so much faster than just walking."

I was right in thinking that Grande's speed and transportation abilities weren't

best used in battle. The Liberation Army had the advantage in communications due to our golem communicators, but when it came to movement and transportation, we were pretty much on the same level as the Holy Kingdom. We had a hard advantage in weaponry, and I even had some tricks up my sleeve that I hadn't introduced into battle yet.

Maybe the next thing I should focus on is transportation? You know, like developing bikes or cars or similar high mobility vehicles. That sort of thing might really strengthen our position.

It was kind of pointless to strengthen our military at the moment, though. We were technically in the middle of a cease fire. But I wasn't exactly useful at the negotiations table. I was just a former office employee who liked games. Not exactly up to speed on history or battle tactics.

That said, high mobility transportation wasn't just a military thing. It could have a huge effect on the economy as well. If the way merchandise and goods were shifted around was improved, there'd be more deals, more money changing hands, and the economy would be firing on all cylinders. I imagined there'd have to be talks with merchants who travel by horse and drawn carriage, and the businesses that run those as well, if that all came to fruition.

"Kousuke, we're almost there," said Sylphy.

"What, for real? Wasn't that a little too fast?"

In the brief time I was thinking to myself, we'd nearly reached our destination.

"Judging by the geography, I'm pretty certain we're almost there," Sylphy confirmed. "Grande's truly fast."

"Yeah. I'm gonna have to thank her for this."

"Hee hee, indeed. Give and take is important."

I couldn't look behind me while in the saddle, but I could tell Sylphy was smiling.

"Damn straight," I replied with a nod.

Relationships in which you just take from another person didn't last very long.

You might get something out of it for a brief time, but in the long term, you'd have a lot to lose.

But even in give and take relationships, it's possible for things on both ends to fall apart, so there wasn't only one right way to do things.

"If that's the case, I have a whole lot to repay you for," Sylphy said, giggling.

"Nah, I'm good. Just being with you is more than enough."

"Well I'm not good with that," Sylphy replied. "I want to be with you too, which means it's not proper payment for the work you've done."

"Then we have a problem."

"That we do."

Despite our words, I could sense her smiling behind me. Her arms slipped around me from behind, holding me tight. I could feel her warmth through her touch, and it put me at ease.

"Sorry to interrupt the two of you," said Grande, "but we're about to arrive."

"Oh, right. You're good to descend."

"S-sorry."

The two of us panicked a little after Grande called out to us. We were so deep in our own little world, despite knowing we'd be landing soon.

"Then here I go. Hold on tight."

Grande began her descent.

Hey, Miss Grande? Is it just me or is this descent angle a little intense? H-hey, wait, wait!

Both of us yelled into the wind.

Grande's descent could best be described as, er, ludicrous. Did she not like us flirting on her back? I'd have to keep that in mind.

After setting up a large golem communicator at Alpha, we immediately flew onward to our next objective. Instructions about security would be sent to them

directly from Arichburg, so we didn't have to handle that. After all, we were technically on vacation.

"Just to be clear," said Sylphy, "when we say we're doing a checkin on the rear and setting up communicators, that's all a cover story. Same with our talks with the elves in the Black Forest."

"Understood."

Things were going just as Sylphy planned for us, even though we were effectively on vacation. The absolute leader of the Liberation Army, Sylphy, was checking out the status of our rear bases with her own eyes, setting up golem communicators, and holding an official meeting with the elders of the elf village.

I was there as her aide. I was the only person who could communicate with Grande the dragon, and I was also the only "dragon rider." Plus, with my abilities, transporting resources was easy. In fact, I was actually carrying supplies and such from Arichburg in my inventory. I unloaded some at Alpha, and I'd be unloading more at the base in the Badlands and at the rear.

"It's been a while since I've seen the rear base," I mused. "Wonder how it's doing."

"Seems like gizma attacks are pretty common, but it's mostly peaceful over there. The area is wide, and there aren't any concerns over food or water," said Sylphy.

"They've got magic straight from the vein hollow too... I would like for it to be more than just a healing location, but also a base for engineering and mass production of magic crystals."

"Actually, aren't there quite a few buried ruins in that area? It might be a good idea to make it a base for explorers."

As we chatted, we eventually arrived at the central base in the Badlands.

"It's been quite some time," Sykes greeted me.

"...Is it just me, or do you look way tougher than before?"

"To have a hope of survival, one must temper one's strength," he said,

chuckling.

Sykes had undergone quite the transformation from the weakling he used to be. If my memories were correct, he was almost twice as tall. His body must have responded to the extreme conditions it was placed in. Demi-humans were crazy like that.

“Wait, what do you mean, survive?” I asked. “You’re not fighting, are you?”

“I am, in a sense.”

“Every night?”

“Every night.”

I could see the light fade from his eyes all of a sudden. The R&D branch here was basically Sykes’ own harem.

I’m sorry, buddy, it’s just that most of us dudes, me included, are on the front lines.

“...Good luck,” I tell him.

“Thank you,” Sykes replied, his eyes dead.

I handed him a bag with fairly large magic jewels and mithril ingots. Sykes and his people were going to serve as a relay point for the golem communicator network and do research into radio broadcasting as well, so magic jewels that had amplifying power and mithril that passed magic effectively would boost their efforts.

Sykes seems fairly surprised by this, so I told him I learned how to make all of it. His eyes dimmed further.

“Where is your path leading you, my friend...?” He wondered out loud.

“They call me a chicken that lays mithril and magic jewel eggs,” I said, shrugging.

“Makes sense...”

Look, it’s not like I go into childbirth and pop out jewels or mithril, okay? All I’m doing is using materials to make the stuff. That’s all. It’s just the rate at which I can do it is kinda weird.

After grabbing lunch at the base, we set flight again, heading for the rear base.

This was the first large-scale base I made, with a capacity of three thousand people. There were barely even one thousand folks living there now, so it was pretty spacious.

“It’s hustling and bustling here, huh?” I remarked.

“According to reports, they’ve had no gizma attacks, and they’ve been pulling bountiful harvests from the fields,” said Sylphy. “Magic tools that make use of the infinite magic from the vein hollow are widespread now, so life here is pretty good.”

“They’ve also got a barrier for keeping monsters out. Most of the people who live here led horrific lives in that mine before, so maybe it’s best they get a break from the tough stuff for a while.”

“Well, we need more helping hands, so that can’t go on forever. Sounds like the folks who are feeling better have been exploring ruins and doing mining as well,” Sylphy remarked.

“Gotcha.”

The citizens seemed surprised when they first saw Grande, but fortunately it looked like information was doing the rounds properly, since we weren’t attacked out of nowhere.

“Your Highness, thank you for coming.”

Greeting us at the rear base was an elderly gentleman who was either a dog or a wolf demi-human.

“Thank you for coming out to meet us, Donnel.”

The old gentleman that Sylphy called Donnel was once a high-ranking adventurer. Some two decades ago, during the war, he retired from adventuring and ran the adventurer’s guild branch in one of the many towns in the Kingdom of Merinesburg. He was already quite old at the time.

These days, he was putting his experience to use managing the rear base.

“To think you’d tame a dragon... I’d expect nothing less from you, Sir

Kousuke.”

“Grande’s just my friend,” I said.

“I see, I see.”

I didn’t tame her and make her my pet or servant, so I always made sure to correct that kind of talk where I could. Although it was really the combined might of Melty’s terrifying strength and my delicious food that got her to be friendly, so Donnel wasn’t *entirely* wrong.

“Sylphy, I’m gonna pull out the supplies,” I said.

“Okay, I’m going to chat with Donnel for a bit.”

We parted ways, and I headed to the storage area. I took a look at the people I passed as I walked through, and everyone had peaceful looks on their faces and healthy complexions. The folks there looked awful when they first arrived, so I guessed living there had really helped with their health.

When they noticed me, everyone expressed their gratitude.

“Thank you so much. It’s thanks to you that I can live a decent life.”

“The only reason I can raise our kids without worry is because of you. Thank you.”

“Dad’s sickness went away since living here! Thanks a whole bunch!”

The demi-human refugees who once were on guard around me were now super friendly. No lie, having so many people thanking me like really hammered home that I was able to save actual lives.

But I wouldn’t go on about how what I did was just, or good. The world wasn’t so black and white.

I definitely saved the refugees at this base. But I also killed many more Holy Kingdom soldiers and destroyed their families. That ultimately doesn’t change anything, but I tried not to forget it. It’d be great if the world was so simple that there was absolute justice and absolute evil, but it wasn’t.

I eventually made my way to storage, chatting with the refugees as I went. When I arrived, I pulled out the supplies while also stocking up on goods they

had in surplus. The rear base mostly produced food, metal weapons, armor, and other lifestyle goods.

In particular, they had an abundance of foodstuffs and metal goods. When I asked about it, I was told that the food had all been harvested from the field I plowed, and it continued to be bountiful.

Man, that farming block is really showing its value. I wonder what it's like now?

As for the metals, they'd been refining ore mined from the mining spot nearby with the large furnace. They were all objects melded with water wheel energy and magic hammers. As far as I could tell, everything they'd produced was super high quality.

They were currently in the process of trying to mass produce magic iron and steel with magic attributes using the refined ore. If that worked, the gear the Liberation Army used would be that much better.

They also had quite the stockpile of magic crystals, so if they made manufacturing equipment, they could do all kinds of things just by booting the machines up. I was told they were working on the production of those machines. Magic crystals could be used as catalysts for enchantments. And, like magic stones and magicite, magic crystals could also be used to power magical tools. They had more output than magic stones, so even if they couldn't be modified into magicite, they could be used as a stable magic source.

I didn't really get the difference between magic stones and magicite, but that was just me being ignorant.

After refilling their stock and stocking up myself, it just so happened that Sylphy had finished her meeting. All that was left was to put the golem communicator in place, make sure it worked, then head to our final destination: the Black Forest.

It had been a long time since I was last in the elven forest. I imagined it probably hadn't changed much, but I was excited to go back to that house. When we got there, I wanted to just spend a few days chilling with Sylphy.

As soon as the Black Forest came into view, we started debating. Over what, you might ask? Well, it was over where to land.

“Can’t we just land in the village?” said Sylphy.

“Unlike the fortresses, it’s very likely they haven’t gotten word that I’ve befriended a dragon,” I replied. “So, if we were to just drop in...”

“It’s possible we get attacked with elven spirit archers,” she conceded. “Worst case scenario, we might get hit with a spirit gem matter annihilation attack.”

“Okay that’s *terrifying*, thanks.”

Sylphy’s guesswork had Grande freaked out. Even without a spirit gem, the elders’ spirit magic was catastrophe-level for sure. If she took something like that head-on, even Grande would end up in bad shape, tough hide or no. And I’d get caught up in it and die.

Well, maybe not die, but it was still dangerous. Sylphy’d probably be okay, though.

“Option one: we land outside of the woods.”

“Easy. We’d have to walk for a bit, but it’s the safest option. And once we get going, you can just visit home, Grande,” Sylphy explained with a nod.

Grande had told us that her home was deep within the Black Forest.

“Option two: we land in the open space in front of the village.”

“Right, there was that big chunk of land that got cut out as a preventative measure against gizma attacks. It’s possible the elves have repaired the area, but we’ll know for sure when we get closer. Grande would be able to land outside of the village, and it’d give us space to introduce her. That might be a good way to do it.”

“Option three is just us landing somewhat nearby in the woods,” I said.

“One and two are the way to go,” decided Sylphy. “I say we go with the latter. If the area’s been put back to normal, we can do three instead.”

“All right. Grande, can you fly us within sight of the village? Outside of the village walls there should be a large tract of open space. You can land there. If

that space is gone, just set down in the woods nearby.”

“Mm, understood,” said Grande. “However, should I be attacked, I will flee. I do hate pain.”

“Yeah, you do what you gotta do, pal.”

The village came into view in less than a minute. If we were on foot, it would’ve taken us at least two hours to walk from the edge of the woods to the village. I guess the woods must’ve added a lot of travel time, because from up top, it didn’t seem particularly far.

“Kousuke, it would appear as though there’s some open space in front of the walls to the village.”

“Then set down there. Sylphy, Grande says the space is still cleared.”

“Great. Once we land, we have to make sure to show that we’re with Grande.”

Sylphy began to loosen her seatbelt.

Hey, that’s dangerous! Ah, I guess without that thing she can just hold on tight. Why am I even surprised? She’s already used to riding on Grande’s back.

“Here we go!” said Grande. I whooped at the speed and Grande just giggled.

I still wasn’t used to Grande’s descent speed, but Sylphy was smiling and laughing too. God, she adjusted so quickly.

I could feel my stomach doing crazy things, but then I felt pressure pushing down on me. Grande must have been using her wings to slow our descent.

“I’ll be going on ahead.”

“Okay-EEEH?!”

Sylphy took her belt off and leapt into the air.

Hey, wait a second! We’re super high up!

The height must have meant nothing to Sylphy. Who knew, maybe she used wind spirit magic or something. By the time Grande landed, Sylphy was already raising her hand and calling out to the town’s guards.

“Huh... So this is a grand dragon.”

“It’s rather small. Is it still a child?”

“It is indeed on the smaller end, but well within the size of an adult dragon. Young dragons are less spiky.”

“I should’ve expected Sylphy’s mate to have tamed a dragon.”

“Have you been filling her with seed? Sylphy’s belly doesn’t appear any bigger.”

“I can’t wait to see my grandchild’s face.”

Once we explained the situation, residents of the elf village quickly came to observe Grande. Most of them were watching from a short distance away, but for some reason, the elders were up close and personal. Some were at her feet, poking at her scales, while others were up on her back. These old folks were powerful.

All this time, Grande was just vibing, especially since the elves gave her a bunch of mead and fruit to enjoy. That was enough to keep her happy. She was so easy to bait with food.

“Those are gifts, you see.”

“Also, it’s clear that they’re ‘getting along’ quite nicely. I’m sure it’ll be less than three years before it happens.”

“We elves are hard to impregnate, after all. Make sure you give it your all.”

“Er, I will.”

“That being said... You’ve been doing the business with other women as well, hm?”

“And many, at that. You’re quite the beast.”

“Hey, enough.” Sylphy managed to silence the old folks who were surrounding me, a vein popping out of her forehead.

“Sylphy’s angry!”

“Oh, my, this isn’t good. She seems quite serious.”

“Retreat, retreat!”

The elderly began to disperse at an impressive speed, considering their age. The one who looked like a little girl was maybe the sole exception. What was up with these folks?

“I swear, they’re something else...” Sylphy sighed. “Will Grande be heading deeper into the forest after this?”

“Let me check. Hey, Grande.”

Grande bent her long neck and brought her face down close to me. She smelled like booze.

“Are you heading home after this?” I asked her.

“Mm, that is the plan. Staying here would just cause problems for the elves.”

“What are you going to do about breakfast tomorrow?”

“I’ll be spending time at home, so I will not need it. However, I will be back here for lunch or dinner, so please feed me some hamburgers.”

“You got it. Wanna bring some booze home with you as a gift?”

“Ooh, is that all right? I’d love to!” Grande roared happily. The elves watching started to buzz a bit.

“Then I’ll get you two large barrels of mead. You’ll be able to fly carrying that much, right?”

“Mm, that will be fine.”

“Also tell your folks I said hello. And if possible, ask if I can come visit. I’d love to see your home.”

“I shall do so. See you tomorrow.”

Grande downed the remaining mead and, after gently setting the barrel on the offering platform, flew up into the sky with fresh barrels of mead on her back.

“What’d she say?” Sylphy asked. “It’s clear she’s going home, but...”

“She’s gonna come back either around lunchtime or dinner. And, like you heard, I’m going to have her ask her folks if we can come visit.”

“I see, then I guess you won’t be bored on our trip.”

“If I don’t have a reason to go out, I’m gonna end up spending all day every day in the house with you, having some fun. I gotta make sure to give myself reasons to get fresh air.”

Sylphy’s face turned red as she nodded. “Th-that’s a good idea. We have to keep ourselves in check.”

When the two of us were together, it got kinda hard to hit the brakes. Before we even realized it, a week would have gone by, then a month. Just nonstop you-know-what.

“Okay, then let’s head to the house for now,” she said. “Once we clean up a little bit, we can head to where the elders are. Not that I want to.”

“Good plan. Let’s finish what work we have, first.”

It’d be hard to really enjoy our vacation if we had official business to worry about.

The two of us slipped through the brick wall I made when I first came to this world and entered a plot of land managed by the elf village. They’d definitely cut down on the scale of the magic fields that were stacked like a multi-story car park. There were fewer now than when I’d left.

Back then, they had to take care of some 300 refugees from the Kingdom of Merinard, but once the refugees left, the elves probably had an abundance of crops and nothing to do with them. I imagined the folks who had tended to the magic fields were doing other jobs now.

“This wall really brings me back,” Sylphy said.

“This is how I proved that my skills were the real deal. Just thinking about that is enough to make me feel some feelings.”

The top of the wall was crowded with elven warriors with bows. I’d heard there were quite a few monsters in the Black Forest, so you had to have people

on watch at all times in case there was an attack.

One of the warriors shot me a piercing glare, but quickly looked away. Ah, if I remembered correctly, that was the same guy who dragged me out in front of the angry crowd of refugees, picked a fight with Sylphy, and got his ass handed to him. What was his name again? Eh, didn't matter. It was that guy.

“Kousuke?”

“Coming!”

There was no point in telling Sylphy about him, and I doubted he was gonna pull any nonsense. I kicked the guy out of my headspace and followed behind my beloved.

“Welcome home, Sylphyel.”

“We're glad you're safe and sound.”

As we walked through the village, the elves called out to us one after another.

“Long time no see! Got any of the good stuff?”

“I'm down with mithril, y'know...”

“Okay, okay!” I called back to them. “Sit tight, brothers. I'll be unloading tomorrow, so look forward to it.”

The artisans were shooting me passionate gazes. They were actually kinda scary. Hm, the magic jewels were still top secret, so the most I could bust out for them was mithril. I had plenty of gems and rough gemstones, so I'd make that the main focus.

And so, after engaging in some light conversation with the elves, we finally arrived at Sylphy's house.

“Good to be home.”

“Yeah, damn right. It's been way too long.”

As we stood before the entrance, Sylphy looked up at her house. It was as if the tree itself had become a house, which was very elf-like. Even though it'd been empty for months, it didn't look like anyone had messed with it. I wondered if the house itself was alive or something.

“C’mon, let’s go in,” she said. “We’ve got cleaning to do.”

“Aye, roger that.”

And so, after many months away, we finally made our way back home.

Once we were inside, I was shocked to find that it was way cleaner than I expected. Someone from the village must’ve been regularly coming here to clean up, as it barely took us any time to do a quick clean. We washed the containers for holding water, stored some fresh water Sylphy summoned using spirit magic, and that was that.

Before we left the house on our grand journey, I’d chucked the general appliances and furniture into inventory, so I used this opportunity to take out what we needed and set it all down.

We still had plenty of time before the sun set.

“That went way faster than I thought. Let’s go hit up the elders,” I suggested.

“You’ve got it.”

It was best to take care of those sorts of things as quickly as possible so we could enjoy our vacation.

The two of us walked through the village, making our way toward the gathering hall where the elders were. Along the way, we greeted the various elves passing us by. I was pretty sure everyone looked a lot more at peace than they had when we still lived here.

I knew the situation was what it was, but I was also sure it must’ve been stressful for them to live with outsiders. Especially since most of the refugees at the time were being cared for by the elves. The elves were forced to bear the burden of taking care of others while the refugees were incapable of helping out in return. I understood how that could be a lot to handle.

Eventually, we arrived at the gathering hall. Sylphy seemed like she had some thoughts of her own after seeing the villagers.

Just as we approached the building, one of the elven helpers came out to greet us.

“Everyone’s inside and waiting. Come,” the girl said, guiding us inside.

“Crazy timing,” I remarked.

“The elders are close with the spirits,” Sylphy replied. “They probably got the news ahead of time that we were arriving.”

“Spirit magic’s wild.”

When you become a spirit mage capable of causing calamities, do the spirits just go up to you to chat about stuff? Wouldn’t that make it impossible to ever be the victim of a surprise attack? That’s honestly crazy. If I ever had to take down a master-level spirit mage like these elders, it’d have to be with a single strike from outside of their detection range. A sniper, or some kind of long-range blast...

While I was dreaming up ways to deal with the elders, Sylphy and I entered the gathering hall. I didn’t actually plan on picking a fight with them, but whenever I saw something or someone dangerous, I couldn’t help but think up plans on how to deal with them. It was the old gamer instincts kicking in.

“Welcome, Sylphy and her mate.”

“What’s this? Already here to say hello? Don’t mind us, you can just get to the baby making.”

“Gah! This is why you’re such a lump head! When you put it like that, they’re not gonna be able to do what needs to be done. Even a bantam can’t lay eggs when it’s being watched.”

“Ho ho ho, I’d be more than happy if they made babies as quickly as a bantam lays eggs!”

“Young man, you’re close with harpies, yes? Aren’t they already laying eggs all over the place?”

“He’s on good terms with Ira as well. And there’ll be more in the future. I can tell he’s a real player.”

“The spirits are fond of irregulars like him, so when he’s around, it’s a little annoying to use magic because they’re too busy having fun.”

The words just kept coming out of the elders like machine gun fire. Sylphy and

I couldn't find a moment to cut in.

Bantams, really? They were chicken-like birds, but larger than the ones I was familiar with and pretty violent to boot. The eggs they laid were massive and filled with nutrients. That said, harpy eggs were bigger and tastier, but, well, I wasn't sure how I felt about eating those.

"Elders, I'm here to discuss something of importance as the head of the Liberation Army," Sylphy said, finally able to speak. "Could you please show some self-restraint?"

The elders went quiet.

Sylphy was smiling, but the vein popping out of her forehead and the immense pressure coming from her aura was enough to shut them up. You could tell they had lots of life experience, because they knew when to back down. If Sylphy got serious, neither the elders nor this building would be left in one piece.

After some back and forth as the elders tried to force each other to speak, they eventually settled on the elder who resembled a little girl.

"Mm, leader of the Liberation Army and inheritor of the Merinard bloodline, Sylphyel. Let us hear what you have to say," said the elderly girl with a serious tone.

Thanks to that back and forth a moment ago, any weight her words might have had was lost.

"First, I must thank you again for the long support you've shown the citizens of the Kingdom of Merinard," Sylphy said. "Without the help of the elf village, the only option available to them would've been to die in the Badlands or the Black Forest. The reason I've come here in person is to return the favor."

"Hrm, specifically?"

"We can offer the elf village goods that would be difficult for the people here to acquire. Ore, polished metals, different types of gems and stone resources. Also crops and foods that aren't raised in the village, plus fabrics and threads."

"I see... However, those are not things acquired by the Liberation Army, but in

fact goods produced by Sir Kousuke, are they not? Is it not unfair to claim that they are property of the army? One cannot truly say that these goods are offered by your organization.”

She did have a point—most of it was from me.

“I am the adjutant of Sylphy, leader of the Liberation Army, which means I am a member of this organization,” I interjected, shrugging my shoulders. “There should be no problem.”

It wasn't like I was some outsider in the army. If anything, I was a central figure. And since I'd chosen to live beside Sylphy, it was the same as me being an acting member of the army. I wielded my power to make Sylphy's dreams come to fruition.

“And that's that,” Sylphy said. “At the end of the day, regardless of who obtained what, once it ends up in our organization's possession, it's all the same. Could you stop trying to make this into something it isn't?”

“Mrm, couldn't you try to be more accommodating?” Sylphy narrowed her eyes. As soon as the little girl elder saw this, she panicked and raised both hands in a pose of surrender.

“Sorry, sorry,” she said. “I'm getting to be that age where I like to tease you youngsters. Forgive me.”

“I'd like to discuss the exact amount of material, but for now we've brought goods like gems, ore, cloth, and thread; things which won't go bad. Tomorrow morning we'll come by the joint storage facility and deposit it there. In terms of food, we believe it would be best if we left that to our base in the rear and the elf fortress in the Badlands.”

“Good idea. It would be a problem if we suddenly had to deal with an overwhelming amount of food.”

“If there's anything else within our power to do, we'll be glad to help. We've currently taken over half the southern region of the Kingdom of Merinard. We've freed a lot of citizens from their lives as slaves, so we have manpower.”

“Oh, you've already spread your influence so far? You've really been working hard, Sylphy dear.”

“Could you lay off with the ‘dear’ stuff...?” she muttered. “Well, to be honest, a lot of this has gone well thanks to Kousuke’s powers. We’re currently in a cease fire situation with the Holy Kingdom, and we’re starting to make moves toward negotiations.”

“Negotiations with *them*? I doubt that’s even possible.”

“They may understand words, but that doesn’t mean you can communicate with them,” another elder agreed.

“Indeed, indeed.”

That’s how all the elders seemed to see it. The Holy Kingdom was a nation whose national religion was that of absolute human authority and supremacy, after all.

While there were two different layers of power, in the form of the Holy King who ruled the nation and the pope who ruled Adolism, they both agreed on the idea of absolute human superiority. That was why they were able to come together to fight the Empire, which was a nation made up of all kinds of people. It was also why they conquered the Kingdom of Merinard and made it a vassal state.

“As it turns out, there are different sects within Adolism,” Sylphy explained. “Kousuke got in touch with the people who are part of the so-called Nostalgia sect. They hold suspicions that the current form of Adolism has been altered from what it used to be. They believe it’s highly likely this happened just after the Kingdom of Omitt collapsed.”

“Oh?”

“Hm, now that you mention it, that does sound familiar... Wasn’t that when those folks were going crazy?”

“Right, right. I believe that was just after the Kingdom of Omitt was crushed, maybe?”

While the elders were quietly discussing the matter among themselves, I decided to share my thoughts.

“I’m thinking that the survivors of the Kingdom of Omitt were taken in by

Adolism, resulting in the modification of their beliefs.”

The elders went quiet for a moment, then suddenly attempted to change the subject.

“By the way, that dragon was something else! I should’ve expected Sylphy dear’s husband to tame such a beast.”

“Indeed, indeed! We can trust our cute little Sylphy dear with someone like you.”

“The best couple in the forest!”

“You guys are being too obvious! Your eyes are wandering all over the place!”

The elders averted their gazes from me, patted their faces, then started to wave their hands like fans. Some of them even pulled handkerchiefs to wipe their sweat.

“There’s a lot I want to say right now, but there’s no point in talking about something hundreds of years in the past.”

“Exactly! Right! You youngsters need to live for the future.”

“I’m gonna break your bones,” Sylphy cut in.

“Oh, my. Sylphy dear has entered her rebellious phase...”

The elder who looked like a young girl pretended to cry, leading the others to follow suit.

“Be serious, please,” Sylphy pleaded with them.

“Quite frankly...we thought we cut them at the root,” said one elder.

“We even had the earth spirits destroy their underground facility,” said another.

“In other words...” said the little girl elder.

“Whoops!” They all said in a chorus.

All of the elders winked and stuck out their tongues.

How in the hell did they manage to do that simultaneously? Did they all practice for this?

“All right, I’m going to break their bones.”

“Good luck, Sylphy!” I cheered her on, at that point.

Long story short, Sylphy lost her damn mind in anger. I evacuated to the corner of the room and offered moral support as she transformed into a silver tempest of wind. It was kind of like watching a hero show as a kid.

“Aaah! Sylphy dear, you can’t! You mustn’t!”

“We’re old and brittle! We can’t take this kind of harsh treatment!”

“This is bad! Sylphy dear’s really angry!”

“Ow, ow, ow! It’s not supposed to bend that way!!!”

A violent wind destroyed all in its path! The elven elders struggled to flee! The little girl elder, caught in her tracks?!

I was sure things had piled up for her, as within about half an hour Sylphy captured all the elders. She got them wrapped in the vines growing out of the tree, and slung them upside down. They kind of looked like bagworms, actually.

“Let us down!”

“This is far too cruel...”

“When you come at us at close range with physical attacks, there’s nothing we can do... It’s not as though we can afford to destroy the gathering hall...”

“Are you sure this is a good idea, Sylphy?” I asked.

“I didn’t intend to punish them for something that happened hundreds of years ago, but I just couldn’t handle their stupid attitude,” she said. “I lost my cool, but I don’t regret anything.”

Sylphy looked up at the elders with a smile, but her eyes betrayed her true feelings.

Drawn by all the noise, a bunch of elves came running into the building and freaked out when they saw their elders strung upside down. Once they saw Sylphy’s smile, though, they simply nodded and ignored the pleas of their leaders. It wasn’t long before folks started to appear with booze and munchies in hand to watch the elders swinging back and forth. Someone even dropped by

with paints and an easel to capture the moment in an illustration.

“Recording important or rare moments in the history of our village is kind of my thing,” he explained.

I couldn't help but stare at the artist as he whipped out some charcoal and began to skillfully draft a rough on the canvas. What a pro!

“All right, time to head home, Kousuke.”

Sylphy looked refreshed after shaming the elders in front of the rest of the villagers.

“Yes, ma'am.”

I followed behind her like a loyal dog as we headed home. One must never rebel against their mistress. I didn't know how many times I'd come to that particular conclusion, but I nonetheless carved it into my soul yet again.

POV: ???

“WHAT? You caught an important member of the rebellion?”

I'd been going all over trying to take care of the current situation when one of my spies on the way back from Merinesburg reported as much to me.

“Yes. But they escaped within the day.”

“That damn pig... He's worthless.”

I couldn't help but let my true feelings spill out. I'd left the Kingdom of Merinard to that stupid pig... What was his name again? No matter, he was nothing but a pig to me. His ineptitude was truly something else.

According to the report, this person of importance was a black-haired male of average strength. It was Cardinal Krone's man who caught him, and according to that underling he was an important member of the rebellious force known as the Liberation Army.

Krone's underling informed the pig that the man was of great importance, but

when he heard that the saint of truth was headed to the city, that pig ignored the warnings. As a result, the man escaped from prison. Discovering this, Cardinal Krone's underling abandoned the pig and fled from the Kingdom of Merinard.

Cardinal Krone, eh...? He was part of the same controlling sect that I was, but I could not let my guard down around that man. Hell, he managed to get his hands on an important member of the rebellion before anyone else could. He just couldn't put the nail in the coffin.

"...Is that the whole truth?" I asked.

"Er, what do you mean?"

"It's nothing. I'll figure out what's next, so you rest up for now."

"Thank you, sir!"

The spy left my office.

"Is it truly possible that he was so naive in handling the situation...?"

Cardinal Krone was not a man who let his guard down. What was he planning to do with the prisoner? Was he really just going to leave him to that inept pig? Impossible. If he meant to kill the man, he would've done it as soon as he'd been kidnapped. So why did he go and give him to the pig?

"...I don't have enough information."

Not about that man, and not about the rebellious force calling itself the Liberation Army. It was impossible to guess Cardinal Krone's intentions.

"I need to dig deeper."

The pig had kept all of this to himself, which meant he couldn't be trusted, period. Who knew how many soldiers we'd actually lost, or what state our forces were really in? We needed numbers and quality. Should I order the mage squad and holy knights to move out...?

"I must tread carefully, no matter what," I said out loud, picking up my quill pen.

Chapter 5: The Elf Village and the Black Forest

AFTER HEADING HOME, we had dinner and spent our time getting up close and personal until the next day.

As soon as I opened my eyes, I was met with the wonderful sight of Sylphy gazing at my face. She had a smile on her face, and a gentle look in her eyes. This must have been what people meant when they said someone looks truly happy.



“G’morning, Sylphy.”

“Good morning, Kousuke. You just look so adorable when you’re asleep... I could watch you forever.”

“You’re making me all embarrassed... But you know, when I go to sleep knowing you’re by my side, I let my guard down.”

Nothing I could do about the face I made when I slept. Of course, I made sure not to let my guard down when it counted. The only reason I looked cute was because she was right there with me.

“Now then, shall we get up?” Sylphy said. “Let’s dump this stuff in the joint storage. After that, we’ve got the whole day to ourselves.”

“Grande will be coming either around lunchtime or dinner, so we’d better have our meals in the village.”

“Good idea. Hm... When we finish our work, want to go for a walk in the woods around the village?” She suggested.

“I like that idea. Get a little bit of nature in our lives.”

The area around the village was fairly dangerous, though. Those lizaf bastards hung around nearby. They were like wolves and lizards fused into one. They were terrifying, so I had to make sure I was equipped.

The two of us bathed in the backyard, washing away the last night’s festivities, then had breakfast. There was no reason to rush, so we both stood side by side in the kitchen, cooking together.

“I could always just use my crafting skill to whip something up, you know?” I said.

“Yeah, but doing it the normal way isn’t so bad every now and then.”

“Good point. We’ve got plenty of time on our hands, too.”

For breakfast, we had lightly toasted bread, meat, and veggies boiled in nectar, with milk from my inventory. As for where this milk came from, it was standard cow’s milk. Definitely not a cow demi-human or anything like that, promise.

“Mm, the sweet and sour flavor goes nicely with this bread,” I said.

“The spice means everything when it comes to the seasoning. Your skill is useful, Kousuke, but this is good too, right?”

“Yeah, totally. It’s fast, convenient, and tasty, but your home cooking just makes me feel all warm and fuzzy inside... I love it.”

“Do you, now?”

Sylphy smiled brightly as she watched me. It was kinda hard to eat like that, but if it made her happy, who cared?

“Yo, it’s been a hot minute,” the elf guarding the storage space called out to us.

It was after breakfast, so we’d gotten ready since then.

This was the same elf that was on guard duty before, too. Was it just coincidence, or was this their whole career?

“Hey, long time no see,” said Sylphy. “You might’ve heard from the elders, but this time around we’re dropping off goods from the Liberation Army, not us personally. Gifts, basically.”

“Understood. I’ll make sure to jot it all down. Right this way.”

The guard elf led us to a fairly large platform, which was where I began to dump out the gems and rough gemstones. They would eventually become materials for spirit stones, so they were like strategic goods for the elves.

Spirit stones made by modifying gems basically served as amplifiers that increased the output of spirit magic. If you made a spirit stone go berserk, it could unleash devastating magic that could completely change the geography of the land. Of course, doing so would render the stone worthless, but if you had enough of them, it’d be possible to annihilate a large military force with only a few combatants.

“Well, well... Are these all gems and rough gemstones?” The guard commented. “They’re not gonna have to worry about spirit gems for the next few hundred years, it looks like.”

“I’m sure counting all of these is gonna be a pain, but thanks. We’ve got other stuff too.”

“Seriously? Aletta, could you give me a hand?”

“Okaaay! Ah, long time no see!”

From the back of the storage facility emerged a female elf who, once upon a time, picked out clothes for me. She grabbed the bag of gems off of the platform and returned to the back.

“What else are you dropping off?”

“Metals and ore,” Sylphy replied. “Kousuke?”

“Aye, aye.”

I pulled out the refined iron and steel, copper and silver, magic iron and magic steel, and the mithril ingots, and dumped them onto the platform.

“This is absurd... We’re not going to have to go mining anytime soon at this rate.”

“We’ve also got unrefined ore,” I offered.

“Nah, I think we’re good on that stuff. The refined metals are all mega high quality. We wouldn’t have the room anyway,” he said with a nod to Sylphy, so I kept the unrefined stuff in my inventory.

Maybe I’d refine it later in Sylphy’s backyard. If I set the materials and fuel in and submitted an order, all we’d have to do was let it sit and do the work for us.

“Anyway, that’s about it,” Sylphy said. “It won’t be long until there’s open commerce with the fortress in the Badlands.”

“Really? That’s excellent news. We’ll finally be able to get our hands on all sorts of things.”

“It’d be a huge help if you could put together a list of what you want beforehand,” Sylphy said.

“Got it. I’ll make sure it happens,” the elf said with a big smile.

Our work as members of the Liberation Army was just about finished. All that was left was to casually make our way around the village and see if anything or

anyone needed our support. The place had always been self-sustaining, so I doubted they needed any help defending themselves.

After saying our goodbyes to the guard elf, we made our way toward the entrance of the village.

“Now then, just going for a walk seems somewhat aimless,” said Sylphy.
“What say we search for something?”

“Hm, not a bad idea. How about we keep our eyes open for any blessings of the forest, and if we happen upon anything good, we grab it? I honestly don’t mind wandering aimlessly.”

“Really? Okay, then we’ll stick to that.”

“Right on.”

I didn’t know about Sylphy, but I wasn’t exactly wearing exploration equipment. I was just wearing a casual elven outfit, no leather armor or anything. Hell, no helmet either. I did have my weapons and gathering tools registered to shortcuts, though.

As for Sylphy, she was wearing her usual outfit: a black leather riding suit covering her whole body. On the left side of her waist was Pale Moon. Attached across her lower back were her two kukri knives. She’s even had a revolver on the right side of her waist. She was seriously loaded down.

“And why, pray tell, are you staring at my hips?” She asked me.

“No, it’s just I’m kinda happy that you’re equipped with all the weapons I made for you.”

“Hee hee, of course I am. You made them for me, after all. They protect me. Whenever I leave my house, I make sure to have them all on me.”

“Then it was totally worth crafting them all. Want me to remake your knives with mithril?” I asked.

“No, that won’t be necessary. Mithril weapons are incredible, but steel weapons are great in their own way.”

“Is that how that works?”

“It is. Depending on the combat scenario, I sometimes have to throw my knives. If they were made of mithril, I think I’d hesitate.”

“I’d just make you more if that ever happened, but I understand what you’re saying.”

Mithril weapons were extremely pricey, but because I could make as many of them as I wanted, the thought of losing them in battle meant little to me. But to the person actually doing the throwing, it didn’t work that way. I imagined whoever ended up picking up the mithril kukri knives later would be mega surprised.

And so, the two of us casually strolled through the forest, occasionally picking up nuts or wild strawberries and the like. We had no run-ins with any large monsters or animals. Perhaps those sorts of beasts didn’t come close to the village. We did spot a bunch of squirrel-like creatures and birds, though.

After having lunch back at home, the two of us got straight to flirting.

And look, when I said that, I didn’t mean anything crazy. We sat on the couch and chatted a bunch, I laid my head in her lap, she let me brush her long hair, that kind of thing. We hadn’t been able to spend time like that together for a long time. It was true that the two of us were in love and thus made love, but it wasn’t like we were constantly sucking on each other’s faces, y’know?

Besides, since Grande didn’t show up during the day, that meant she would probably be dropping in around dinner time. It’d be awkward if we were doing that kind of stuff right up until she arrived.

“I just love spending time with you like this...” Sylphy sighed. “It’s been so long since I’ve felt so at peace.”

“That’s because you’re always on edge,” I replied. “Considering your age, shouldn’t you be relying on the people around you more?”

“You’re not wrong, but it feels weird coming from you when you’re younger than me.”

“Age-wise, sure. But in terms of elven lifespans, you’re still just a kid. As a

human, I'm an adult who has already come of age."

"Hee hee, I suppose that's true. Then, when it's just the two of us, I'll make sure to lean on you even more. How about I use *your* lap as a pillow?"

"It would be my honor."

I moved to the edge of the couch and patted my thighs. Sylphy smiled happily and gently brought her head down onto them. I gently caressed her hair, and Sylphy narrowed her eyes like a cat. It must have felt good.

Heh, you're just the cutest, you know that? That said, she reminds me less of a cat and more of a large dog. The way she gets like this when she lets her guard down reminds me of a husky.

"Your hair's so beautiful," I told her. "It's all shiny and smooth. It feels amazing to touch."

"Really? I'm glad to--"

She was interrupted by an ear-splitting roar, with a voiceover attached to it that said, "Where is the bastard who tricked my daughter!?"

It was followed by an all-too-familiar roar-voice saying, "Father, stop this at once!"

"Your mother also wants to take a look at this man!"

"I heard there were tasty foods."

"Booze! I want booze!"

Those initial roars were followed by a bunch more, each with their own voiceovers.

"Kousuke?"

"Sounds like we've got guests."

I looked up toward the ceiling and let out a deep sigh. Just how many of them had shown up?

Trying to suppress an oncoming headache, I emerged from the house to see a

bunch of grand dragons flying overhead and roaring. The citizens of the village were in a panic.

Oh, man... How am I supposed to deal with this?

“Grande,” I called to her.

“Ah! Kousuke!”

As soon as I yelled her name up into the sky, Grande noticed me. She got what could only be described as a terrifying look on her face. I understood that she was probably just happy to see me, but it seriously looked like she wanted to kill me.

“Ah! You’re the bastard human who tricked my daughter?!”

A grand dragon several times larger than Grande began to angrily yell down at me.

Okay, you’re way too loud. For real. The air is literally vibrating. Also your breath smells terrible.

“Look, can we just talk?” I called up. “Like intelligent creatures? Grande, what sort of relationship do you have with the other three besides your father?”

“That’s my mother, and those are my two older brothers.”

“Got it. I’m going to prepare some food and drink for everyone, so could you take the rampaging dragon out to the open space near the entrance to the village?”

“Kay!”

“Understood!”

“Booze!”

What was that last response?

“Wh-what are you three doing!?”

Daddy Dragon was dragged outside of the village and down to the ground by the other three dragons. A large landing noise erupted into the air.

The ground totally just shook... But I guess grand dragon bodies are sturdy, so

it's probably no big deal.

"I'm so sorry, Kousuke..." said Grande.

"Don't worry. I had a feeling this would happen."

The moment Grande said she was seeing her family, I kinda had a hunch something like this was going to go down. Just a hunch, though.

"Sylphy, Grande's family has shown up. Other than her dad, the others don't seem particularly hostile, so I'm gonna go have a chat with them. Tell the folks here that they have nothing to worry about, okay?"

"That's fine with me but... Are you sure that everything'll be okay?"

"Probably." I shrugged. "But just in case, could you try and hurry back ASAP?"

"Of course. Don't do anything stupid."

Sylphy disappeared instantaneously. *The heck was that? Some kind of ninjutsu???*

"Kousuke, is that elf also an Overlord?" Grande asked.

"I...have no idea," I replied. "More like a battle-enhanced elf?"

"For but the briefest of moments, she had the same terrifying aura as that Overlord..." Grande said.

"Seriously...? Well, this is Sylphy we're talking about."

To be totally honest, I had no idea how strong Sylphy was compared to Melty. I knew Melty was insanely tough, but I also knew that the three slime girls together were stronger. Maybe I could just ask her?

"Grande, you head to where your family is first," I said. "I'm gonna run over."

"All right."

Grande stopped hovering in the air and flew toward the open space by the entrance to the village, and I followed behind her at a sprint. I entered some command inputs, causing me to move forward faster. My stride and travel distance weren't exactly one to one, so if I wasn't careful, I'd end up tripping, but I'd gotten used to it over time.

When I was in that state, I could run much faster than I normally could, probably about two times faster. And then, if I entered the input for strafe jumping, I could go even faster. But I didn't want to make a spectacle of myself just then.

The closer I got to the village entrance, the more clearly I heard the dragons yelling. *Man, they sure are loud.*

"Let me go! I need to show that rat bastard what's what for poisoning the mind of my little Grande!"

"Stop it, dear! Grande's not a child anymore! You're being overprotective."

"She's right, Dad. Grande's an adult dragon now. And, heck, you just totally let us go when we became adults."

"More importantly, if you crush this Kousuke fellow, we won't be able to drink any booze. I refuse to let that happen!"

The dragons appeared to be facing off and roaring furiously at each other, but what they were actually doing was little more than a family scuffle. This was particularly funny when you considered the elves guarding the entrance were watching them as if the world was coming to an end.

"Hey, guys," I waved to the guards. "I've got this handled, so don't attack, okay?"

"H-handled...? H-hey, wait! Human!"

I ignored the panicked soldiers and headed onward to the yelling dragons.

"Okay, okay, everyone's here, yeah? I'm Grande's friend, Kousuke. It's a pleasure to meet you," I cried out, slapping my hands together.

The four dragons immediately turned toward me.

Yup, they sure are grand dragons. Yup, they sure look terrifying, but at least I'm used to Grande.

"First, thank you for taking the angry talk outside of the village. I'm a man of my word, so before we talk, I'd like to offer you all food and drink. Is that okay?"

“Food and drink, you say?” Grande’s dad started in. “Bastard, do you really think proud grand dragons such as us—”

“That’s enough of that, dear! I’d love to try one of those Ham Bagurres that Grande spoke of.”

“Me too, me too!”

“Booze!”

Man, that boozier dragon sure would not back down. Poor Daddy Dragon looked like he’d been betrayed by his entire family. Yeah, those gestures of his sure did remind me of Grande.

I used some wood blocks to make a temporary dining table, then placed a whole bunch of super-sized hamburgers on top of it. Next, I put down a giant barrel of mead off to the side.

“Please, dig in.”

“Thank you for the meal.”

“Delish... So good...”

“Booze! I have to have some!”

Mommy Dragon grabbed one of the super burgers with both her claws and gracefully began to eat, while Bro Dragon A had one in each claw, eating them simultaneously. Bro Dragon B, well... He had his face inside the barrel of mead.

C’mon, dude...

Grande was waiting by my side in case Daddy Dragon tried to do something. I could tell her gaze was wandering over to the dinner table, though.

“Go on, Grande,” I urged her.

“A-are you sure?”

“Of course I am. This thing’s heavy, so take it.”

“O-okay.”

She grabbed a super burger directly from my hands and began stuffing her face.

Daddy Dragon, not too pleased by the sight of his family munching away, trembled with fury.

“Y-you fools... How could you let some human feed you like this!? What happened to your pride as grand dragons!?”

“Pride doesn’t put delicious food on the table, dear.”

“Delish... So good...”

Grande’s brothers were maybe living a little bit too true to their desires, munching away loudly. They didn’t even reply to their dad. On the other hand, Grande was the only one who wasn’t contributing to the awkward atmosphere. Funny, considering she was the first of the lot to get baited by food when I first met her. Her entire body had long since been filled with the delights of my cooking. There was no way she could agree with her father at this point, her two brothers notwithstanding.

“Grr... This is all because of you!”

Daddy Dragon bared his fangs and raised his voice.

Whoa, talk about presence. This is legit terrifying. If he bites me, I’m done for.

“Now, now,” I said. “Let’s all calm down and talk this over, Father Grande. I’ve heard from your daughter that dragons are wise, smart beings. I’m sure we can figure things out if we talk it over.”

“I’m not falling for your tricks, human. Your species is sly. You’re planning on pulling the wool over my eyes.”

“C’mon, don’t be like that. I legit just want to talk and maybe clear the misunderstandings between us. If that doesn’t work, it’s not like we can’t just settle this with violence later.”

Considering the changes in his daughter and the way I immediately got his family on my side with food, it made perfect sense that Daddy Dragon was still on high alert. I wasn’t really a threat, though.

“First, why are you so angry with me?” I asked him.

“Because you hurt my Grande!”

“Wait...”

I turned to Grande, who awkwardly looked away.

“You took my blood before, remember?” she said. “I told him about that.”

“Oh, I see. It’s true that I did cut her a teeny bit and take her blood. But I didn’t force her to do it, I promise. It was a fair trade for food, and she agreed to do it.”

“In what world do you believe a father wouldn’t be upset by his daughter being harmed before marriage?!”

“Uh...”

He wasn’t wrong. In his position, I wouldn’t be thrilled.

“You’re absolutely right. Unfortunately, I don’t have a daughter, but if I did, I’d probably be angry too.”

“See!? You get it, human!” Daddy Dragon nodded triumphantly. Now that he’d calmed down, the real discussion began.

“I agree entirely,” I said. “However, that’s only if we were talking about a young child who can’t make decisions for themselves.”

“Gr...”

“He’s right, dear. The moment Grande left the forest, she became her own woman. It’s wrong to complain about the choices she makes for herself,” Mommy Dragon said in a low, rumbling voice.

“E-exactly, Father,” said Grande. “Plus, Kousuke healed my wound and left no scars. And when I offered him more blood later, he refused because he didn’t want to cause me pain over and over again. Kousuke’s not after my power, blood, or scales. He really just treats me as his friend.”

Urgh, her pure words of trust pierced my chest.

I’m so sorry, Grande, but I’m not the saintly human you think I am. I absolutely got close to you with the intention of using you... I’m so, so sorry...

Daddy Dragon smacked his tail on the ground, growling. Was that something he did when he was in a bad mood, or when he was thinking to himself? Either

way, it was a pain. It was loud and the ground shook and it sucked.

“Look, Dad, just try some. It’s delicious.”

“You ain’t getting none of the booze, though.”

Bro Dragon A held out a claw with a super burger in it to Daddy Dragon.

“I don’t need that foolishness!”

Daddy Dragon smacked the food to the ground with his tail.

Seriously, man? If that’s how you’re gonna act, I’m gonna need to teach you a-

“URGAH!?”

An awful noise ripped through the air and Daddy Dragon’s neck was stretched out up toward the sky.

Drip, drip, drip, went the sound of something falling from the sky.

Blood, and chunks of something.

Mommy Dragon growled in a super deep, terrifying tone. “Delgis, one must never waste food.”

The voice speaking human words sounded gentle, but it chilled me to my core.

“I-I know...”

“Grande, your mom is terrifying.”

“Wasting food in front of Mother is the worst possible thing you can do,” Grande explained as she trembled in place.

Right. She was generally pretty gentle, but when someone did something they weren’t supposed to, she was strict as hell.

All of a sudden Bro Dragon A was eating his super burgers with good manners, while Bro Dragon B was, well, he was still stuffing his head into the barrel of booze. *Sticking to his guns, huh?*

“I’m sorry, Kousuke,” Mommy Dragon said. “My husband can be a bit hard-headed. The rest of us have no problem with your relationship with Grande, okay? If he says anything stupid going forward, you’re welcome to ignore him.”

“All right, thank you very much.”

“But if you ever betray Grande... You understand, right?” Mommy Dragon growled with a cute voice while looking down at me.

She sounded cute, but she was terrifying. *I'm gonna piss myself. Sylphy, save me!*

While I healed a teary-eyed Daddy Dragon's chin wound that he got from Mommy Dragon, Sylphy approached with some soldiers. Mommy Dragon growled, causing Sylphy to stop the soldiers and approach on her own.

“I brought soldiers just to be safe, but it looks like things are fine here,” she said. “What happened to that dragon?”

“Daddy Dragon over here wasted food and got punished by Mommy Dragon,” I explained. “By the way, that one there is Grande's mother. This one eating burgers is Bro Dragon A, and the one with his head in the barrel of booze is Bro Dragon B.”

“A and B? Really?” She asked me. “Well, fine. I take it these dragons aren't here to burn the village to the ground, then?”

“Yup. No worries. Daddy Dragon is just overprotective and came here to complain at me, while Mommy Dragon likely tagged along to keep him in check. Bro Dragon A and B are just here because Grande told them about the burgers and booze.”

“Okay, I'll let the others know.”

Sylphy turned around and went back to where the soldiers were. After watching her go, Mommy Dragon growled.

“Is that your mate?” She asked.

“Yeah. She's a beauty, right?”

“I do not know how humans judge beauty, but she is a strong-looking female.”

“She's tough, beautiful, and amazing. That's all you have to know.”

“What about Grande?”

“Hrm?”

“What about *Grande*?” Mommy Dragon said again and looked down at me.

Er, what exactly am I supposed to say here?

“She’s adorable,” I said.

“Indeed, she is. What else?”

“What do you want me to say? Her body’s too large, and our races are just too different.”

My strike zone was pretty broad, but even I couldn’t do anything about Grande. If I was a woman and Grande was male, maybe things might’ve worked out, but... Even if that was the case, with that size, I sure as hell wouldn’t want it to be painful, if you get what I’m saying.

“Couldn’t you power through with bravery?” Mommy Dragon asked.

“I sincerely doubt it.”

I really wished she wasn’t asking the impossible of me.

“I guess that’s that, then...” Mommy Dragon let out a sigh through her nose and gave up, thankfully. The sigh nearly blew me away, though.

Grande and I just aren’t like that, you know? She’s like a pet that heals my soul, and I want her to stay like that.

“Hey, um, I’m sorry, Kousuke.”

After I was released by Mommy Dragon, Grande apologized to me.

“No worries,” I told her. “They were just excited that you came home to visit.”

“Mm... I’d heard an old fairy tale from the elders about a human and dragon having that sort of relationship, so...” She trailed off.

“I’m surprised that there are legends about that sort of thing,” I said.

“It’s a tale about how a male dragon changed form into a human to be with the woman he fell in love with.”

Oh, that sounds pretty familiar. Wasn’t there a story like that in old Japanese

folktales? Like a dragon version of Tsuru no Ongaeshi.

“Can dragons take human form?” I asked.

“It’s just a story I heard from the elders. I don’t know.”

“Huh.”

In other words, no sign of Grande suddenly becoming a dragon girl. You know, with a horn on her head, wings on her back, a thick tail, legs half covered in scales, claws, but beautiful like a human girl! I would have welcomed a sudden twist like that.

As cute as Grande’s personality and mannerisms were, I just couldn’t deal with something the size and feel of a minor kaiju. Sorry.

“But wait... If I *could* shrink down to a human’s size, couldn’t I eat more hamburgers and pancakes?”

True to her desire for more food, Grande began to formulate a reason for transforming into a human.

Sorry, but if you shrank, your stomach would too. You’d only be able to eat so much.

“I’ll feed you as much as you want in your dragon form, so don’t get any strange ideas.”

“Aw, well...”

Grande tilted her head, dissatisfied with my reply.

Look, I’ve hit total capacity with Sylphy, Ira, and the harpies. And then on top of that I have to make room for Melty. If Grande turned into a humanoid, I’d be way, way over capacity. Hell, I still have to make room for Elen eventually.

After healing Daddy Dragon and feeding him, the happy family finally went home. As thanks for the food, Mommy Dragon left behind scales from her husband and sons. Honestly, this whole situation ended as a plus for us.

To get their scales, she used her front claws to carve into the others and gave us the scales that fell off. As far as I could tell, the boys sure seemed like they were in pain... But I was probably just imagining things.

After offering some to the town for causing a fuss, the smiths and craftsmen got a twinkle in their eyes. Dragon scales must have been pretty high on the wishlist for them.

So, about the trip back to Sylphy's house... For some reason, everyone was treating me way better.

Up until then, most of the elves were chatting it up with Sylphy, not with me. But after that, folks were hitting me up too.

And they were being mighty polite about it too. It definitely feels like they respect me now?

I decided to ask Sylphy about it.

"You dealt with five dragons fearlessly, calmed a raging dragon, and then healed that dragon's wounds," she said. "Then on top of that, a dragon offered scales to you without you having to get violent with them. Every elf in this village saw what you did, and even the most stubborn of them can't deny your accomplishments now."

Sylphy was in a chipper mood after seeing the others react to me. She must have been happy that I was being recognized not just as a dragon rider, but as someone who could communicate with the noble beasts.

I sat down on the usual sofa, with a wood cup of mead in one hand and a big grin on my face.

"Do you see me in a different light too?" I teased.

"I already know how incredible you are. You're the best adjutant a woman could have. But I did fall in love with you all over again."

"You're gonna make me blush, y'know."

"Well, you've done enough to warrant that reaction. I'm so proud of you."

I didn't think I'd get Sylphy's praise just for feeding and talking to some dragons. But, depending on how you viewed the situation, it *was* pretty dangerous. Daddy Dragon was real hyped up.

Worst case scenario, if he'd actually tried to hurt me, I was prepared to protect myself against the first attack, at least. My stone blocks were on standby!

I figured whether he came at me with a bite, a tail swipe, or his breath, it'd either be from the front or the side. As long as I survived the first attack, I could fall back and strengthen my defenses. Once that was done, I could strike back.

In other words, I just needed to survive. And when it came to survivability, I thought I could even handle Sylphy or Melty. I'd be able to handle an angry Daddy Dragon.

"Let's take it easy for today and do something tomorrow, okay?" I suggested.

"Sounds good to me," Sylphy agreed. "I'd be fine with lazing about in the house, but what about having Grande guide us deeper into the Black Forest?"

"Oh, that sounds like fun. A little bit of adventure for us."

"Deep in the Black Forest is no man's land, so I'm sure it'll be filled with rare plants and creatures. Amazing views too, I bet."

"Heck yeah," I enthused. "We'd better get ready for tomorrow, then."

"Do you really need to do anything? Your inventory has it all."

"Good point. I've got leather armor and weapons in there, so we're all good."

I packed the leather armor and iron helmet I made beneath Merinesburg into my inventory for safe keeping. If I put those on, I'd be good to go. As far as weapons were concerned, I'd been quietly stocking up on assault rifle rounds ever since getting back to Arichburg, and I had my test weapons back too.

Some of them were dismantled for research purchases, though...

I swear, the folks in R&D are insatiable.

"Then tomorrow, we're going on a Black Forest tour with Grande."

"As long as she shows up while the sun's still up," said Sylphy.

"Ah, right. I should've told her ahead of time. Maybe I should put together a golem communicator for her..." I mused.

Grande was surprisingly good with her claws, so I could make a communicator

kind of like a wristwatch that attached to her front leg. Then I'd just design it so she could control it with her other claw.

"Hm?"

While thinking over the design for Grande's communicator, I felt a tug at my shoulder. Obviously, Sylphy was the only one there with me, so it had to be her.

I turned to look at her face and found her frowning at me.

"So, um, it's just the two of us right now, so..."



“Lovey-dovey time?” I asked.

“Um, er, well... Yes,” Sylphy whispered, her face bright red from my direct question.

She's so cute it's bad for my health.

If my mistress so desired it, it would be done. After all, I was her loyal servant.

The morning after spending the entire evening getting our lovey-dovey on...

When I woke up, I noticed that Sylphy had already gotten out of bed. Something smelled really good. She must've started making breakfast.

“G'morning, Sylphy.”

“G'morning!”

Sylphy turned around in the kitchen, already done with her meal prep. The combo of her rough outfit and yellow apron just made her that much more lovable. I couldn't help but stare in appreciation.

“It's a new day, Kousuke. I've got some water prepared in the garden, so go freshen up.”

“Thanks, will do,” I replied before heading to the garden.

I made it a point to express my gratitude when possible. Things like thanks, sorry, and other similar words should be used whenever applicable. Just because we were close didn't mean we should skip out on that sort of thing. Greeting people, saying thank you, and apologizing were all low-cost ways of maintaining healthy relationships.

It had been a while since I last bathed in the garden. As of late, it'd been nothing but hot baths.

Maybe I should make one of those for this house, too? I can take apart my old work shed and turn it into a bathhouse.

I headed back to the living room, where Sylphy had already prepared breakfast.

“Come on, let’s eat.”

On the menu were steamed potatoes, vegetable and bean soup, bacon, and boiled eggs.

“Quite the spread this morning, eh?”

“Well, we did a whole lot of exercising last night, so we need it.”

“Very true. And today we’re gonna go on a big adventure. Gotta have a hearty breakfast.”

“Exactly.”

I asked her to put some elven-made butter-like stuff on the hot potatoes. Mm, it was like butter but not quite. Margarine, maybe? It was tasty either way.

The lightly-salted soup brought out the sweet flavors of the vegetables, and thanks to the beans, it had a satisfying mouthfeel.

The bacon was fairly salty, but it matched well with the potatoes. The bantam chicken eggs were nice and hard boiled. When it came to boiled eggs, Sylphy preferred them that way. I wasn’t fussy about my eggs, but lightly-salted boiled eggs were just the best.

“This is all delicious, babe.”

“Really? The dishes you make tend to be a lot more complex...”

“That might be true, but I love your cooking,” I told her. “Everything I make can’t help but feel like ready-made food. Yours has the warmth of a homemade meal, and it fills you right up.”

“Is that so...? Hee hee, I’m glad to hear it,” Sylphy replied with a warm smile.

After eating, we got ready for our adventure.

I equipped my leather armor and put on my helmet... Then realized that all that could wait until Grande arrived. I put the helmet and my weapon on a shortcut and was good to go.

Oh, I suppose I’ll at least keep my mithril short sword sheathed at my hip.

“Now I’m done.”

“Same here.”

Sylphy was wearing her usual black leather riding suit, and on the left side of her hip was Pale Moon, the right side a revolver, and her two kukri knives on her lower back. She was all suited up.

“All we gotta do is wait for Gra-”

“I demand hamburgers!”

“BOOZE! BRING ME BOOZE!”

“Brothers, stop!”

Once again, my ears were accosted by massive roars and accompanying voiceovers. Pretty sure I experienced this exact thing yesterday.

“Looks like she’s arrived,” Sylphy said.

“Yup.”

Sylphy offered me a pained smirk.

“What are they saying?”

“Grande’s brothers are here for food and drink.”

“Ah. What’s your plan?”

“Depends on their attitude.”

If they interacted with me fairly, as friends, then it would be no biggie. If not, well... I’d have to respond in my own way. Melty wasn’t there, but Sylphy was, so things should be fine regardless of what happened.

—

“Give me hamburgers, human!”

“Booze! Bring me BOOZE!”

“Brothers, I beg of you! Please stop!”

I traced the booming dragon family’s voices back to the open space again, where Grande had been kicked down and was being pinned to the ground

under the legs of her two brothers Yeah, no.

“Get your filthy goddamn claws off of Grande right now, you shit head lizards.”

I’m extremely unhappy.

It only takes a glance at Grande to tell that she probably tried to stop her brothers. Hell, she has cuts and wounds on her scales. This is unforgivable.

“Don’t get smart with me, human! Bring me hamburgers at once!”

“Booze! Bring me booze, now!”

These boneheads act completely according to their desires. They’re about as intelligent as your average animal. That’s weird considering how logical and smart Grande and her mother are... Even Grande’s old man is better than this.

Either they were a little loopy in their heads, or all male dragons were kinda like that. I really wasn’t sure.

“I’m only going to repeat myself once,” I told them. “Get. Your. Feet. Off. Of. *Grande!*”

“Hey, Kousuke.”

“Sylphy, I don’t care if I’m dealing with dragons or not, anyone who kicks and hurts my friend is someone I don’t want to be pals with.”

“Hm... Good point. I feel the same.”

“I knew you would. I’m gonna go have a chat with these gents, so could you just keep an eye on things? If the situation takes a turn, I’d appreciate a helping hand.”

“Of course,” Sylphy replied with a nod.

She was standing straight up with her arms folded, observing the situation in silence.

“K-Kousuke,” said Grande, “I don’t think picking a fight with my brothers is a good idea...”

“You dummy,” I told her. “Any brothers who hurt their little sister like this are losers anyway. And more importantly, I refuse to let anyone hurt my friends.” I

called out to her brothers, then. “Get your filthy claws off of her, you damn dirty lizards! If you don’t, I’m going to blow you away.”

Bro Dragon A let out a throaty sound like he was laughing at me. “Fragile human, how do you intend to do that? Just hand over the hamburgers.”

“Booze, booze!” panted Bro Dragon B excitedly.

Yeah, these guys are idiots.

“Last warning,” I told them. “Step back from Grande. If you don’t, you’re goners.”

Bro Dragon A refused to comply, and instead put even more power into the legs he was using to pin down Grande. She groaned in pain.

Yup, they were donezo.

I pulled out a certain weapon from my inventory and pointed it at them. It was the large revolving grenade launcher, of course, and was equipped with six 40-mm multi-purpose grenades. Enough piercing power to break through 50-mm armor.

One of the brothers started to ask what it was, but he didn’t get to finish.

“Hasta la vista.”

Kerplunk, kerplunk, kerplunk, went the silly-sounding noise as I fired off consecutive rounds that traveled a beautiful arc through the air.

“Nngh?!”

All of the rounds collided with Bro Dragon A’s face and neck, exploding on impact. Bro Dragon A clearly didn’t like the feel of that. His neck and back twisted in pain.

“You’re next.”

I fired off three more rounds. Bro Dragon B tried to dodge, but I targeted his large body; there was no chance he could shift his whole bulk out of the way in time. All three rounds exploded on him and he staggered back.

“Ow, ow, ow!”

“H-hey, Kousuke? Some of the pieces are falling on me.”

“Sorry about that,” I earnestly apologized to Grande while reloading.

I didn't have the physical power to go fist to claw with these guys, so this is my only avenue of attack. I'm sorry, buddy.

“Goddammit, that hurts! You want a fight, you're—”

Kerplunk, kerplunk, kerplunk, kerplunk, kerplunk, kerplunk.

“Ow! Ouch! That hurts! Stop it!”

Bro Dragon A finally started to cry out in tears after I shot six rounds at him. Blood flowed from his wounds, which meant the rounds that could pierce 50-mm armor worked on dragons too. If I used an actual anti-tank rocket launcher, I might've been able to finish them off.

“I surrender, I'm sorry, please forgive me!”

After taking three rounds himself and seeing his brother take an additional six, Bro Dragon B immediately gave in. He rolled over flat onto his back.

I silently reloaded my grenade launcher and pointed it at Bro Dragon A.

“I surrender too, please don't hurt me anymore, pretty please! No more kerplunks!”

“...Apologize to Grande, then I'll let this go,” I told them.

“Grande, I'm sorry for pinning you down like that.”

“I'm sorry, dear sister.”

“A-all right,” she replied to them. “I forgive you both.”

“Excellent,” I said. “Now, don't move.”

Just to be careful, I used stone blocks to lock the dragons in place. Then, after filling about eight 500-milliliter glass containers with the blood flowing from their wounds, I healed them up.

For some reason, Sylphy was watching this all transpire with a grin on her face.

“I've healed your wounds,” I told the dragon bros. “I'm sure you saw, but as a fee for causing all this trouble, I took some of your blood. Got it?”

“Yessir,” they replied in unison.

I released them from their stone bindings and the two of them earnestly nodded their heads, seated next to each other.

“Now, about the food and drink,” I said. They listened attentively. “Yesterday I treated everyone to food and drink because Grande’s always helping me out and she hadn’t been home to see her family for ages. Plus, I was meeting you guys for the first time. I offer food and drink to Grande all the time, but it’s not a one way street. We’re equals, so she does some work for me, then I give her food and drink.”

“Work?” The dragons repeated in confusion.

Both dragon bros tilted their heads. Ugh, that was kind of cute, even if their faces were terrifying.

“Exactly. Stuff like hunting medium-or large-sized monsters, offering blood and scales, that kind of thing.”

“I see,” one brother replied.

“As a symbol of our new friendship, I’ll treat you guys today.”

Both brothers reacted with great excitement.

“But starting tomorrow, if you want food or drink, then hunt down some medium to large sized monsters in the Black Forest for me,” I said. “But don’t make them too big, or I won’t be able to do anything with them. A wyvern is the perfect size, got it?”

“Understood”, they said together.

“Also, this is only gonna be the case while I’m staying in the village. I’m going to be heading back north to a human city in less than a week.”

Both bro dragons suddenly seemed disappointed. I’d love to help them out, but I didn’t think the elf village had the means to support two giant stomachs, so there wasn’t much that could be done. Even I would have a hard time feeding Grande *and* two other adult dragons. I could at least bring it up with the elders, though.

“Now then, that’s enough talk. Let’s be pals, okay?” I said to them.

“Yeah!”

“Pals!”

The two dragons roared loudly. *God, what a racket.*

I made a quick dining table out of stone blocks and put down some giant cheeseburgers and a giant barrel of mead.

“Delish! What is this!? It’s even better than yesterday!”

“They’re called cheeseburgers. Special burgers with cheese on them.”

“Cheese...burgers! Awesome!”

“Booze, booze...”

Bro Dragon A excitedly chowed down on his super burgers while Bro Dragon B stuffed his head into the barrel of alcohol.

Man, is Bro Dragon B gonna be okay? Is he an alcoholic?

“Want some too, Grande?”

“Y-yes...”

Grande seemed kind of on edge, so I ended up offering her some food as well. She was going to be flying me and Sylphy later on, so no booze for her. The thought of Grande flying drunk terrified me.

Grande averted her gaze and started eating her super burger slowly and neatly. Usually, she just took huge bites, but it looked like she was really watching her manners. I wondered what was going on with her.

“What’s up?” I asked her. “You’re acting kinda weird.”

“I-it’s nothing.”

She kept glancing at me then looking away. She was slapping her tail on the ground, though, so at least she must not be in a bad mood.

Judging the situation settled, Sylphy called out from behind me as she approached. “Seems like things worked out over here.”

“Yup. I’m just glad we patched things up. It would’ve sucked if they really came at me.”

If the brothers straight up attacked me, it might've been really dangerous. I had a plan to make a wall of stone blocks and attack from behind it if things got bad, though.

As for weapons, I would've gone with an anti-tank rocket launcher or an anti-tank recoilless cannon.

"Hee hee, you're tough as nails, Kousuke. You seriously took on two dragons at once. Heroes of legend would go pale seeing what you did."

"It's my weapons that are tough, that's all," I insisted. "I'm just a weak little slug. Compared to the warriors of this world, I'm nothing."

"You don't give yourself nearly enough credit. If we fought at range, I'm not sure I'd come out on top."

"I'd literally lose in an instant," I told her.

She'd close on me moving at such a high speed I wouldn't be able to see her, and then she'd do me in with her close-range skills. My fighting style worked for big targets like Grande, but against the various humanoid races of this world? Not happening.

"Hee hee, are you sure? Care to test that theory?"

"No way... I never want to fight you."

Could you please not embrace me from behind and whisper into my ear? It's way too alluring. Hell, if anything it's kind of depressing, because this leather armor is preventing me from feeling your soft touch against my back.

As we flirted a bit, Grande stared at us, as if she'd forgotten entirely about the cheeseburger in her claws. As soon as we locked eyes, she panicked and looked away yet again, going back to her burger. She sure was acting strange...

"Thanks for the food, Boss! I'll make sure to bring you something great next time!"

"I wish to drink tomorrow, so I shall work hard as well."

The bro dragons both flew off after eating and drinking, promising to bring

me some monsters the next day. Depending on what they brought back, I could trade that to the elf village in exchange for some of their unique goods. Elf-made stuff was all high quality.

Hold up, did that dragon call me “Boss?” I really didn’t want underlings like those guys.

Anyway, I finally got the chance to bring up the idea of going on a little forest adventure to Grande, but...

“Wait just a moment. I-I’m not sure how I feel about the two of you riding on my back...”

“Aw, you don’t want to?”

“Th-that’s not it...”

Grande growled kind of gently. Yeah, something was wrong, but what could it be?

“Seems like things aren’t going to plan,” Sylphy interjected. “What’s wrong?”

“No,” I told her. “For some reason she doesn’t want us to ride on her back.”

“Th-that’s not it, I swear,” said Grande.

“Really?”

“What’s she saying?”

“It’s not that she doesn’t want us on her back, she says.”

“Hm...”

Sylphy tilted her head just as I did. Grande seemed somewhat nervous. What the heck was going on?

“I bet there are all sorts of beautiful sights deeper within the Black Forest,” I said to her. “I want to see where you were raised, Grande.”

“Umm... Well, there are places like that, but...”

“I want to see the things that you think are beautiful. Please take us?” I asked.

“Argh... F-fine, fine...”

Grande began to quickly slap her tail against the ground. I didn’t think she was

mad... If anything, she seemed happy? I'd never seen her do that before.

"Is everything okay?" Sylphy asked me again.

"She's kinda off, but I don't think she's feeling bad," I explained. "She gave us the okay though, so it should be fine. Grande, I'm going to put the saddle on, okay?"

"O-okay."

She lowered her body for me, allowing me to put her saddle on. Cool, no problem. I wondered why she'd started acting all weird like that.

"Wh-where would you like me to take you?" She asked.

"Hm, I don't know a thing about the geography here," I said. "Sylphy, Grande's asking where we wanna go. Any requests?"

"Hm, how about Grande's homeland?"

"Oh, good idea! Grande, we want you to take us to where you grew up."

"W-wait, I'm not ready. I can't do that yet."

Grande turned down my request, shuddering. What did she mean she wasn't ready?

"Then just take us somewhere beautiful, okay?" I said "Something like a waterfall, or a field of flowers, or somewhere high up where we can see a ton of stuff."

"Did she say no?"

"Apparently, she's 'not ready' yet. No clue what that means."

"Huh..." Sylphy quietly thought to herself with a serious expression on her face.

"J-just because I think something is beautiful doesn't mean you will..." said Grande.

"That's totally fine," I assured her. "I'm interested in what you personally find beautiful."

"Y-you are? Mm, then I'll take you to the most beautiful spot I know."

She was happily whapping her tail against the ground.

Please stop. The ground's HP is already at zero. I'm pretty sure the area you're hitting has been lowered permanently.

"Sylphy, we're all set. Let's hop on."

"Hm, all right. We're in your hands today, Grande."

"Kousuke, what did the dark elf say?" Grande asked.

"She said she's counting on you. Same here."

"I see. Mm, no worries. I will show you both a fabulous time."

Grande pulled close with a growl, and I gently caressed her head. Then Sylphy and I climbed onto her back and put on our safety belts.

I glanced over at the elf village where a whole bunch of elves were watching from above the defensive wall. I bet the sound of the grenades must've freaked them out.

"We're off!" Sylphy said with a wave, and the elves responded in kind.

I waved to them too, and much to my own pleasant surprise, they waved back.

"Grande, let's go."

"Aye, hang on tight."

Grande lowered her stance, building power, then unfurled her wings. Looked like she was going to set off into the sky without getting a running start. Sylphy and I both lowered ourselves onto the saddle, adhering to her warning.

Grande leapt up into the air, her wings spread wide. Immediately, a gust of powerful wind erupted from beneath her, slowly lifting her huge body.

"We're going to head to the cliff deep within the woods first," she told us.

"We're in your claws!"

"Mm, I'm going to fly slowly, but hang on tight, even so."

"You've got it. Sylphy, we're gonna be heading to the cliff deep in the woods first."

“Oh, a cliff, eh? Exciting.”

“Right?”

I gazed down at the Black Forest as Grande flew us above it. That name wasn't for nothing: I couldn't see the ground at all. The forest was so thick...

Are these trees unique, or is it the dirt? Oh, that reminds me. I need the dirt here to make farm blocks, so I should grab some while I can.

“The cliff is up ahead,” Grande announced.

“That's quite the steep cliff, and huge to boot.”

“I can't even begin to imagine how it was formed.”

Multiple white waterfalls flowed from the cliff, falling down from the crag's peak. As the waterfalls neared the ground, they became mist, forming rainbows near the base of the cliff.

“Whoa, this is incredible!” I gasped. “These rainbows are beautiful!”

“It really is,” said Sylphy. “Hee hee, I never thought something like this existed deeper in the woods.”

“Hee hee hee, right?” Grande laughed. “There are always rainbows here. However, it's as though it's endlessly raining over there, so if you get near, you'll get wet, and the footing is bad. There are also many water elemental monsters, so it's dangerous for humanoids to go near.”

“Gotcha.” I turned to Sylphy. “She says it's beautiful but dangerous for us to get near.”

“I see... But viewing from afar is more than enough,” said Sylphy excitedly, her gaze locked on the rainbows. “It's not every day one gets to enjoy a sight such as this.”

A waterfall that produces rainbows, huh? In a fantasy world like this, I'd bet there were great materials over there. Something filled with rainbow colored magical energy, or some sort of super powerful monster. It might be a good idea to check it out one of these days.

“We're going up,” Grande announced.

“Roger that.”

Grande suddenly began to ascend, and we pressed our bodies tightly against her back. She was really moving fast.

“At the top of the crag is a beautiful pond with clean water.”

“Oh, sounds awesome.”

Grande went higher and higher until we finally arrived at the peak.

“Holy... This is wild.”

“It’s gorgeous...” Sylphy agreed.

It was paradise. The pond was filled with clear, beautiful water, and there were all kinds of gorgeous flowers blooming around it. Were they alpine plants, I wondered?

“It’s safe here, so we’ll be landing,” said Grande.

“Gotcha. Sylphy, we’re landing by the pond.”

“Wonderful!”

It seemed like Sylphy had been entranced by the beautiful pond and flowers, as she sounded happy as anything.

Grande circled the top of the crag for a bit, choosing where to land before gently touching down. She was extremely careful not to step on any of the flowers.

“Excellent work, Grande,” I told her. “It must’ve been tough avoiding the flowers.”

“Hee hee, it was nothing at all,” she said. “It would simply be a shame to ruin such a beautiful work of nature.”

Grande growled happily as she turned her head to look at us. She looked like she was grinning proudly.

“All right, we’re hopping off. We won’t be super long.”

“Aye.”

“Much obliged. Sylphy, let’s go.”

“Yay!”

We undid our safety belts and carefully disembarked Grande’s back. As soon as we got near the flowers, their aroma wafted toward us. They had extremely strong scents.

“They smell wonderful,” I said.

“Agreed... I’ve never seen these sorts of flowers before... How about bringing some back for Ira?” Sylphy suggested.

“Great idea. Grande, is it okay if I pick a few flowers?”

“As long as you don’t uproot them, absolutely.”

“No problemo. I’ll get right to it then...”

I pulled a one-handed gardening shovel out of my inventory and carefully grabbed some flowers. What happened to my mithril shovel +9, you ask? If I’d used that, I’d probably uproot everything in one go by accident.

I grabbed five of each type, then headed for the pond with Sylphy. No fish or animals as far as I could tell, which made sense, considering the altitude.

“Think it’s drinkable?” I asked.

“If you put some in your inventory, it’ll probably tell you one way or the other, no?”

“Ah, right. Duh.”

I used a wooden water bucket to grab some water from the pond, then put it in my inventory. Apparently, it was pure water.

“Pure as pure can be,” I announced. “We should be able to drink it, but it doesn’t appear to have any special effects like I was kinda hoping it would.”

“Those sorts of things are hard to stumble upon for a reason,” Sylphy said, giggling at me with my slumped shoulders.

“Still, what a beautiful spot.”

We sat down at the edge of the pond, and Sylphy looked around the area with a peaceful expression. There were all kinds of colorful flowers nearby, and whenever the wind blew, their aromas tickled our noses. It really was quite

gorgeous there.

“It’s a bit cold though,” I said.

“Hahaha, we are pretty high up, after all. The breeze is fairly gentle today, but I bet when the winds are strong, it can get pretty scary up here.”

“Indeed.”

Curious as to what Grande was getting up to, I looked her way to find her watching us, then sniffing the flowers. I started to make my way back to where she was.

“Hey, Grande, the flowers are beautiful, but the vista up here is what’s really amazing. I’m terrified of falling, though, so I don’t wanna get close to the edge.”

“Mm, it is quite the view.”

I wondered how many meters up we were. Because the cliff was so steep, it felt insanely high up. This area where we stood wasn’t very large. It might have even been narrower overall than the grounds of a school.

Seriously, how did this thing come into existence? When magma pumps out of the ground, it doesn’t harden like this, and if this was done by winds, we’d see other crags along the way. I’m no geologist, though, so I’m not gonna find an answer.

“Oh, what’s that over there? That tree’s absurdly huge.”

I pointed my finger at the ginormous tree that was at least one, two, even five times bigger than the other nearby trees. Its trunk looked absurdly massive.

“Hm, that is rather large,” said Sylphy. “The tree that the gathering hall is in is quite impressive, but this one must be at least twice that size. It’s most certainly the oldest one in this forest.”

“Would you like to take a look?” Grande offered. “It is but a brief flight away with my wings.”

“Loving the sound of that,” I said. “I definitely wanna take a look up close. Sylphy, she’s willing to take us.”

“Excellent. I can’t wait.”

Grande lowered her stance so we could get up on her back, and we fastened ourselves in. Our next destination, the great tree deep within the Black Forest. I hoped we'd find some rare materials this time!

"It's huge!"

"It really is," Sylphy agreed.

The huge tree was really something else. How many meters are we talking? I couldn't see the top because of the huge branches and leaves, but it had to be over 100 meters, easily. And the branches stretched out super wide. Wider than a baseball field at least.

The roots were amazing, too. There were a bunch that were at least a meter in diameter, and they were popping out of the ground in waves. They wrapped around each other, covering the ground. I imagined you'd have a rough time getting to the trunk.

"Is it a different kind of tree from the one the gathering hall is in?" I asked Sylphy.

"The leaves are differently shaped," she said. "It's so majestic... I can't even begin to imagine how many months and days it has stood here."

Sylphy and I were looking up at the tree when suddenly one of its leaves fell down toward us. Sylphy easily grabbed it out of the air.

"Hrm..." She inspected it. "I'm unfamiliar with this shape."

"It's pretty massive. Wanna bring this back to Ira?" I asked.

"I doubt she's seen anything like it before, so she might be thrilled with this."

I took the leaf from Sylphy and took my own long look at it. Outside of its shape, it seemed like a regular old leaf. A bit like a grape leaf, with the way it shot out in three directions. Into the inventory it went.

Black Forest Fairy Tree Leaf × 1

“Oh, I got the name of the tree, by the way. It’s a fairy tree.”

“A fairy tree...?” Sylphy gasped. “You’re certain?”

“Yeah. It said ‘Black Forest Fairy Tree Leaf’ in my inventory display, so I’m pretty confident. I knew about spirits, but are there fairies in this world too?” I asked.

I’d seen spirits plenty of times, thanks to Sylphy wielding spirit magic. They were like little glowing balls of light. I didn’t know why, but it turned out I had a physical makeup that drew spirits to me. According to elven legend, Fabled Visitors such as myself were guided to this world by the spirits, so maybe there was some deep connection between us.

“It’s said that fairies dwell within fairy trees,” Sylphy explained. “I take it you don’t know much about fairies?”

“I know they like causing mischief and that they’re small and have wings, but that’s about it. I have no idea what they’re like in this world.”

“That’s pretty much right,” said Sylphy. “Appearance-wise, they’re a small race of humanoids with wings. Some of them are about as tall as the length between your wrist and the tip of your middle finger, while some can be as big as a human child. They have the ability to disappear, and they can also wield powerful magic.”

“...They sound tough.”

“That’s because they are,” she agreed. “Fairies are typically pretty carefree and innocent beings, but it’s said that one would tempt fate by upsetting them. It’s not like they’ll kill you in a fit of rage or anything, though. You’ll just be subjected to some awful mischief, as far as I’ve heard.”

“No, thank you,” I said. “We probably shouldn’t get too close to them, huh?”

“Maybe that’s why Grande set off again once we landed and dismounted.”

“That’s very possible.”

After taking us close to the tree, Grande said she had some sudden, important business to take care of, then flew off. We didn’t even get a chance to ask her what was up or how we were going to call for her when we were ready to go. It

was kind of a problem.

But even if we couldn't hook up with her again, we could just go for a leisurely stroll back to the village. At night, when it got dangerous, I could build an underground shelter, or a shelter in the trees, and we could hole up there. We had plenty of food and water, too. We didn't need to worry about protecting ourselves, either, not with Sylphy around, and I wasn't entirely powerless myself.

We could handle ourselves either way, so neither of us were especially panicked.

"Wanna take a look up close?" I asked.

"Hm... A part of me certainly does," said Sylphy. "But would it be wise to surprise the fairies like that? And this tree is so big that it'd just look like a wall up close."

"I guess that's true. If only there was somewhere with a clearer view... What about on top of that root over there?" I said, pointing.

"Let's go, then."

Sylphy and I worked together to climb over the meters-high roots of the tree, then plopped ourselves down. With my wood blocks, it was no sweat.

"The breeze feels great, and it's warmer than it was by the lake," Sylphy said.

"Mm-hm. The perfect temperature. Actually, I've been meaning to ask something. I've been here in this world for a while now, but do the four seasons exist here?"

"There are seasons, yes. Right now it's the beginning of autumn, with winter to come after."

"Winter, huh...? Does it get cold?"

"Well, you hardly ever get snow piling up on the fields. It does snow up high on the mountaintops, but it's fairly uncommon for it to get cold enough for that down here."

"Gotcha, so it's pretty warm. It'd get pretty damn cold where I used to live. The snow would frequently pile up to around where your knees are, and if you

didn't have a heater, your house would be freezing."

"That sounds rough... I bet many were lost to the cold."

"Well, fortunately, heaters are commonplace over there, so that sort of thing isn't so common. That being said, every year you'd still get something like over a thousand folks freezing to death... But then in the spring the cherry blossoms would bloom. Talk about beautiful."

"Flowers that blossom in the spring, huh? What type of flowers are they?"

"Cherry blossoms are light pink flowers that blossom on specific trees," I explained. "We call that shade of pink cherry blossom, in fact. Their lifespans are really short, and once they start to fall from the tree, they all go at once. The wind picks up their petals and scatters them around like snow, too. They sometimes call that a shower of cherry blossoms."

"That must be stunningly beautiful..."

"It really is."

I doubted that I'd ever get to see something like that here.

I thought back to the sight of cherry blossoms scattering through the air...

But then, suddenly, a powerful wind picked up.

"Hmm?"

"What the heck?"

The wind seemed to be blowing around us, picking up the leaves nearby and swirling them into the air around us.

"This isn't normal," said Sylphy. "The work of fairies?"

"Are they nearby...?"

Suddenly, the swirling storm of leaves began to turn pink, eventually blanketing our entire field of view in the color.

"A shower of cherry blossoms..." I gasped.

That's exactly what it was. No matter where I cast my gaze, I was met with a flurry of pink petals.

“This is it?” said Sylphy. “Then this must be the work of faeries...”

I was deeply reminded of home. I didn't leave any family behind there, but I wasn't totally without an attachment to that world. The new one wasn't where I was born and raised.

I could feel the tears welling up in my eyes and rolling down my cheeks. I didn't even notice them. As soon as Sylphy saw my tears, her beautiful face shifted to an expression of surprise, and then quickly to anger. She stood up and shot a piercing glare at our surroundings.

“Stop this at once,” she called out. “Regardless of your good intentions, making Kousuke shed tears is unforgivable.”

Sylphy's gorgeous silver hair moved as if it were alive, and suddenly the storm of cherry blossoms came to a screeching halt. Actually, it'd be more correct to say they just vanished. The flower petals, the wind, all of it. It must have been some sort of illusion.

“We're sorry...”

“The Fabled Visitor wanted to see them, so...”

“That's why we made it happen.”

“We didn't think he'd cry.”

“We're sorry...”

I could hear their tiny voices around us, each one of them sounding downtrodden. It was clear they were apologetic about all of this.

It really was the faeries who lived there.

“Sylphy, it's fine,” I said. “I just got a little teary-eyed from how nostalgic it made me feel.”

“Are you sure?”

I wiped the tears from my eyes and forced out a smile. Sylphy still looked concerned, but she nonetheless nodded her head.

“Yeah, for sure,” I told her. “Thanks for getting mad on my behalf. And thank you to you guys, too. I didn't think I'd ever get to see cherry blossoms again, so

it made me happy.”

A bunch of voices responded.

“Really?”

“You’re not mad?”

“You’re not sad?”

“Yeah, for real! Those weren’t sad tears. They were tears of joy! You showed us something amazing, and you have my thanks. Sylphy, you thought it was beautiful too, right?”

“Mm... I did. It really was extraordinary.”

“You’re not mad anymore, right?” I asked with a smile, tugging at her clothes.

She grinned and once again sat on the root of the tree. I was glad she caught on.

“As long as you didn’t cry because you were sad, then I was wrong to get upset,” she said. “Faeries, I’m truly sorry.”

“Can we be friends?”

“You’re not mad anymore?”

“Nope,” said Sylphy. “Let’s be buddies, okay?”

As soon as the words left her mouth, a bunch of small human figures appeared in the air. They were the spitting image of what I’d have imagined a fairy to look like. Their size varied from person to person, but many of them were small enough that they could have sat comfortably in the palm of my hand. They all had wings on their backs, and they were fluttering them quickly. What looked like shining particles were falling from their wings.

“Wow, so these are fairies... They certainly look the part,” I said. “Talk about fantasy.”

“This is my first time seeing them up close too,” Sylphy said. “I’ve spotted them a few times from afar when out hunting, but that’s about it.”

The fairies kept their distance around us, probably still on guard, or worried about having made me cry. They all wore the expressions of kids who’d just

been scolded by their parents.

“Hey, c’mon,” I told them. “Neither of us are angry anymore. If anything, I’m grateful you showed us something so wonderful. Come over here and let’s be buddies! How about some sweets to celebrate our meeting?”

I whipped out a basket of cookies from my inventory and showed it to them. I crafted those babies using harpy eggs, minotauros milk, butter, flour harvested from the fields I made, and sugar crafted from sugar cane.

“Here, Sylphy. Say ‘aaah.’”

“Hrm?”

I stuffed a cookie into her mouth, and chomped on one myself. I was sure there were fairies who’d never seen cookies before, so eating them first was the quickest way to reassure them that there was no danger.

“See, they’re sweet and crunchy and delicious,” I said. “You all should have some!”

I held the basket out to them, and, after glancing at one another, the fairies slowly drew near. One of the fairies got next to the basket and looked up at me to check my expression. I smiled down at them.

They reached into the basket and tried to lift a cookie with two hands, but it was too big for them.

“Hm, too big, eh?”

“Big and heavy,” the fairy said.

“Lemme see...”

I set the basket down on the root between me and Sylphy, then grabbed a cookie and broke it into pieces. Turning it into dust would be a step backward, so I made sure they were chunks that the smaller fairies could carry.

“How’s that?” I extended my open palm toward the fairy.

“Thank you!” They picked up a piece of crushed cookie and took a bite out of it.

“It’s crunchy, sweet, and delicious!” Said the fairy.

“I know, right? Here, I’ve got plenty more, so everyone come over and have some. Here, Sylphy.”

Sylphy grabbed a cookie, broke it into smaller pieces, and put them in the palm of her hand as well. It wasn’t long before the fairies had gathered around us. At first, most of them took from my hand exclusively, but due to the small crowd that formed, some started to take from Sylphy’s hand too. Eventually, the fairies who were watching things from afar made their way to her hand for some cookie fun times.

“Delicious!”

“So crunchy!”

“Sweet!”

“Take your time so you don’t get any stuck in your throat!” I said with a grin as the fairies excitedly munched on cookies. I took a wooden bucket of minotauros milk out of my inventory, along with a bowl to pour it into.

The fairies’ mouths must have gotten dry from all the cookies, because they turned their attention to the bowl and flew to the edge to sip at the cool liquid. They seemed clearly fine with it. Of course, I hadn’t told them where I got the milk from, and I didn’t intend to.

With their stomachs nice and full, the fairies began dancing and singing on our shoulders, knees, and heads. It was like we were in a fairy cafe instead of a cat cafe.

“See you later!”

“Bye-bye!”

“Thanks!”

The fairies managed to work together to carry the basket of cookies as they flew back toward the fairy tree. We spent the entire time exchanging all kinds of stories with them, but it was time to head home since the sun had begun to set.

“What an incredible experience,” I said.

“I imagine few have ever had the opportunity to interact with faeries like that.”

The two of us stood up and brushed the cookie crumbs off of ourselves. The faeries were munching away on top of us the whole time, so of course we’d been covered in crumbs.

“Now then, guess I’ll build a shelter a little distance from here.”

“Sounds good,” Sylphy said. “Hopefully we can meet up with Grande tomorrow.”

It turned out that faeries were scared of dragons, so Grande probably kept her distance on purpose.

“Where do you think she’ll take us tomorrow?” asked Sylphy.

“I’d love to check out her home,” I said.

“Hee hee, that’d be exciting and a little scary.”

“True enough.”

And with that, we bid farewell to the fairy tree.

The next morning, after spending a lovey-dovey night together we washed and then immediately made moves to reunite with Grande.

It’d be unwise to wander the depths of the Black Forest without knowing where to go, however. Trying to locate us from above wouldn’t be easy, even for Grande, and since we couldn’t see the sky, we couldn’t spot her from below either.

To start off, I began cutting down the trees near our shelter. That way, we could improve visibility while also creating a landing spot for Grande and obtaining materials. Three birds with one stone, baby.

As for Sylphy, she went ahead and gathered wood to build a fire for us before I got to cutting down trees. With smoke rising into the air and a clear plot of land, Grande would be able to spot us nice and easily.

There was a chance we might draw monsters to our location, but between

the two of us, we could take care of most dangers. Or at least, that was the conclusion we came to. I built a defensive position aboveground, and I cut out a pretty wide chunk of land, so as long as we could see the enemy coming, we'd be safe.

“Kousuke, er, that's quite the weapon you've got there,” Sylphy commented.

“It's super strong.”

Sitting atop the defensive position was a three-barrel, .500-caliber destroyer of men. In other words, a 12.7-mm heavy Gatling gun.

As for bullets, it used the same rounds as an anti-materiel rifle. That's the sort of power we were talking about. There were anti-materiel rifles that used larger-caliber rounds, but standard ones typically used this kind. What do you think happened when this Gatling gun fired those rounds in succession at high speed? It tore a human to shreds. Even a dragon would struggle against it.

The major issue was that the rounds cost a lot, so I couldn't exactly use it willy-nilly. It was also crazy heavy, making it impossible to hold and shoot simultaneously. You'd have to be a super-powered reporter wearing red, yellow, and blue to do that. He could rip things to shreds with his hands, after all. Heck, I doubted whether an anti-materiel rifle would have any effect on him. But that was beside the point.

“If Grande gets here soon, I won't have to use this thing.”

“I doubt things will be *that* easy for us,” Sylphy said.

And they sure weren't.

“Man, they're all so huge,” I complained.

“That weapon of yours is absurd...”

Not long after we started sending smoke up into the air, the monsters came out, looking to dance. And they were still coming. Wild boars the size of houses, giant praying mantises, centipedes, griffin-like dudes, some kind of thing made of tentacles—all sorts.

Of course, none of them stood a chance against my Gatling gun. And once I taught Sylphy how to use the thing, she mastered it almost immediately. All you really had to do was center the gun on your target and hit the switch, and the bullets went flying. Not exactly rocket science.

We'd draw the enemies to us and take them down, and then I'd run out to collect what I could while Sylphy provided backup. They didn't swarm us very quickly, so we spent about three hours enjoying a bit of leisurely hunting. Then a roar pierced the air.

"So, this is where you went."

Grande descended from up high, still wearing her saddle from the day before.

"G'morning, Grande. Thanks for coming."

"Mm. I apologize for not doing so yesterday. Fairies are frightened of dragons, so I kept my distance. I did take a peek at you guys from the air, but since you appeared to be having fun, I didn't want to disturb you."

"Awesome choice. Thanks for that."

"Hee hee, right? I'm a capable woman!" Grande snorted loudly and confidently. It was like her victory pose.

"What is she saying?" asked Sylphy.

"She apologized for leaving us behind yesterday, but she did come check on us a bunch, and since we were having fun with the faeries, she let us be."

"I see. She must've realized you and I would have no problems on our own."

"Probably. Have you already had breakfast, Grande?" I asked.

"Mm, I have. What's the plan for today?"

"Sylphy and I were talking about wanting to see where you grew up. Is that okay?"

"O-of course. Yes, that'd be fine."

"Cool, cool. Then we're just gonna grab our stuff, so hold on," I said, before heading off with Sylphy to clean up.

Wait, Sylphy? Are you seriously walking around with that Gatling gun in your

hands? For real? Where do you hide all that strength in those slender arms of yours???

Quietly baffled by her unreal hidden strength, I took apart our little defensive outpost. Earlier that morning I took apart our underground shelter, so we were ready to fly off. I did cut down a significant number of trees, but those should be fine to leave as-is.

“We’re good to go. Counting on you today, Grande.”

“N-no problem...”

She was still acting kind of odd. Was there something she was worried about? I tilted my head as I helped Sylphy up onto her back.

“Let us be on our way,” Grande said.

“Let’s do it.”

Grande started running, then as soon as she jumped, she spread her wings wide, catching the wind. No matter how many times I experienced this, it was that moment that gave me chills. It was like a mix of excitement and fear. The fear of potentially falling to my doom.

“Kousuke, what was with the head tilt a moment ago?” Sylphy asked me.

“Well, it’s just that Grande’s been acting kinda odd,” I replied. “I wonder if she’s worried about something back at home.”

“Hm...”

Sylphy considered this deeply.

“Apparently, a dragon allowing humans to ride on their back is considered a big deal, so maybe it has something to do with their culture?” I mused.

“I see... You should probably ask her parents for more details,” she said.

“Good idea. It’s pretty rare to be able to ask a dragon directly about that kind of thing, I’d imagine. Heck, we’ll be able to ask stuff neither of us know about.”

“Oh, that’s exciting,” Sylphy said with a gentle smile.

When we were back in Arichburg with our loved ones, she seemed relaxed, but the natural smile she’d had on her face since coming to the Black Forest was

something else entirely. She must've really been stressed out.

A few minutes of soaring on Grande's back and we reached the depths of the woods.

"So, this is the crag deepest within the Black Forest..."

"That seems to be the case. I doubt there are many humanoids who've seen this place before."

At the edge of the Black Forest, the rocky crag stretched out for as long as the eye could see. I say crag, but it was more like a mountain range. There wasn't much in the way of greenery, just rock face everywhere.

"This is where you were born and raised?" I asked.

"Indeed," Grande said. "Many dragon families live here. They open holes in the rock and build their nests there."

"Huh. Do other sorts of dragons nest here, or are they just grand dragons?"

"Only grand dragons. Occasionally a sky dragon pops in for a short period of time, but there shouldn't be any here right now."

"Why not?"

"Those dragons are constantly flying around the world, so when they grow exhausted, they borrow the nests of other dragons to rest their wings."

"Wow."

"What is it?" asked Sylphy. "Did she say anything interesting?"

"Yeah, so like..."

I explained to her what Grande said.

"Sky dragons, huh?" Sylphy mused. "There've been sightings of them in the past, but there's much we don't know about them."

"Seriously?"

I asked Grande for more details, and she explained that sky dragons typically flew at high speed and at high altitudes, so humanity rarely even noticed their presence. It was likely that the sky dragons that were spotted in the past were

descending to rest their wings.

“Now then, this is the nest I was born in,” announced Grande. “We’re going to land.”

“Got it. Sylphy, we’ve arrived at Grande’s home, so we’re getting off here.”

“Okay.”

Grande circled a bit while descending slowly. If she was on her own, she probably would’ve done the landing quickly, but she was being careful with us on her back. She was a real sweetheart for keeping us in mind.

“We’ve arrived.”

“Ooooh... It’s a cave.”

“It does indeed appear to be a regular cave.”

After getting off Grande’s back, the two of us looked up at the giant cave opened in the mountain and let our thoughts flow freely. The entrance to the cave was at a smooth uphill slope that probably helped to shield it from rain.

“Are you coming in?” Grande asked.

“Mm, I’m not so sure,” I replied. “Sylphy, wanna go in?”

“Into a dragon’s nest? Um, I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t curious, but would it be safe?”

“Grande, Sylphy wants to know if it’s dangerous to go in.”

“I’m with the two of you, so it should be fine. It’s my family, after all.”

“Good point. She says because it’s her family home, it should be fine.”

“Then, shall we?” Sylphy said.

“Okay. Grande, lead the way.”

“Mm, as you wish.”

Grande began to slowly walk forward with us behind her. However...

“That tail is mega dangerous,” I commented.

“...Sorry.”

Grande was in a good mood, which meant she was swinging her tail back and forth and nearly smashed us with it. Really should have seen that coming.

“Let’s get on her back instead,” Sylphy suggested.

“Grande, mind if we ride on your back?”

“That’s fine.”

So, our tour of a real dragon’s nest began in earnest from atop Grande’s back. She was being especially careful with us, as there was pretty much no shaking whatsoever.

We ventured deep into the depths of the cave.

“Hah hah hah! Humanoid liquor sure is delicious!”

“And these ‘ham burger’ things are excellent as well!”

“Hey, we’re outta snacks! Someone go on outside and get some more.”

“Fine, fine. I’ll go hunt a wild boar or something.”

It was exactly what it looked like.

Yeah, I know. Outrageous right? As it turned out, Grande’s nest was connected to all the other grand dragon nests if you went deep in enough. It was like a shared space for them, or a banquet hall, or something.

The underground space was about as large as a small town. There were tons of stone, table-like structures all over, all big enough for dragons to use, so the scale was crazy big. Oh, and there were about two dozen grand dragons chilling out all over the place.

“This is terrifying.”

“A normal human could never hope to survive in an environment like this.”

All the dragons were like the massive beasts you’d see in a giant monster film. Just getting in the way of them while they were walking would turn any humanoid into minced meat.

So how exactly were Sylphy and I safe in this mega dangerous environment? Well...

“Y’know, I kinda feel like a tuna sitting on a chopping board,” I said.

“I do not know what a ‘tuna’ is,” said Sylphy, “but I somehow still understand what you’re saying.”

The two of us were on top of a giant table made of carved stone. Sitting on the stone surface would be uncomfortable, so I pulled some soft cushions from my inventory and the two of us were sitting tightly together. In front of us was nothing but the faces of grand dragons. From the outside, we must look like dinner on a dining room table.

I wasn’t too sure what was up with Grande. Her mom came over and dragged her to a corner of the banquet hall where some other dragons were butting heads with her. *Wonder what’s up...*

“Just to be clear, I don’t have infinite food and drink in my inventory, okay?” I told our hosts.

“Oh ho ho, we know! But I will say, this Fabled Visitor sure has a fascinating talent!”

“The last one was pretty boring. All they had was a tough body and super strength.”

“It really was unfortunate. No matter how much we hurt him, he wouldn’t give up or die.”

“In the end, he was so annoying that we threw him all the way to a humanoid settlement.”

The elder dragons had way more spikes on their heads and they surrounded me, talking about days long past. According to them, they’d met other Fabled Visitors. In the end, the human was so annoying that they yeeted him far away. What was he, Hercules or something?

“Does that mean he could speak to you guys too?” I asked them.

“Yes, but remember. Just because one speaks the language doesn’t mean they truly know how to communicate!”

“The guy just blabbered some nonsense before attacking us out of nowhere. I don’t really remember much more than that.”

Sounded like the other guy was a real meathead. I could imagine dealing with that type must’ve been a pain for the dragons. That said, I had my own problems, since they were basically forcing me to pull stuff out of my inventory for them. Who could possibly say no to a bunch of grand dragons?

While I thought that to myself, a single dragon returned from the corner of the banquet hall. I’d definitely seen that one before.

“Gramps, didn’t you once tell me a story about a dragon who fell in love with a human girl a long time ago?” The dragon asks with a high-pitched growl.

“Ah, I did, I did. They were quite the unique aqua dragon. They lived all the way out west.”

Ah, that must be Grande’s mom. If that’s her grandfather, then that’d make him Grande’s great grandfather?

“If I remember correctly, the dragon became a human so he could be with the woman, right? How’d he manage that? Is it easy to do?”

“Oh? Have you suddenly fallen for a human? At your age? Who is it? Don’t tell me it’s this Fabled Visitor.”

“It’s not for me!” Mommy Dragon insisted. “Delgis might be an idiot, but he is still my husband. So? What’s the story?”

“The process itself is not difficult, but it requires a catalyst, which makes it nearly impossible. You need a magic jewel about the size of a human eyeball.”

“What, really? That is a tough one...”

Okay, look, I wasn’t so stupid that I didn’t understand why Mommy Dragon was asking her grandfather about this. I wasn’t, but seriously...? How did it come to this? Who asked for this? Wasn’t this kind of sudden?

“Hey, do you have any magic jewels?”

“I...do not,” I said. Then a dragon sniffed me.

“You smell like you’re lying.”

Mommy Dragon growled and bared her fangs. *How can you tell?! What does a lie even smell like?*

Cold sweat ran down my face. Thankfully, Sylphy tilted her head and interjected.

“What’s wrong, Kousuke? That’s Grande’s mother, is it not? Is she threatening you?”

“Hah hah hah, it’s um... Er, ma’am?”

“Yes?” Mommy Dragon said, dangerously.

“I just want to be sure, but um, what do you plan to use such a magic jewel for?”

“Obviously it’s to turn Grande into a human. You said you aren’t turned on by Grande as a dragon, right?”

“That’s correct,” I said. “She’d be too much, even for me.”

“Then I reasoned that we could just turn Grande into a human instead!”

“Talk about taking the ball and running with it...” I held my head in my hands. It was then that I felt someone pulling at my arm.

“Kousuke, translate for me,” Sylphy insisted.

“Ah, um, okay. Try not to freak out?”

“Hm? Okay, I promise.”

I immediately translated the contents of my conversation with Mommy Dragon.

“...That’s unexpected,” Sylphy said.

“Yeah, I know.”

“Um, okay. Let me talk to her. Can you translate for me?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

For the time being, I transformed into a translation machine.

Chapter 6: The Birth of an Old-Sounding Dragon Girl

TRANSLATING WAS A REAL PAIN. Needless to say, Sylphy exposed everything about my love life to the dragons. It was all laid bare. Laid bare to every single large female grand dragon present in the banquet hall. It sucked.

The female dragons were having a field day, while the male ones were growling and grinning. Daddy Dragon, on the other hand, was having a meltdown.

“Is he still alive?”

“His tail appears to be twitching, so I’d guess so...?”

Before us was Daddy Dragon, his head smashed into the rock wall. He looked mega dead.

What happened for it to come to this? Well...

After hearing my translation, he lost his cool.

“I’ll never let that sex demon of a human near my daughter!”

It was awkward. The women beat him up a little. Oh, yeah, the reason his head was buried in the wall was because Mommy Dragon smashed it in there with her tail. I was never going to disobey a single thing she said, ever.

There was one other dragon who lost their cool.

“...”

After being freed from the clutches of the other women, Grande curled up into a ball by the wall.

She looked like all the power had been drained from her body. Understandably. The, um, romantic feelings she secretly harbored for me were also laid bare. Directly to me, even. The peer pressure, and the physical pressure, from those female dragons was really something to behold.

“Oh, I’ve never seen a magic jewel so big before...”

“Hm, the world sure is a vast place of many wonders! Anyway, we can use this

to perform the ritual.”

The elders surrounded me while peering down at the magic jewel I pulled out of my inventory, then began discussing the matter amongst themselves. There looked to be some younger dragons mixed in with the group, so maybe they were also using the situation as an excuse to pass down the details of the ritual to the next generation.

“All right, we’ve shared how to perform the ritual,” an elder dragon announced. “Let us begin. Daughter of Delgis, Grande. Come!”

The female dragons pulled Grande over by the tail. *C’mon, you gotta at least treat her more gently than that!*

“Now then, Grande, daughter of Delgis. We shall begin the ritual to turn you into a human woman.”

“...”

“Oh, Grande, dear. How long are you going to sulk?”

“What’s wrong with sulking?! Why did all my secrets have to be exposed in front of so many people? And in front of Kousuke, no less!”

“Because it’s fun for us? If I had to come up with another reason, it’s because you’re weak, I suppose!”

“What was I supposed to do?” Grande wailed. “I was surrounded by Mother and everyone else!”

In the dragon world, power was everything. There was nothing I could do to help her at that point, so I focused my attention on Sylphy.

“Hey, Sylphy, are you really okay with this?” I whispered to her.

“I’m fine with it,” she said. “I was certainly surprised to find out that Grande had those kinds of feelings for you, despite being a different species entirely, but... After hearing what she had to say, I understood. If anything, I have questions for you, given how you unconsciously won over her heart.”

“That wasn’t the plan, I swear. It’s true that I found her cute, but in a pet sort of way. I saw her as a friend, despite our differences, y’know...?”

I told Grande's mom all of this, but it was simply impossible for me to hold romantic feelings toward an actual dragon. I found her cute, the way she munched on hamburgers with that terrifying face of hers, or the way she rolled around in the sand under the sun.

So how did things come to this? If I said no, I'd be turned into a pile of meat. I was surprised to find out she felt that way about me, but I supposed I was also kind of happy about it?

Honestly, I'm just thunderstruck.

"Then we shall now perform the ritual on Grande, the daughter of Delgis. Let us begin!"

The dragons surrounded Grande and began to roar together, as if chanting something. In the center, Grande was holding the magic jewel and staying still. The jewel was about the size of a human fist, so it looked as small as a bead in her claws.

It felt like the dragon chants echoed throughout the cave and into my head. It was honestly just loud noise, and yet I found myself wanting to keep listening.

Eventually the jewel in Grande's hand started to show some changes. It radiated a bright light.

Just as I was wondering what she was meant to do with it, Grande suddenly swallowed the jewel.

Er, is that really safe? Won't she get sick?

Nervous as all hell, I watched as Grande's body began to emit light and physically morph. It looked painful... I hoped she was okay.

The light began to shine brighter, making it difficult to look directly at what was happening. Everything was white. It reminded me of the light that appeared when I upgraded my workbench or something.

"Did it work...?"

After the light faded, there was undoubtedly a girl in the center of the circle of dragons. She was far away, so I couldn't see her in detail, but I could tell she has horns on her head, dragon wings, and dragon-like hands and feet. Also that

she was nude.

“Hmm, did we mess up?”

“I’d say we can call this a victory.”

“Instead of becoming fully human, ain’t it better that she has unique qualities?”

The elders were all talking amongst themselves about Grande’s transformation. *You guys didn’t screw up, did you? Why do you sound so unsure of yourselves?*

“My body feels odd... I feel weak.”

Grande, on the other hand, was inspecting her new body. Opening and closing her hands, jumping tentatively up into the air. Her new body did seem weaker than her old one.

“Come on, Grande, dear. Go on and show Kousuke.”

“All right!” Grande said. She spread her wings and flew toward me.

“Whoa!”

She ended up speeding like a bullet, smashing into the ceiling and getting stuck.

Um...

Grande managed to pull her head out of the stone ceiling and fell right in front of me. It didn’t look like she was hurt, at least. She must have been tough as hell to fall from that high up without injury.

“E-everything feels so different!” she said. “My body’s so light, and controlling my magic is harder than it used to be...”

“H-hey, are you okay?” I asked.

“I’m not sure I am. Getting used to this body will take some effort.”

Grande rubbed her pale butt before standing and walking up to me. I gave her a long look, from the tips of her toes to the top of her head.

Poking out from the sides of her shoulder-length blonde hair were two scary-

looking curved horns. On her back were a set of dragon wings the same color as her hair. Everything from her elbows to her hands was covered in scales the same color as her blonde hair. Her fingertips were equipped with tough-looking claws. Around the center of her chest was what looked like a shining magic jewel. Going further down, below her knees were scales like the ones on her arms. Her feet were also equipped with sharp claws.

Mm-hm. She was a mix between a human and a dragon.

Hm? What's the deal with her breasts? Bigger than Ira's or the harpies', for sure. They're not huge, but that's totally fine.

"K-Kousuke, how do I look?"

"Let me take a good look at you up close. Come here."

"O-okay..."

Grande trotted over to me, and I took her hands so I could get a feel for her. Her claws were warm, but definitely tough like a dragon's. And sharp. I raised my gaze from her claws and looked her in the eyes.

They were golden, but her pupils were different from a human's; they looked snake-like.

Grande started to turn bright red from all the staring.

"S-say something."

"You're cute as hell," I said. "What do you think, Sylphy?"

"I fully agree. She's adorable. I just can't believe that such a big dragon could become such a cute girl. And hey, it sounds like you can speak our language now."

"Oh? Now that you mention it, it seems that I can. I understand your words, Dark Elf."

"My name's Sylphy, not Dark Elf. Call me that from now on, okay?"

"Oh, right, right! Understood, Sylphy. You may call me Grande! It is a pleasure to finally make your acquaintance."

Grande puffed her chest out proudly.

Your expression is great and all, but let's cover up that chest of yours, shall we?



↑
AND NOW...
キ

キ
TA-DA!
!

Just as I was about to pull something out of my inventory for her to cover up with, Mommy Dragon stretched out her neck to interject.

“Well? Isn’t Grande adorable?”

“She is,” I agreed.

“Which means now you can mate with her, correct?”

“Couldn’t you try and be more subtle?!” I yelped. “And uh, we’re gonna you know, take our time and do this properly. Grande’s gotta get used to her body and all.”

“Awww, you sure you don’t wanna do it now?”

“No!” I said, adamant. “I’m not into that sort of thing!”

Having sex in front of all these dragons was way too high-level for me.

And stop trying to make your daughter do stuff like that in public! What the hell is wrong with these dragons!?

“What’s wrong?” Sylphy asked.

“Mommy Dragon wants me to have sex with Grande right here and, like, show her.”

“Wha...?”

Even Sylphy was weirded out.

Poor Grande had turned bright red, shielding her face with both claws.

“Um, let’s change the subject, shall we?” I said. “Oh, I know! Now that Grande has a human form, can she change back into a dragon?”

“Hrm... I-I wonder. In the old legends, the dragon who became a human was able to transform whenever they wanted to.”

According to the elders, she should be able to change back and forth after training.

“Not that we have a clue how that works! Hah hah hah!”

“After all, it’s been some thousand years since anyone performed this ritual.”

“We never had any interest in the dang thing.”

“As far as us dragons are concerned, falling in love with a human is a pretty unique kink—GYAH?!”

One of the elder dragons was sent flying by the female dragons. Talk about a mood killer.

“We support your love, Grande!”

“I think a love that transcends species is just wonderful!”

“It’s so romantic!”

Grande retreated a little as the female dragons approached her excitedly. She was already lost among them before, but now that their sizes were totally different, she was being overwhelmed. I imagined this must have been pretty scary for her.

“Grande, if you train hard enough, you should be able to completely transform into a human.”

“Mm, work hard at absorbing your magic jewel. When you’ve completed your transformation, you will become a being beyond a grand dragon. A being that surpasses our race. Be careful to not let your great power control you.”

“I-I understand,” said Grande.

The elder dragons, including the one that had been sent flying, had all straightened their backs and were suddenly acting their age. *If only they’d done that earlier... Ever heard the phrase, “there is safety in silence”?*

“So, um, Grande?” I said.

“Y-yes?”

“Here’s to happy times ahead of us.”

“Ah... Yes, I’m looking forward to it!”

Grande smiled widely.

After wrapping things up with the dragons, we crawled out of the nest and

back below the light of the sun. The dragons were apparently going to bed after eating and drinking their fill.

“They’ll likely sleep for the next few days,” Grande said.

“Isn’t that a bit much?” I asked.

“That’s how dragons are. Unlike humanoids, we don’t have to really do much work. We basically just eat and sleep. Few are foolish enough to try and attack the home of a dragon.”

“I’d bet... There’d be no escaping a group of dragons like that.”

“Precisely. Though I imagine you might be able to make a miracle happen, Kousuke.”

“Nah,” I said. “If that many dragons came at me at once, I’d be doomed. You guys can dig under the ground, after all.”

If I tried to dig my way out, they’d be able to follow. I couldn’t face enemies head-on, so I’d prefer to never be in that situation with the grand dragons.

“But you could probably annihilate them all if you wanted to, no?” Grande pressed me.

“I’d never do something that horrific,” I told her. “They’re your family.”

“I suppose that’s true.”

“Generally speaking, I’m a man of peace, you know.”

“R-right...”

What, you got complaints? Take this!

With a roar, I took my hands and ruffled up her golden blonde hair, causing her to close her eyes and shake. The feeling of her hair and her scalp were brand new to her, and she clearly didn’t know what to do with herself.

“We gotta get you used to your new body, ASAP,” I said.

“I-I agree... I just feel weird all over.”

“How about some light exercise? I’d be happy to accompany you,” Sylphy added.

“Oh, good idea. Jumping and flying around with your new body to see how it feels is a solid move.”

“Hmm, then let me give it a try.”

The three of us decided to do some light exercise together. First up was some gentle running.

“No problem,” Grande said. “Although it does feel odd running on two legs.”

“Well, you were going around on all fours before now.”

“If anything, I find it impressive that you’ve taken so quickly to running on two legs after all this time,” Sylphy said, complimenting Grande.

“Agreed.”

Next up we had her run at a full sprint. She tried it, and ended up yelling in alarm.

“She sure went flying,” Sylphy commented.

“That was...awful.”

With her first step, Grande dug her foot into the ground and sent herself rocketing dozens of meters away.

“So, she goes flying if she puts one hundred percent into it, huh?”

“Maybe her muscle strength is the same, even though her weight and size have gone down?” I mused.

“Hrm... Kousuke, could you set down a brick block?”

“No problemo!” I replied, and did as I was told.

The brick blocks were composed of solid brick stuck together with cement, so they had pretty damn high durability.

“That was terrifying...” Grande said, back on solid ground.

“Grande, try punching this brick wall with everything you’ve got,” Sylphy told her.

“Hrm? All right. Heeyah!”

Grande’s fist annihilated the brick block in one strike. She didn’t just make a

hole, she completely disintegrated the thing. Its durability must have hit zero, so it just disappeared into the void.

“This is crazy...” I said.

“Hrm. Kousuke, set up another block,” Sylphy instructed.

“Aye, aye.”

“Grande, I want you to punch the block again, with everything you have. But this time, no using magic.”

“No strength enhancing magic?” Grande asked. “Okay, I’ll give it a try.”

Grande settled into a stance, and after putting some distance between herself and the block, she once again thrust her fist forward. *Fwoop!*

Grande’s fist was buried in the block.

“What?! Oww!”

Grande pulled her fist back with tears in her eyes and rubbed her right hand with her left. She wasn’t bleeding or anything, but she did look like she was in pain. I felt bad for her, so I had her drink a life potion.

“Hrm, I see now,” Sylphy said. “It’s likely that her abilities have adjusted to fit her size after gaining a human form. Her magical power might very well be the same, or even more powerful than before.”

“So, basically...?” I trailed off, unsure.

“In other words, while her physical body is about average size and weight for a humanoid, her magical output and overall quantity is still dragon-level, or even larger,” Sylphy explained. “That’s why, when she uses magical strengthening like she would’ve as a full dragon, she’s able to produce incredible power despite her smaller body. It’s likely that a normal humanoid body wouldn’t be able to handle that kind of power, so her current physical body is probably as tough as a dragon’s.”

Sylphy closed her eyes to think.

Hmm, so basically she’s like a jumbo jet that’s been turned into a small Cessna, but the engine output is still at the same level as the jumbo jet, so when

it goes full blast, it zooms off?

Normally the plane itself would fall apart as a result, but the fact that it hasn't means it's just as tough as the jumbo jet still? ...Man, what am I even talking about?

“So, the problem here is that her magical output is so powerful that if she goes full blast, she might cause something tragic to happen?” I asked.

“Exactly,” said Sylphy. “The fact that she unconsciously uses magic to strengthen herself is the kind of thing I’d expect from a dragon, but it’d be dangerous to have her live among humans while doing that.”

“D-dangerous...?” Grande said. “Really?”

“Yes, really. For example, imagine Grande is asleep and swings her tail around. If magic strengthening is happening unconsciously while she’s asleep, anyone on the other end of her tail would be sliced to pieces.”

“That’s terrifying.”

“You’re in even more danger, Kousuke,” Sylphy said. “Imagine the two of you are in the middle of, well, getting busy, and emotions are running high so she goes at you full throttle...”

“...Oh.”

My bones would be smashed, or in the worst-case scenario, I’d be crushed.

That’s awful! Her tail could be dangerous in that scenario too. I’m not gonna say how or why.

As Sylphy discussed the potential for disaster, Grande’s face went from blushing, to turning pale, to being covered in tears. It was true that this could be a big problem going forward.

“K-Kousuke offered me one of his precious magic jewels and I finally acquired a human body, now all of this...?” Grande said.

Tears trailed down Grande’s cheeks.

Aw, c’mon. Don’t cry.

“Sylphy, do you have any good ideas?” I asked.

“Well... We could train her so that she can consciously use magic strengthening instead of doing it unconsciously.”

“Oh, right. The elder grand dragon said something about her training her powers. Anything else?”

“You could use a slave collar,” Sylphy said.

“Excuse me?”

You mean, like, put a slave collar on Grande? Actually, wait, if I remember correctly, I was told that they do something about the body's magical power. What was it again?

“Slave collars are magic tools that use the wearer's magical power to create magical circuits and limit the wearer's actions,” Sylphy explained “If you used that system as a base, you might be able to make a tool that can control Grande's unconscious magic strengthening.”

“So, like a Grande-exclusive limiter sort of thing? If that's the case, then I wouldn't want to include any unnecessary functions like preventing her from taking it off, or forcing her to listen to orders. It'd be dangerous if she couldn't take the dang thing off herself,” I said.

Sylphy nodded in response.

“Of course. Back in the elf village is an artisan who specializes in making magic tools. I think we can figure this out.”

“Awesome. Grande, looks like things'll be a-okay.”

“...Yeah... Thank you, Sylphy.”

“Hee hee, you're more of a crybaby than I thought,” Sylphy said with a warm smile as she pulled a handkerchief from out of nowhere and cleaned off Grande's face.

Aw, I'm so glad they're getting along.

I waited patiently before gently patting Grande on the head.

“If the artisan can't figure it out, I'll use my skills to whip up something that'll work. No worries, it's all gonna be okay.”

“...’Kay,” Grande smiled, her eyes still red.

Yeah, she’s a cutie. Actually, now that I think about it...

“Um, shouldn’t we get her some clothes?” I asked.

“...That’s a good point.”

“Clothes, eh? I forgot that humanoids wear such things.”

Grande had been marching around in the buff without complaint since she’d transformed, so Sylphy and I had thought nothing of it either.

“But I imagine normal clothes won’t fit me properly,” Grande said. “Not with the way my arms and legs are.”

Grande looked down at the dragon-like feet and hands. Shirts and pants weren’t gonna work there. Hell, she had wings on her back to boot.

“Let’s go with this for now,” I said.

I still had the bikini armor I made as a joke from when Sylphy, Ira, Melty, and a bunch of other demi-human women had their little fashion show thing. I pulled it out for Grande. At the moment, it was the only thing I had that would fit her.

Once we got back to Arichburg, or even the rear base, I might be able to get her something to wear up top that’d fit other winged races. Actually, perhaps I could use my workbench to make her something?

...Nah, the bikini armor is fine for now.

“That’s...” Sylphy trailed off.

“Yeah. I had it stuffed in my inventory ever since.”

“Hm... It looks light and easy to wear. How does one put it on?” Grande asked.

“Sylphy, you’re up.”

She grabbed the armor from me and helped Grande put it on. It was red. That was the only color to roll with when it came to bikini armor, obviously.

“This armor is as stupid and pointless as ever,” I said. “But that’s what makes it great.”

“It’s barely covering any of the things you’d want covered,” said Sylphy.

“I certainly don’t hate it!” Grande added.

This was her first outfit, so I might have been off the mark with this assumption, but it was possible that Grande just had a natural resistance to wearing clothes. After all, she did spend her life as a dragon completely in the nude, so it made sense she wouldn’t be super into the idea of putting on more.

“Make sure you try on all kinds of clothes,” I encouraged her. “I’m sure you’d look great. You too, Sylphy.”

Sylphy was usually always dressed in her black leather combat suit, so it’d be nice if she wore something cute every now and then. Like a knit sweater or something? Maybe even some fashion glasses?

“Hrm, well, if you say so, Kousuke, I’ll try other clothes out too,” Grande said.

“Ha ha, you’re a tough customer,” said Sylphy. “But I suppose from now on I’ll try and work on being more fashionable.”

“That’d be incredible. I’ll make any clothes you ladies would like. Actually, I guess it’s better for the economy if we buy them, huh?”

If I just went and made everything myself, the poor clothing stores would be put out of business. Unless it was something we couldn’t find on our own, we ought to buy from the marketplace as much as possible.

“Then shall we head back to the elf village?” I said.

“Sounds good, but... How?”

“Huh? We can just ride Grande’s back and...”

I turned to Grande, who stood there in her red bikini armor in awkward silence.

“Um, what do you need to do to change back...?” I asked her.

“...I’m not sure.”

“Can you fly like that?” Sylphy asked.

“I can, but...I don’t know if it would be safe.”

After she tried and failed to switch back a few times, we instead had her practice flying in her human form. If she learned how to fly safely, I could

handle the rest.

“I have a good idea,” I said.

“Why do I suddenly feel concerned...?” Sylphy replied.

How rude. It'll be fine! I've got this covered! Just trust in Kousuke!

“GAAAGH!”

While listening to the screams coming from far off, I set up a golem workbench in front of the grand dragon nest and got to work with my item creator.

“What’s the plan?” asked Sylphy. “A saddle won’t work when her body is so small.”

“I’m making something even better,” I told her.

But what was I gonna do about the design?

I was basically trying to make a gondola for Grande to carry. I could design it like a ski lift, where our legs are dangling in the air, or maybe make it be more like a basket. Hell, I could even make it a proper carriage-like gondola... The simplest and lightest to carry would be the ski lift design, though, so I started with that.

For the frame, I went with steel because it was so tough. I then created landing legs for each of the four corners. For the seats, I upholstered them to make it as comfy as possible. Then I added seat belts and a handle at the top to make it easy for Grande to carry. That should do it!

Grande-Exclusive Gondola—Materials: Steel Spring × 6, Cloth × 4, Fiber × 20, Leather Hide × 3

Bam, nailed it. I put the request into the golem workbench queue.

Ever since I upgraded my workbench, nearly all the crafting times on items were dramatically shortened. It depended on what I was making, but a lot of

the times dropped to under half, or, in the best-case scenario, a tenth of the time they used to take. It was totally worth the struggle to upgrade the bench.

And so, shortly after entering the order, the whole thing was completed, steel frame and long seat included.

“What is this?” Sylphy asked.

“It’s a gondola for Grande to carry. You and I sit here, put on the seat belts to lock ourselves in, then Grande grabs the handle above us and flies.”

“I get it... For safety’s sake, shouldn’t you have made it a closed box?”

“I considered that, but I thought it might add too much air drag.”

“Wow, that’s a good point.”

A carriage-shaped gondola would likely face a lot of wind pressure directly on its front. That meant Grande’s hands would be pushed backward, which would force her to exert more effort.

“But it’s probably gonna take some time for Grande to get used to this thing,” I said. “I guess I’ll make some other, different types of gondolas too, since I have the time.”

“Nothing wrong with having a lot of options,” Sylphy agreed.

The two of us brainstormed, using the Grande-Exclusive Gondola #01 as a base, and came up with more variations. I ended up making the box-like gondola that was Sylphy’s idea, a basket that resembled the type you’d see attached to a hot air balloon, a birdcage-style gondola with metal bars around it, and one that looked like swings connected to a metal frame with chains. They were subsequently dubbed #02, #03, #04, and #05.

“So, I’m done making them... Which one do you think is best?”

“Well, we should probably prioritize ease of flight for Grande, no?”

“Yeah... Guess the fastest way to see is to just have her try them out. Grande!”

The dragon girl zoomed over our heads, followed immediately by the sound of some boulders getting smashed, and then a girl’s scream.

I turned around to find Grande's head stuck in a boulder, her tail swishing back and forth in a panic. It hurt to look at.

Grande broke free and shook her head, pebbles and such rolling off her body. A normal human would've been killed by that sort of collision, but she was totally fine. Dragons sure were tough.

"Grrr... I just can't figure out how hard to push myself," she said. "You called, Kou... Er, what're those?"

"I figured we could sit in them and you can carry us as you fly," I explained.

"Ah, I see. I just have to grab the handle on the top, right?"

Grande looked over the various gondolas with great interest.

"Yup. Could you try them out and see which one is easiest to fly with?"

"Mm-hm, leave it to me!"

Grande spread her wings and began to float, first grabbing the handle of the basket-like gondola, #03. Since there was nothing inside of it, it was way too light, which made it difficult to fly with. I called Grande back and put some stuff inside to give it some weight, then had her fly back up again.

She definitely looked like she was having an easier time then. I went and added weight to the other gondolas, about 80 kg, then locked it all in place with the seatbelts. Sylphy and I were both on the lighter side, but it was possible we might have her carry Danan or Sir Leonard in the future.

As she practiced with the gondolas, Grande's flight began to stabilize, bit by bit.

"This one, this one, and this one are the easiest to fly with," she pronounced.

After about an hour of testing, the ski lift model (#01), the birdcage model (#04), and the swing model (#05) turned out to be the best for Grande. The box and the basket ended up producing too much drag, so they were hard to use safely.

"And how did it feel to fly?" I asked.

"It should be fine," she said. "Once I'd gotten used to flying with them, it was

a snap. There should be no problems if I fly normally.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, if I were locked in airborne combat, I’d end up going too fast for them.”

“Ah, I see. Well, you’re not going to be engaging in any midair combat while carrying us, so it should be fine.”

“I hope so,” Grande agreed. “Either way, I’ll be able to go faster than I did before, so if things get hairy, I can just speed ahead and outpace the enemy.”

“Wouldn’t that put us in danger...?” Sylphy grimaced.

The g-forces would probably knock us unconscious at a certain point. A legit red-out. The wind pressure was something to be concerned about, too. I’d have to count on Grande and Sylphy’s protective shield magic to account for that.

“Anyway, shall we give this a go? Which one do you want to use?”

“I’d personally prefer #04, as it’s the safest...” Sylphy said.

“Then #04 it is.”

Model #04 was the birdcage. It had been defensively strengthened to protect against bird strikes. It would prevent us from getting hit head-on by a bird, but it definitely won’t protect us from the blood and guts. But ultimately, I figured we’d be protected by wind magic anyway, so that was fine.

Once Sylphy and I climbed into the gondola and put on our seat belts, I called out to Grande.

“Okay, we’re good to go.”

“Mm, roger that. Careful not to bite your tongues!”

Grande rose into the air and grabbed the handle of the gondola, moving further up into the sky. Beautiful vistas, the wind, the g-forces pressing us down into our seats! Where did that leave us...?

“Uggh...”

“Aaagh...”

After landing in the clearing just outside of the elf village, Sylphy looked pale

and I ended up vomiting.

Clearly, this wasn't gonna work. The up and down motions, the shaking, the speed—it wasn't doable. Sylphy used light spirit magic on herself to feel better, and she cast some on me as well.

Ah, that's the ticket... I feel much better.

"I-I'm sorry..." said Grande.

"N-no, it's totally not your fault," I assured her.

"He's right, Grande," said Sylphy. "These seats just don't work. Maybe #05 would've been best."

Because #04's seats were attached to the frame so tightly, all of Grande's rocking affected us. If we were riding the swing-like #05, the seats might've been able to move independently to compensate for that. Still, there was probably plenty to improve on that front. I could make the chains a bit stretchy and work on something for horizontal movement as well.

Once I was feeling better, I buried my vomit with my shovel.

Man, it's been a while since I felt bad enough for that. Ugh... Just thinking about it is enough to make me wanna go again.

"Once we've rested for a bit, let's go see that elf you mentioned about making a limiter for Grande," I said to Sylphy. "We don't have a ton of time on our hands."

It was the fourth day of our little vacation. Technically, we had a full week, but that meant we only had three days left. We ought to take care of the Grande issue quickly.

"Right, right. The sooner the better. Hopefully we can get this order completed while we're still here," Sylphy agreed.

"If we can't, then I'll just have to get it made back at the frontlines. Ira and the others could probably make what we need, no problem."

I pulled a bottle of drinking water out of my inventory and took a sip, then passed Sylphy one as well.

“Want some water, Grande?” I asked.

“Mm, that I do!”

She probably couldn't open the cap on her own, so I did it for her before handing her the bottle. Much to my surprise, though, Grande was quite good with her claws. She had no problem gripping the bottle and drinking from it.

“Mm, in this new body, this small bottle of water is more than satisfying.”

“I bet,” Sylphy said, laughing. “You're, like, dozens of times smaller, maybe hundreds, right? A lot of stuff is gonna feel different for you, but I'm sure you'll get the hang of it.”

“You got that right, Sylphy,” I agreed. “I suppose I'll make a bed and add it to the living room tonight.”

“Hm? I do not mind sleeping on the ground.”

“If you're going to live as one of us, you gotta change the way you do things a little bit. I'm telling you, a warm, soft bed *rules*.”

“Hm, does it...?” Grande tilted her head, thought it over for a moment, then nodded, satisfied with my explanation. “I'd be lying if I said I wasn't interested in experiencing life as a humanoid.”

That's it. I'm gonna get you used to our way of life. Honestly, the image of Grande sleeping on the ground brings abuse to mind, and that doesn't float with me. It's painful to look at and just feels awful.

“Are you feeling better?” said Sylphy. “We should hurry and talk to the artisan.”

“Yes, ma'am!”

“Excellent! I shall follow your lead.”

And so, the three of us once again entered the elf village.

“Wh-who is this young lass?”

“Remember the grand dragon who brought us here when we first arrived? This is her. Her name's Grande.”

“Mm, I am Grande. It is a pleasure.”

The elf guards stopped us at the village entrance. Once Sylphy explained, they were left with their mouths wide open.

“Sh-she’s a dragon?”

“Indeed, I am. Shall I show you my fiery breath?”

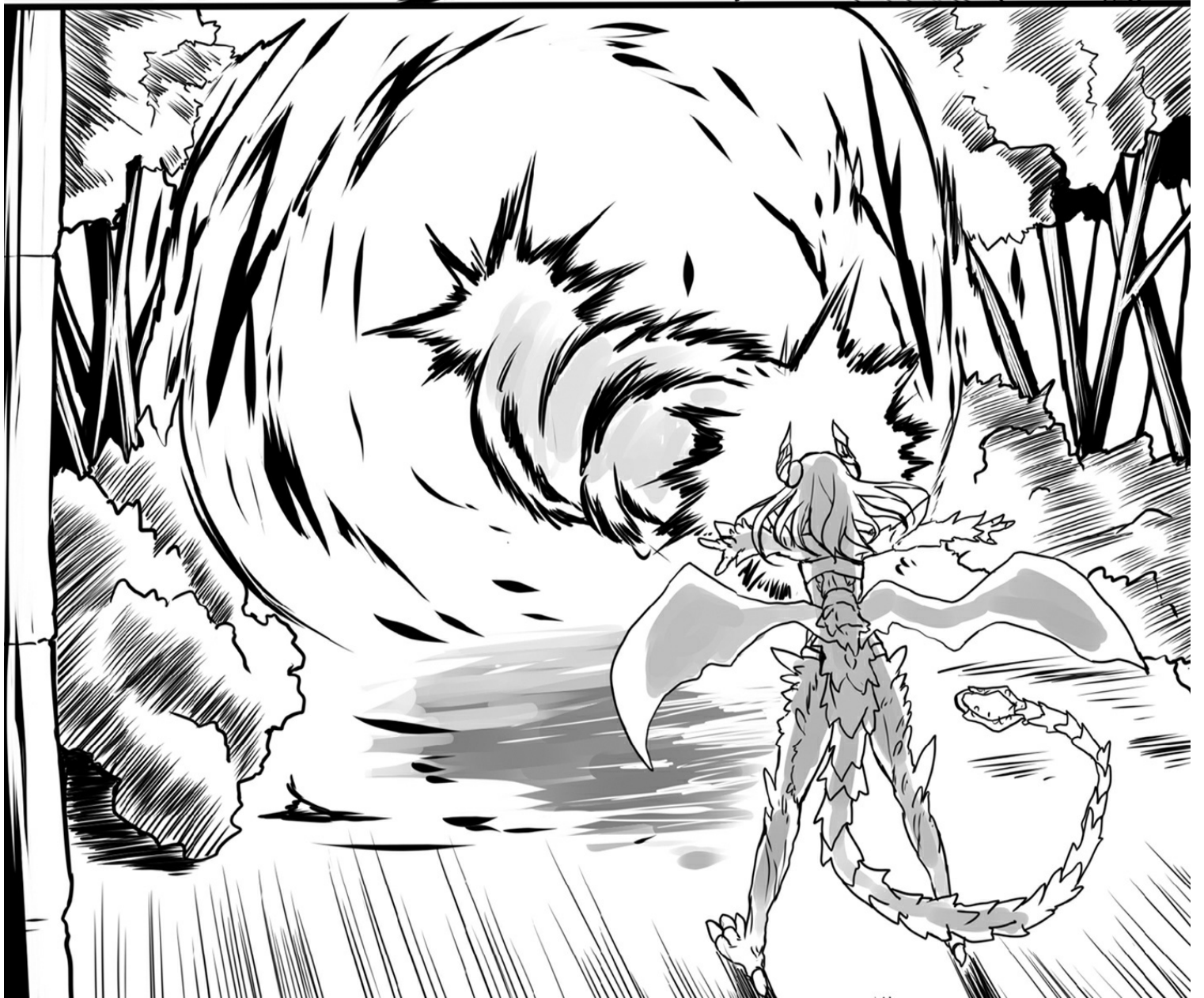
“Er, you can do that in your current form?” I asked.

Well, that was a surprise. In her humanoid form, she was the same height as Ira, give or take. I couldn’t even imagine what it’d look like if she used her fiery dragon breath.

“Mm, I’ve yet to try since gaining this form,” said Grande. “Let me see...”

Grande turned her back to the village entrance and looked up into the sky.

A huge noise rocketed out from her and into the air. A thick, white beam erupted from her mouth and shot up into the sky as she yelled. I could feel the temperature in the area rise immediately.



Holy hell, my cheeks are burning up!

“Phew, I did it.”

“That was it...?”

Cold sweat rolled down Sylphy’s face as she sought confirmation. That “fiery dragon breath” was more like a laser cannon as far as I was concerned. The “KaBOOM Cannon” maybe? Was she going to carve a giant hole into some mountain?

It was flashy as hell, but I found myself curious as to how powerful it actually was. Could a brick wall three meters thick guard against it? ...Probably not.

When I turned around, I found the guards frozen in place, pale, with sweat pouring down their faces. Which was understandable. Dragons were dangerous, but what Grande just did made her look even more terrifying than the average dragon.

“Anyway, that’s how it is,” I told the guards.

“I-I get it now... She’s not dangerous or anything, right?”

“I am a smart, reasonable dragon!” Grande insisted. “I would never rampage in the elf village.”

“Of course you wouldn’t. You’re reasonable.”

There really was no reason to doubt her. She could be a little stubborn, but she was smart, compassionate, and peaceful. Hell, you could even call her a scaredy cat.

“Right, right!” she added, nodding happily.

Yeah, sending her into active combat wasn’t gonna happen. The day I did that would be the day I died of guilt. If nothing else, I needed to work hard so that it’d never come to that.

“A-all right, just be careful,” said the guard.

“There, no problem,” said Sylphy. “Now let’s move, you two.”

“Roger that.”

“I shall!”

The two of us followed Sylphy into the elf village, making our way toward the workshops at its center.

Around there you could always hear someone clanging against something else, or some sort of mechanical noise. Some of the elves were taking breaks between work, while others were chatting amongst themselves.

“Heya, Sylphy,” one of them called out. “How were the woods?”

“Lots to see, that’s for sure,” Sylphy told them. “There was a beautiful waterfall that made rainbows, and a giant fairy tree even bigger than the one at the gathering hall.”

“Wow. And who’s the young lady? Don’t think I’ve ever seen a species like hers before.”

“I am the grand dragon, Grande! The very same dragon who flew these two here a few days ago.”

“Wait, dragons can take human forms!?”

“I’ve never heard anything about that before.”

“Sorry, but could I sketch you real quick?”

The various artisans began to make a ruckus around us. As for me, I was a little way away, crouching behind a barrel in stealth mode. If those people found me, they were gonna surround me and force gems and mithril out of me!

“And where might Sir Kousuke be?”

“He should be around here somewhere.”

“There he is! Surround him!”

“NOOO!!!”

Considering Grande and Sylphy were both there, of course they’d assume I was there too. I was immediately surrounded by the others, though it’s not like I was trying to hide all that seriously.

“Actually, there’s something I’d like you guys to make for me,” I told the artisans.

“Please, we’re all ears.”

“Do you need an aphrodisiac? I have one that works extremely well.”

“If you’re giving a gift to a woman, I’d recommend gems.”

“No, no, something made of gold or silver is best.”

“What about some beautiful cloth, or a set of clothes?”

“These are all great ideas, but not for today,” I told them. “Sylphy?”

“Right. We want you to make us a magic tool.”

Sylphy went on to ask if the artisans could make a magic tool, based on a slave collar, that would limit Grande’s inadvertent and dangerous body-strengthening magic.

“Hmmm, I see.”

“Something based on slave collars, you say...? No, wait. Couldn’t we use a protection bracelet?”

“Ooh, good point! They spread out the magic circuits within the body.”

“But ordinary materials won’t be able to hold up against a dragon’s magical powers.”

“Then in terms of materials...”

The elves directed their gazes toward me. I figured this was coming.

“I’ll get you whatever you need, as long as it’s within my abilities,” I told them.

The elves grinned devilishly.

They’re creeping me out!

In the end, I supplied them with a fairly plentiful amount of mithril, rough gemstones, and magic jewel shards. I initially tried to have them make do with magicite, but the elves used a magic tool to measure Grande’s magical output and discovered that, in order to take in her magical power, it’d take either a chunk of magicite the size of Grande’s head, or eighty pieces of standard

magicite.

When I asked if there were any other materials we could use instead, magic jewels came up, so I offered some of those. Things got crazy when I did that. I ended up having to lie and say I only had a limited supply. It took a while to get them to give up.

“That was awful,” I said to Sylphy.

“Even the spirits of the dead would’ve gone pale when faced with their lust for more jewels...”

Back at Sylphy’s house, Grande and I both let out deep sighs. While I was dealing with the artisans, she was getting requests to be sketched by the local elf artist who recorded happenings in the village. The elves who dealt in alchemy and magic tool creation were asking her for her hair, too. Dragon scales and hide were fairly well-known materials, but dragons typically didn’t have hair, so that was a whole new world of possibilities to them.

Grande had no way to deny them, so she ended up giving each person a few strands of her hair in order to get them off her back. Lemme tell you, they were pleased as punch. It turned out that mad scientist types existed everywhere.

“Just to let you know,” I warned her, “when we get back to Arichburg, Ira and the others are probably gonna do the same thing.”

“I’ve learned my lesson,” said Grande. “Feeding a crazed beast is the best way to get it to calm down.”

In other words, she’d already learned the fine art of giving up, and how it was tied to her own peace and quiet. *Ha ha ha, she’s learning!*

In my case, the things I created were pretty world-shaking, and as long as I had the time, I could produce them infinitely. If I didn’t draw the line somewhere, it could be very dangerous. Especially with the magic jewels. Depending on how they were used, they could become more dangerous destructive weapons than the spirit gems were. I couldn’t let these things circulate freely.

Quite frankly, if our objective was to simply annihilate the Holy Kingdom, we could just mass-produce bombs using magic jewels and then burn their

territories to the ground. It'd be easy, but we weren't going to do that.

"I'm glad we were able to put in an order for the magic tool."

"Same," I said. "But what exactly is a protection bracelet?" I'd never heard of such a thing before.

"Every now and then, elven children are born with enormous magical powers," Sylphy said. "Just by crying or screaming, they're able to bring great destruction upon their surroundings, and even hurt the people who care about them."

"Whoa... That sounds dangerous."

"It is. Protection bracelets are the tools we use for such children. They're designed so that if a child's magical output goes above a certain level, they absorb the magical energy so that the child can't hurt themselves or others."

"What happens to the magical power they absorb?"

"It's naturally released. Though in this case, the artisans might end up giving it a special new function. A dragon's magical power is enormous, so even if it doesn't efficiently make use of her power, they should be able to add a useful effect or two."

"But wait," I said. "The tool's supposed to take Grande's dangerous powers and put a limit on them. Wouldn't it be moving backward to take those powers and use them to buff her abilities...?"

"...That's true."

"...Sure is," Grande added.

Sylphy tilted her head and Grande nodded.

"Well, all we can do is leave it to the pros," I said. "For now, how about we have something light to eat?"

The sun would be setting soon. I was pretty hungry after everything that just went down.

"Hamburgers!" Grande exclaimed.

"You sure do love those, huh? I mean, I'm fine with it."

I grinned smugly and pulled a burger from my inventory, then set it down on a plate on the dining table. Grande happily reached for it while I picked up a burger of my own. Sylphy returned from the kitchen with a bottle of mead.

“Hee hee...”

Grande’s eyes were literally twinkling as she bit into her burger. She smacked her tail against the floor, clearly pleased that we could eat the same burgers. ... *Wait, hold on.*

“Grande, your tail,” I said. “No hitting the floor, or else you’re gonna make a hole.”

“Ugh, controlling that is going to be difficult...”

“It’s fine. This house is alive, after all. It’ll fix itself if it gets a little bruised and battered,” Sylphy explained with a smile.

All elf houses were designed as if folks carved homes into them, but it turned out they really were just trees. Did they use magic to do that? I was pretty curious...

Grande looked relieved to have avoided Sylphy’s ire. Despite the tone she sometimes took, our dragon friend was an earnest scaredy cat who was capable of great empathy.

“I’m so sorry...” she said.

“It’s fine, really,” Sylphy reassured her. “There are plenty of other demi-humans who express their feelings with their tails. Lizardmen and lamia, for example. They slap their tails against the ground when emotions run high. They sometimes make holes in the ground, too. That sort of thing isn’t exclusive to you, so don’t worry about it. And I’m the master of this house, so if I’m not concerned, you don’t have to be either, okay?”

“Okay... But I’ll still be careful from now on.”

“Aw, you’re such a good dragon.”

“Mm, I’ll try my best!”

Sylphy and Grande smiled at one another. They were gonna get along just fine. Things would be good with Ira and the harpies, but Melty was the one I

was worried about. Grande still seemed a bit frightened of her.

“I want you to tell me all about yourself, Grande,” Sylphy said. “Up until now, we haven’t had the chance to properly speak to one another.”

“Ooh, it would be my pleasure. I’d also love to know more about you.”

“Absolutely.”

Watching them smile and talk amongst themselves gave me a good feeling about all of this.

POV: ???

FAR EAST OF ARICHBURG, night had already fallen. Two individuals came face to face in an office illuminated only by candlelight. One was a young clergyman clad in pure white priest robes that were lined with gold and silver thread. The other man was wearing a brown, hooded robe. If one were to describe two unique qualities of the hooded man, it would have to be the snout peeking out from under the hood and the tail poking out from under his robe.

“Well?”

“Everything’s in place. All we have to do is wait for results. If the information I received is correct, that is.”

The robed man shrugged his shoulders.

“There should be no concerns on that end. I am more concerned about the Fabled Visitor.”

“We don’t need to worry about him. He broke out of his cell in less than an hour, after all.”

“Without any tools?”

“Yup. Well, I don’t know if he actually had nothing on him, but before we dumped him in the carriage, I had him empty out everything he had. He can be pretty careful when it comes to stuff like this, though. I wouldn’t be surprised if

he hid some weapons or tools on his person.”

“I see... What a pain,” the young clergyman said with a serious expression on his face.

As if to agree with the man, the robed man’s hood moved—he had nodded.

“A pain, indeed. I know that all too well. That’s why I don’t recommend picking a fight with him. The harpies will blow you to smithereens.”

“The aerial bombs you spoke of, yes? Hard to believe.”

“I do my job well,” the robed man said. “I’m not about to go reporting fabricated stories. Those things are so powerful that even the genius cyclops mage said it’d be difficult to defend against them with her magic. And anyway, that’s only a small piece of why that guy’s terrifying.”

“Abnormally fast harvests, less than half a day to build a powerful fortress, his ability to blow away a fortress and its entire army in one move, miracles that can heal someone completely incapable of movement, the ability to make medicines that can heal any and all ailments, the mass construction of weapons and armor, the ability to draw iron, copper, silver, gold, mithril and gems from normal boulders... If all of this is true, he’s a walking calamity.”

“It’s one hundred percent factual. And it’s likely he’ll only grow more powerful.”

“The tales of heroes of yore are filled with unbelievable stories, but this... This is...”

The clergyman rubbed his brow as if to tend to a headache.

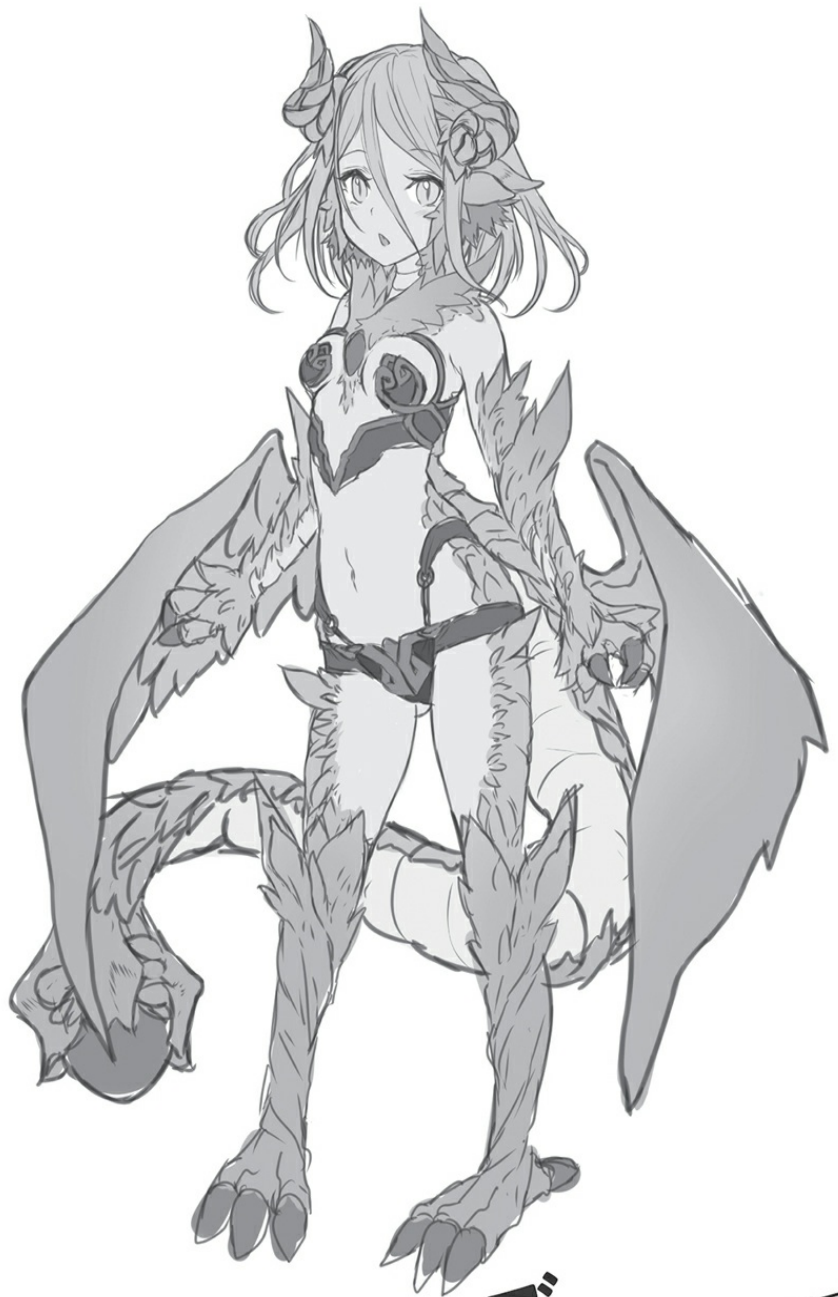
“But that’s enough for now. It will take time before we see results. What do you plan on doing next?”

“I’ll be going back home. I’ve got some reporting to do there as well. Plus, it’s not safe for me in this country.”

“I see. We’ll handle your travel papers and fees on this end.”

“Much obliged.”

CHARACTERS



グランデ

Grande

Chapter 7: The Vacation Ends

AFTER RETURNING TO THE VILLAGE, we spent three days relaxing in peace. Our original goal had been to come there to rest, so we were under no obligation to sight-see.

Instead, we'd get up in the morning, take a bath, grab breakfast, go for walks in the area, craft some stuff, and just chill out.

Sylphy occasionally met up with the elders to discuss things pertaining to trade, but there was never any point in me tagging along. If we went together, they'd just start teasing her, and then the talks would go nowhere.

As for Grande, she was traveling back and forth between her nest and the village. Sometimes her bros would tag along, and when they did, I'd just feed them. Actually, they'd bring me powerful monsters they hunted in the woods, so overall it was a plus when they came by.

I'd have the elves take the monsters apart and give them some of the remains for their trouble. The rest of the materials I traded for flour, vegetables, honey, and more. By using the meat, I got my hands on materials far superior to the hamburgers and mead I'd been feeding the dragons. Basically, we were all just swapping materials down the line.

Of course, there was no way the elf village could produce enough vegetables and grains to go on feeding two whole dragons, so this process couldn't continue forever. It'd be too much of a strain on the elves. I could always make a farming block and use that to produce goods to fix the problem, though.

Over those last three days, I ended up making all kinds of items. For example, I modified and upgraded Grande's transportation gondola. I further modified #05 (the swing version) and added springs to the chains that held the seats. It'd be able to properly respond to shaking in all directions. After giving it a try, I found that the shakes were cut down significantly, making it great for long distance travel.

Grande spent her time re-learning to fly and control her strength. She was

also training to be able to switch her back and forth from dragon to humanoid. She must have been talking to the elders every time she went back home.

“I still can’t change forms, but I think I’ve gotten a handle on the feel of it.”

Grande’s lips were covered in sticky honey as she snacked away on pancakes. She hadn’t yet figured it out, but I trusted she would eventually.

There was no training needed for Sylphy, so she had just been relaxing. It had probably been a while since she was last able to have some peace and quiet, so she was in an exceptionally good mood. The closest to training she came was when I invited her to try some target practice with my guns.

Not only was her posture and grip near-perfect, her eyesight was excellent as well. She had such mastery over the revolver I gave her that she really didn’t need any practice, but...

I mean, seriously. At 10 meters, she was able to bullseye all six shots. Is that not insane?

“I think I could use a stronger pistol.”

“For real?”

“Yeah.”

Since Sylphy mentioned it herself, I decided to make some revolvers with higher calibers. The one she’d been using had .357 Magnum rounds, so I made one with .44 Magnum rounds, .454 Casull rounds, and then one with .500 rounds just for shits and giggles.

“You gotta take care with this, this, and especially *this* one,” I told her. “The recoil on each shot could hurt you if you’re not careful.”

“Okay.” Sylphy suddenly grabbed the .500-caliber revolver in her hand and whispered to herself.

“Hm... This one is quite weighty.”

“That one’s seriously dangerous, so please be—”

A massive bang echoed through the area, nearly destroying my ears. Ten meters away, the target brick crumbled into nothingness.

“Hm...”

Kaboom! Kaboom!

Successive shots sounded more like the cries of wild beasts than gunfire, but with each shot, a brick crumbled apart.

Wait, she’s this accurate with successive shots? Seriously?

“The recoil on this is a bit rough.”

“A bit...?” I gasped.

Back in my world, folks said that the specs on that gun pushed up against the natural limits of what a human could realistically handle.

“I’ll try the one beneath this next,” Sylphy said, picking up the large revolver that used .454 Casull rounds. It was a popular beast in anime and novels of the world I used to live in.

Sylphy once again began to fire off consecutive shots. Didn’t I tell her that thing was dangerous?!

“Hm, this feels perfect,” she said.

“For real...?”

“Let me try one more.”

Next, she grabbed the .44 magnum revolver and began firing.

What the hell?! She was firing off in three-shot bursts. Revolvers weren’t meant to be used like that!

“Hm, of the three, the second I tried felt best,” she decided.

“Oh, uh, okay. Do you wanna customize it or anything? I could add a close-range bayonet or something.”

“I don’t need anything like that,” she said. “It would just make it heavier, right? As long as it’s tough, I’ll take it as-is.”

“Aye, aye, ma’am.”

And that was how Sylphy traded in her trusty revolver for an even more powerful gun. Why no customization? Well, the thing’s frame and barrel were

made with mithril to begin with.

That's how we spent our days right up until it was time to go home. The fact that Arichburg hadn't got in touch with us at all meant that, hopefully, there were no problems back on the front lines.

"Make sure you come visit again, young ones!"

"And next time bring your baby with you!"

"I wanna see my grandchild's face!"

"Hey, husband, really go for it! Keep workin' at it!"

The elderly elf who looked like a little girl handed me something wrapped in cloth. I thought maybe it was a lunch box or snacks.

"Here, this is an elf aphrodisiac! Take it with you!"

So, not snacks. Man, these people are crazy.

"I'm glad I made it in time! Here, this is the special protection bracelet you wanted."

The elf artisan had bags under their eyes. They handed me a silver bracelet that almost shined in the light. It had a complex design carved into it, and quite frankly, it was gorgeous. A magic jewel the size of my fingertip reflected the light of the sun, its golden color resembling a dragon's eye.

"Thanks a lot. I just gotta get this to Grande now."

If I gave this to her just then, it'd get in the way of her flying.

I looked over at Sylphy and Grande, and the two of them were talking to the women of the village about something or another. I used the opportunity to pull the modified gondola out of my inventory. When she saw it, Grande came walking up to me.

"Is that the new one?" she asked.

"Yup. Should be a lot more comfy and a lot less terrifying than the last one."

"The both of you sure got sick last time," she said.

"Sylphy just barely managed to hold on."

But not me, obviously. Yep.

“Here, take this,” I said to Grande.

“Oooh, it’s beautiful! Is this the bracelet we spoke of?”

“Yeah. Try putting it on when we get back to Arichburg.”

“Why not now?” She asked.

“I don’t particularly mind, but I imagine it’d get in the way of you flying,” I explained, handing her the bracelet.

I called it a bracelet, but it wasn’t completely round. It was more like a bangle in that regard. It was also relatively soft to the touch, so it was easy for Grande to grab it and put it on with her big dragon claws.

“Whoa...!”

Grande gazed at the shining bracelet on her arm. Was she actually into those sorts of accessories?

“Do you like accessories like this?” I asked her.

“Hm? Hm... Dragons typically like anything shiny, and I’ve never gotten to wear something like this before. Humanoid bodies are quite nice...”

“I see. Then, when we get back, I’ll make all kinds of accessories for you. A ring might not work, but I’ll make you bracelets and anklets and necklaces and stuff.”

“You will?”

“Of course,” I said. “You’ve actually got a humanoid body now, so why not try on all sorts of things?”

Grande’s eyes sparkled as she nodded repeatedly. The harpies were also fond of accessories, so they’d probably get along just fine. I’d love for all the winged folks to be pals.

“Mmm, now I’m really excited to head back.”

Grande started smacking her tail on the ground, but because of the bracelet on her arm, it looked like the power of her tail had been significantly decreased. The ground was still contorting, but still. The bracelet wasn’t changing the

original power or weight of her tail.

Eventually, Sylphy wrapped up her conversation and headed over to us.

“Sorry about the wait,” she said.

“Nah, it’s all good. Grande?”

“Mm.”

She took her bracelet off and handed it to me, prompting Sylphy to cast her gaze upon it.

“So that’s the finished product?” She asked.

“Yeah. We still haven’t had the chance to fully test it out, though.”

“Then let’s do that tonight,” Sylphy suggested.

“Er, isn’t that a bit sudden?”

There was Ira, the harpies, and Melty waiting back home, after all.

Meanwhile, Grande was listening in, completely oblivious. She didn’t have a single clue what we were talking about. *What a pure soul... If only you could stay that way.*

“Let’s cross this bridge when we come to it, okay?” I said.

“All right.”

Done in by Grande’s innocent gaze and body language, the two of us averted our eyes and climbed into the gondola. Once in our seats, we put on our seatbelts.

“We’re off, then!” Announced Sylphy. “If anything happens, contact the fortress!”

“Thanks for everything!” I called out.

“Farewell, elves!” said Grande.

After we each said our goodbyes, Grande grabbed the handle of the gondola and set off, circling a few times while rising into the air. The village below us grew smaller and smaller until it was completely lost in the woods.

“All right, let us be off! Are you all strapped in?”

“Yup, good to go.”

“Likewise.”

“Mm, then let’s soar!” Grande announced before zooming to the north.

Man, she’s fast. Maybe even faster than she was in her dragon form. Dang.

I turned to look at Sylphy beside me, who seemed a bit sad. I held her hand tightly in mine and drew close to her ear.

“Let’s come back again sometime soon,” I said to her.

“...Yeah, I’d like that,” Sylphy agreed with a smile, squeezing my hand in return.

The warmth from her hand felt comforting. It was funny. She was so skillful with her weapons, and could even handle the blowback from every ridiculous gun, yet her hands were so soft. How did that even work?

“Vacation’s over,” she said. “It’s about time we settle things with the Holy Kingdom.”

“I agree, but that’s not gonna be simple.”

“Of course not.” Sylphy looked far beyond the Badlands, toward the great lands to the north. “We just have to keep taking steps forward toward our objective. We’ll get there eventually.”

“You know I’ve got your back,” I told her.

“I trust you.”

Sylphy squeezed my hand again and smiled, and I did the same. We didn’t need to say anything else.

Arichburg was about as peaceful as it could get after our week-long trip. It actually seemed a bit busier, as there were more merchants, farmers, and adventurers doing their business there.

“Looks like things have been fine here,” Sylphy said.

“Right? Really feels like everyone’s keeping the peace.”

We lined up just outside Arichburg's gates and watched the other people line up as well. Everyone looked lively, which suggested that the Liberation Army's policies hadn't upset anyone all that much.

About sixty percent of the people in line were humans, and the rest were demi-humans. Most of the humans were merchants, with a few farmers in the mix as well. In contrast, nearly half of the demi-humans were farmers, with merchants and artisans making up about ten percent of the rest. Everyone else was a soldier of the Liberation Army holding a weapon. Actually, some of those were likely adventurers. They might have come to enlist.

"Sure seems busy here," I said.

"Arichburg is right on the frontlines, and it's the Liberation Army's biggest base of operations at the moment."

The city was also a hub for trade and commerce, on top of standing at the midpoint between the Kingdom of Merinard's southern and northern regions. It was surrounded by dangerous mountains and deep forests, so it was nearly impossible to get to the south without passing through.

Melty and I had cut through that mountain range, got attacked by wyverns, and then bumped into a grand dragon. If a normal military force were to try to brute force their way through, they'd definitely suffer casualties in the process.

"Kousuke, I'm a bit hungry," Grande said.

"All right, hang in there."

The grand dragon was pulling at my clothes asking for a snack. How had things come to this? She was supposed to be like my pet friend. God truly worked in mysterious ways.

I handed a single block cookie over to Grande. She had her bracelet equipped, its silver finish reflecting the sunlight beautifully. Those cookies were originally emergency food for the refugees, but they were also tasty and perfect for snacking.

"Mm, these are softer than I expected," said Grande. "They crumble in your mouth and they're sweet."

“Chewing on hard stuff can be a pain sometimes,” I said.

“But now I’m thirsty.”

“Here.”

I opened the cap of a bottle of water and passed it to her. She should be set for a while after that.

Eventually, the line moved forward and two soldiers of the Liberation Army approached us. They were patrolling to make sure nobody was causing any problems.

The pair looked over the folks in line, heading for the back. They took a look at us and then started to move on—except they didn’t. Instead, they stopped and stared with widened eyes. That was a perfect double take, if I did say so myself.

“Um, you wouldn’t happen to be Princess Sylphyel and Sir Kousuke...?”

I didn’t recognize the guards. One of them was either a wolf or dog demi-human, and the other was a lizardman.

“That’s us. I am Sylphyel.”

“And I’m Kousuke!”

“Weren’t you supposed to come home via dragon...?”

“Correct. She brought us here.”

“Indeed, I did!”

The soldiers looked completely lost in response to Sylphy and Grande’s answers.

“Um, you mean, er... There’s no need to stand in line!”

“Really? I suppose not.”

“Yup.”

There was no point trying to argue that we should wait along with everyone else. We’d accomplished our objective of scoping things out, so we just let the soldiers lead us away.

“Are you sure it’s okay to skip the line?” asked Grande.

“Sylphy’s number one in the Liberation Army and I’m basically number two, so it’s fine,” I told her.

“Are you *really* sure?”

“I mean, probably. As long as we don’t abuse the power too much.”

“Hm...”

Grande tilted her head, but decided not to press any further. Honestly, I didn’t have a proper explanation as to why we should get to cut ahead.

I guess you could say that if leaders, commanders, nobility—y’know, people with power—kept getting stopped at the gate, it’d slow down communications and the like.

The three of us passed through the gates while the rest of the folks in line stared at us. Once inside, we made way for HQ at the lord’s manor. We told the soldiers we didn’t need guides, so they let us go on by ourselves.

“Wow, there are so many people here!” Grande gasped. “So this is what humanoid cities are like!”

“I totally forgot you’ve only ever seen them from afar,” I said.

“Precisely. It’d be cruel to the humans for me to get too close, and I didn’t want to get hurt either.”

“Even when you were right next to the city?” Sylphy asked.

“It’d be scary for people if I suddenly peeked in, would it not? I’m a good dragon, so I didn’t do that.”

“You really are a sweetheart, Grande,” I said, chuckling.

“I know, right? Feel free to praise me even more.”

Her head happened to be in the perfect spot, so I ran my hand through her hair and rubbed her gently. Suddenly, Sylphy bumped into my shoulder. When I turned to look at her, she was pouting. *Ah, she’s jealous.*

“Want some too?” I asked.

“...No, I’m fine.”

After she thought about it, she probably realized how embarrassing it would actually be to get her head petted in public like Grande, because she turned away, her ears bright red.

“Kousuke, Kousuke!” Grande said to get my attention again. “Where are we going?”

“See that big building straight ahead? That’s the lord’s manor. It’s where Sylphy and I live.”

“Ah, so your home? How exciting!”

“We’ll be preparing a room for you too, Grande. We’ve got plenty to go around.”

“Wow!”

As we headed toward our destination while also showing Grande around, some familiar voices called out to us.

“Oh, my! Back home, Princess?”

“Yeah, all the way from the rear,” said Sylphy. “We talked things over with the elves.”

“How wonderful. So, we’ll be getting elven goods, then?”

“Yes, eventually.”

“Oh, if it ain’t Kousuke! It’s been a while.”

“Sylphy and I went back to the rear for a bit. How’re things going for you?”

“Not bad, not bad. Demand for meat has gone up, so I’ve been making decent money. But I’m starting to wonder if I’m an adventurer or a hunter, y’know? How about you? Don’t think I’ve ever seen that race around before.”

“This is Grande. She looks small, but she’s crazy powerful. Ten of me couldn’t beat her in a fight.”

“Aren’t you useless in a fistfight?”

After conversing with folks for a bit, we eventually arrived in front of the

manor where Melty, Ira, Danan, and Madame Zamil were all waiting for us. Since Sir Leonard wasn't there, he was likely still out fighting in the southern regions.

"Welcome home," said Danan. "How did the inspection go?"

"We had excellent talks with the elves. You've gone over the communications network already, right?"

"Absolutely," said Melty. She turned to look at Grande, who was clutching onto my clothes. "And who might this be?"

What are you hiding for? You're so shy...

"This is Grande," I introduced her.

"Indeed, I am."

"...You mean the dragon?"

Ira tilted her head while Danan and Madame Zamil shot doubtful looks. *I get it. You've all only seen her as a giant dragon.*

"Some crazy dragon magic stuff transformed Grande from her grand dragon form into this humanoid form," I explained. "Amazing, right?"

"..."

Everyone, Melty included, looked exasperated.

"Look, this isn't my fault," I said. "This is legit dragon magic stuff. I didn't do a thing...! Well, I sort of did. But I just offered them materials. That doesn't count, okay? I was basically threatened by a bunch of grand dragons, okay? This isn't on me."

While I desperately tried to make excuses, everyone turned toward Sylphy.

"Well, um, yes," she said. "I'd say he's about fifty percent at fault."

"Aw, seriously?" I whined. So uncool.

"W-well, regardless of how it happened, we welcome you!" Said Melty, smiling at Grande. "Of course we do! Now we can communicate and everything."

Grande hid behind me. She was just barely trembling in fear.

“She’s scared of you,” I said.

“H-huh...?”

“Her first impression was the worst, so...”

“C’mon, let’s be friends,” Melty tried. “Okay?”

“Grr...”

“Now she’s on guard,” I said.

“Boo...”

Grande sharply smacked the ground with her tail. It was less that she was on guard and more that she was scared, I thought. I was sure time would fix things eventually. We’d just have to be patient.

“Anyway, I’m going to get filled in on things,” said Sylphy. “What about you, Kousuke?”

“I should probably do the same. If I don’t have to be there though, I can show Grande to her room.”

“I think we’ll be fine with just the princess for now,” Danan said.

“Agreed,” said Madame Zamil.

The two of them had decided that I didn’t need to be present, so after mulling it over for a bit, Melty nodded in agreement.

“Then just the princess it is,” she said.

“Roger that. I’ll show Grande to her room then.”

“I’ll come with.”

Ira quietly pulled up to my side. She was gonna go along for the ride.

“Then it’s settled!” I said. “We’ll be chilling, so when you’re done, come on over.”

“Will do. I shall see you later.”

Sylphy planted a kiss on my cheek and took Melty and the others to the office

on the second floor.

“My name’s Ira. It’s a pleasure to meet you.”

“I’m Grande, and likewise!”

The two shorties greet each other, which makes me feel kinda warm and fuzzy. They both looked young. Maybe not like kids, but definitely young. The combo of a cyclops girl and a dragon girl really was the stuff of fantasy books.

“Shall we?” I said.

“Aye!”

Ira grabbed Grande’s hand and began to lead her along, with me following behind. It was almost evening, so everything else would have to wait until the next day.

“Welcome home! And welcome, Grande!!!”

“Good to be back.”

“Hell yeah.”

“H-hello... And thank you.”

That night, the harpies threw a welcome back party for us and Grande. The idea came together half an hour before the party itself. I was the one providing the food and drink, so it was more accurate to say that they came up with the *idea*.

“Time for the gifts!!!”

“Yay!”

The harpies clapped with their wings while Ira and Melty clapped their hands.

“Um, first up is Ira,” I said. “We got you some rare flowers, complete with dirt and roots, from deep within the Black Forest.”

“Wow...”

I pulled the high-altitude flowers from my inventory, complete with pots, and lined them up for her.

“They were growing at this crazy high altitude, so they might not last long down here,” I cautioned.

“That’s totally fine,” said Ira. “I’m really happy you got these for me. I might be able to use them for medicines, thank you.”

“What pretty flowers!”

“I’ve certainly never seen them before.”

“How romantic!”

Melty and the harpies were dazzled by the flowers. Women really did love that sort of thing, huh?

“For my harpy girls, I got you a bunch of fruits picked from around the elf village, some dried fruits, and some jam.”

“Wow, this brings me back!”

“We haven’t had the chance to have any since leaving the woods!”

“I always looked forward to eating sweet fruits when we still lived there.”

I pulled out the basket of fruits, the bag of dried fruits, and the glass bottles stuffed with jam and presented them to the harpies, who looked thrilled.

“For you, Melty, we’ve got you some wine from the elf village. A good vintage, apparently.”

“Thank you so much, Kousuke.”

Melty took the set of red and white wine bottles from me. They weren’t the kinds of bottles you popped open at a wild banquet or party, given their vintage.

“And then I have a bunch of fabrics and other stuff from the elves that you guys can divide amongst yourselves,” I said.

Patterned clothes, single-colored clothes, all kinds of stuff. Also rough gemstones, magicite, magically enhanced materials—I offered the monster parts that Grande’s bros got to the elves, and I received this stuff in exchange.

“Wow, what beautiful cloth!”

“Let’s bring it all to the tailor in the city and have them make clothes for us!”

The harpies crowded around the cloth excitedly as I sipped some mead off to the side. Soon, the harpies spread out the cloth and surrounded Grande, putting it against her body, chatting away. It looked like they were thinking up clothing designs for her.

“Is that thing she’s wearing what you’re into?” asked Melty.

“Nope, not at all,” I replied. “It just so happened to be the only piece of equipment I had that could fit her, given the claws and all. I figured it was better than just having her wear a bra and shorts.”

“Is that so...? Would you like me to wear something like that?”

Melty used her arms to press her breasts together. *Urgh, she’s inviting me to look. Don’t be a coward, Kousuke!*

“...Sometime soon.”

“When it’s just the two of us?”

“Y-yeah,” I managed.

I looked away from the seductive Melty in order to calm my nerves, only for Ira to grab onto me from the opposite side.

“Should I wear it too?”

Her big eye gazed straight at me.

Ira’s figure in bikini armor like that... Mm, I could dig it. Usually, you’d want someone who could fill out a bikini like that, but someone slender and flatter like Ira would look good in her own way too.



“S-sometime soon.”

“Hee hee...”

“...”

Melty smirked seductively at me while Ira smiled quietly, feeling me over with gentle hands.

Ah! This is bad! Excuse me, customer? Customer, you must stop at once! At once!

“Ah! Melty and Ira are trying to get up close and personal with Kousuke!”

“No fair!”

“You can’t just skip the line.”

“C’mon, you too, Grande.”

“A-ah, right, okay.”

The harpies rushed me, pressing their breasts against my face, kissing me lightly all over, sucking on my neck and rubbing me all over with their wings. Grande held onto my legs while I sat on the couch. Her eyes were spinning.

What exactly was she doing?

“Grrr, I’m not giving up my spot!”

“Me neither.”

“Ow, ow.”

Melty and Ira strengthened their grips on me, which honestly just hurt. Sylphy, on the other hand, was simply watching from a distance in silence, sipping her mead. She knew her position was untouchable, so could she spare some of that calm energy for me?

“Hey, where are you putting that hand... Wait, don’t take my clothes off! Ow! Who bit me on the neck?! No leaving marks in visible places!”

“Now, now, now, now.”

“Stop—h-hey, wait! Hold up! We just started the party, right!? We’ve barely even eaten...” I said.

“It’s fine. You served nothing but food that still tastes good when it’s cold. Don’t worry, we’ll feed you plenty as we go, okay?”

“Wha?! You had this planned when you put in your food requests, didn’t you?!”

It’s true. They didn’t request hot foods like pizza, soup, gratin or anything else... I can’t believe it!

“A-are you planning to do *that!*?”

Um, excuse me, but that’s a very unique type of play, okay? I can eat food myself, all right? You don’t have to feed me mouth-to-mouth!

“Hee hee, we happen to love it.”

“You just have to swallow!”

“Let us take care of everything...”

The harpies were wearing charmingly cute smiles as they dragged me to the bedroom. I couldn’t just push them away. If I did, it’d make them all sad.

“Mm, once I got used to it, I became a fan,” said Melty

“Likewise!” Ira agreed.

The two of them followed after the harpies with trays of sandwiches, hamburgers, and fruits. Grande wobbled behind them with a large water bottle. It was important to stay hydrated, after all.

Sylphy smiled as she watched us leave. “I’ll join you soon enough,” she called after us, holding up her bottle of mead.

The harpied chorused an “Okay!”

And then the door was closed shut.

Epilogue: What I Can Do

“...I’M SO DEAD.”

“It’s your own fault,” said Sir Leonard. “Honestly, you should just be glad to be alive. Your toughness knows no bounds.”

After expressing how impressed he was, in the weirdest possible terms, Sir Leonard sat me down in a chair.

Man, this table is so nice and cool. Wait, when did Sir Leonard get back? He wasn’t here yesterday.

“Heh heh heh, I’m all burned out... White hot, y’know what I mean?”

After waking up just past noon, I hauled myself over to the meeting room on the first floor of the manor, legs wobbly. My life points and stamina were both at about twenty percent.

“Er, take it easy, would you?” Danan said. “Your health is important.”

“I’d rather you not die of sexual emaciation,” Sir Leonard added. “Maybe we should ask the others to be a bit more careful?”

Danan and Sir Leonard were seriously discussing how to deal with my “problem.” This was so awkward.

“More importantly,” I interrupted, “how’ve communications been going with the Holy Kingdom?”

“Hrm...” Danan hesitated. “Do you really want to know?”

“That’s why I’m asking. Is it that bad?”

“No, not at all. There’s nothing to hide, because there’s been almost no progress.”

“For real?”

“The saint may have authority and power, but it’s not endless,” said Sir

Leonard. “She has an administrative officer and a military supervisor with her, and they both hold sway over their respective branches. The saint only has power over the church. That said, of the three of them, she has the most power, so they can’t ignore her entirely if they want to mobilize their troops.”

“She is the saint of truth, after all. Just by standing before her, truth and lies are laid bare,” said Danan. “It’d be difficult to do anything behind her back.”

“I see.”

Can’t believe I thought I could get anything past her when we first met.

“However, even though they’re reorganizing their troops and stocking up, they’re in no position to invade,” Sir Leonard went on. “They’re recruiting adventurers and mercenaries in order to help govern their territories and take care of monsters, and even with that help, they’re barely getting by. Sending off an invasion force under those conditions would be nearly impossible.”

“As long as they don’t get large-scale reinforcements from the homeland,” added Danan.

“Got it,” I said. “What about negotiations for getting our territory back?”

“It’s been difficult,” Danan admitted. “We’re requesting the return of all of our citizens who were turned into slaves, as well as all of the land of the former Kingdom of Merinard. But they already have citizens who’ve moved to Merinard at this point, so they can’t accept our conditions.”

“Which means war?” I asked.

“That’d be the fast way to conclude things, certainly. If the talks don’t work out, we’ll have no choice but to use force. Now that the south has been taken care of, the Liberation Army is on the rise. We *could* invade Merinesburg at this stage.”

The Liberation Army, driven to take back all that was taken from them, and the Holy Kingdom that won the war and placed the Kingdom of Merinard under its control... I was really hoping we could reach a solution by talking it out, but...

“Should we have another nation step in?” I asked.

“That would be a poor move,” said Sir Leonard. “Countries do not often come

together on friendly terms. If we were to allow a third party to step in now, after the war, who knows what requests they might make of us.”

“There’s been suspicious movement off at the western border connected to the union of nations. We might be forced into a war on two fronts,” added Danan.

“Then what’s the plan? Strike first?”

“That’s where we’re divided. Her Majesty is against being aggressive here, but Melty’s perspective as a domestic affairs officer is that the other side will not negotiate, so we should hurry up and invade so that we can take back our land,” Danan explained.

“How aggressive,” I said. “How are you two feeling about it?”

“I have no issue with fighting,” Sir Leonard said.

“I personally think we should wait a little longer,” said Danan. “If the saint and her Nostalgia sect are able to gain political control *and* control over the primary sect of Adolism, that would be ideal. No matter how strong the weapons you make for us may be, there is just too large a difference between the Holy Kingdom’s territory and ours.”

Sir Leonard wanted to be aggressive while Danan favored patience, eh?

“But we can’t afford to give our enemies too much time,” Danan continued. “It raises the chance of them concocting a way to deal with our harpy aerial bombs. And the longer we take, the more of an advantage they have, as the nation with more land.”

“That is true.”

It all depended on Elen, also known as the saint of truth, Eleonore. Wasn’t there something I could do to help her? I remembered her mentioning something about ruins... I had to look into it.

Danan and Sir Leonard both had things to do, so we said our goodbyes and I left the manor. There was nothing like a little bit of alone time, especially after how intense the night before had been... Where did everyone go, anyway?

When I'd woken up, nobody was around. That was a new feeling.

"Um, Madame Zamil?"

"Yes?"

"Why are you following me?" I asked.

"If something were to happen and you were kidnapped again, I could no longer go on living."

Madame Zamil stared at me with her impossible-to-read reptile eyes. In her hand was Shooting Star, her long trident that reflected the light of the sun. People passing us by couldn't help but stare.

"Look at that weapon. She must be General Zamil."

"I wonder what's going on...?"

"Look at that mithril shine... It must've been made by a renowned smith."

Sorry folks, but it's basically a mass-produced weapon... Wait, since when did Zamil start being called "general?" I suppose she and Sir Leonard led the forces down south, though, so it makes sense.

"Um, what do you mean you couldn't go on living?" I asked her.

"When you gifted me this Shooting Star, I vowed to protect you just as I protect Her Highness," said Madame Zamil. "And yet that fox bastard Cuvi was one step ahead of me and kidnapped you... If something like that happened again, I couldn't possibly allow myself to live."

"Hold on a sec," I said. "Don't you dare take your own life. If I were to come back and find that you killed yourself as a way of taking responsibility, I'd seriously cry."

"...You would?"

"Of course I would. Don't just protect my body, protect my heart. I'm begging you here."

"...Your heart?"

Madame Zamil's eyes widened. *Heh, I sounded pretty cool there for a sec, huh?*

“You mean you also want me to... With you?” She asked. “I’m not sure that’s possible, given how different our species are. I’m oviparous.”

“That’s not what I mean, okay? I just mean don’t you dare sacrifice yourself or take your own life out of a sense of responsibility.”

“I see now.”

Could it have been that Madame Zamil was actually kind of dense when it came to non-combat matters? The concern crossed my mind, but I erased it from memory. If anything, it was probably a problem with how I lived my life.

I could see why. I had Sylphy, Ira, the harpies, Melty, Grande, and Elen, although she wasn’t there at the moment. I couldn’t complain if folks thought all I saw was pink. Madame Zamil was innocent on that front.

“By the way,” she asked, “where are you going?”

“Nowhere, really. I’d love to talk to someone about what I should be doing, but everyone I could ask is off doing other things. So, here I am, looking around.”

“And what is it you wish to talk about?”

“What I should be doing to help move the current situation forward,” I told her. “It’d be bad if I acted on my own, right? That’s why I was thinking of discussing things with Sylphy or Melty or Ira. Danan and Sir Leonard seemed busy.”

“I see... I’d be happy to lend you an ear, you know. Perhaps I might be able to help.”

Madame Zamil apparently performed spectacularly down south, so she’d unquestionably be a great person to discuss my issues with.

“In that case, I’ll take you up on your offer. Hmm, but we’re not going to be able to hit any restaurants or cafes when you have that trident with you... Ah, how about over there?”

I spotted something resembling an outdoor cafe, so we headed that way. Madame Zamil could just rest Shooting Star against the outer wall.

“Couldn’t we go back to the manor?” She asked.

“I mean, but we’re already here. It’d be a nice change of pace to visit a cafe like this. I’m curious about what they have on their menu, too.”

“Really?”

“Yup. What would you like to drink?” I asked her.

“Anything but alcohol.”

“An ice tea it is. Excuse me!”

I ordered some tea snacks and two ice lemon teas from the cat-eared waitress who came by to take our order. It wasn’t long before she returned with two opaque glasses of ice lemon tea. The tea snacks would be coming in a bit.

I took a sip and let the liquid circle in my mouth for a bit before cutting to the chase.

“Danan and Sir Leonard filled me in earlier,” I said. “The current situation with the Holy Kingdom ain’t great.”

“No, no it isn’t,” she agreed.

“That’s why I’ve been thinking about what I can do to maybe fix that. Specifically, I want to do something to help Elen, the saint of truth.”

“The saint...? What were you thinking?”

“Given what we’ve all been thinking, the best-case scenario would be for the saint and her Nostalgia sect to gain power within the Holy Kingdom, right?” I said. “Ultimately, our primary enemies, and the ones holding the Kingdom of Merinard at sword point, are the ones who currently control Adolism.”

“Yes. They claim human superiority as a matter of religion and faith.”

“And the Nostalgia sect Elen belongs to doubts those beliefs,” I said. “They think there are signs that the Adolism of the past underwent massive modifications. And if that’s the truth, then that would deal damage to the current sect that claims human superiority.”

“So I’ve heard. But even if that is the truth, would the Holy Kingdom so quickly change their ways and return our land? I just have a hard time believing that,” Madame Zamil said, closing her eyes and shaking her head. “When I was

born, the Holy Kingdom already claimed human superiority. Those born there were raised to believe that demi-humans should serve humans. That they stood above us, and that it was the natural order of things. Changing someone's feelings and their way of thinking is no simple task."

"Then you think what Elen's doing is meaningless?" I asked her.

"No, I don't believe so. I think the fact that there is a peaceful group within the enemy forces is a good thing, and I think only good can come from them expanding their power. However, if the power balance between the controlling sect and the Nostalgia sect were to crumble..."

"Yeah...?"

"It's likely that before we can reconcile, there would be a civil war within the church." Madame Zamil tilted her head in doubt. "And when that happens, can the saint's sect really defeat the controlling one?"

Hm.

"I can't imagine the controlling sect will just go around killing members of the Nostalgia sect," I replied. "They might have different beliefs, but they're citizens of the same nation. They're both a part of Adolism, right?"

"I hope you're right... But the current Holy King and the current pope of Adolism are both members of the main sect. Depending on how things go, the Nostalgia sect could face fierce oppression. It's entirely possible that the Nostalgia sect sees this coming, and that's why they've gotten close to the Liberation Army."

"Like, they're trying to use us in case of an internal power struggle?"

"We can't ignore the possibility," she said. "And if that were to happen, it's not as though we wouldn't have good reasons to help them."

"Like what?" I asked. "I mean, don't get me wrong, if that happened, I'd want to help Elen and her friends, for sure."

Quite frankly, it'd be foolish to jump in the middle of another country's religious internal strife, yet there I was.

"If we were to bring them on board, we would gain an official avenue to deal

with Adolism, and through them, with the Holy Kingdom,” explained Madame Zamil. “And, as a border nation suffering under the Holy Kingdom and Adolism’s policies, an Adolist sect that believes in peaceful reconciliation with demi-humans is more than worth supporting. Especially if we can prove that they’re in the right. We’d immediately gain personnel that would help in negotiations with other nations. Human clergymen are extremely well-trusted within society.”

“I get it now... I never considered that.”

In other words, there were plenty of merits to us cozying up to Elen and the others. In that case, if there was something I could do to help, I wanted to do it.

“Then I guess the best course of action is to search the Omitt ruins for old Adolist scriptures, huh?”

“I imagine that would be the case,” she said. “Fortunately, the Badlands are under our control. We’ll get results eventually.”

“My ability to dig through the ground will prove mighty useful.”

“...Yes, but you’re the key to our supply line,” Madame Zamil pointed out. “I’d personally prefer it if you didn’t put yourself in danger.”

“But I can’t just sit here in Arichburg every day, chilling,” I said. “Grande’s joined us, and if I asked her, she’d be happy to transport things for us...”

When one thought of transportation in this world, horses and carriages came to mind. I’d been thinking about making some advances in that department. In terms of overall efficiency, developing new modes of transportation might be a good idea.

It’d be bad to constantly use Grande for everything. She wasn’t actually a member of the Liberation Army. She was cooperating because she cared about me.

“It’d be bad to rush things,” I added. “It’s times like this that I need to calmly and efficiently make moves.”

“Indeed, one must be patient.”

“Thanks, Madame Zamil. You’re a real lifesaver.”

“I’m honored to have been of use,” she said.

That night, I’d talk to Sylphy, Melty, and Ira about everything I discussed with Madame Zamil.

Our business concluded, we sat back and enjoyed our tea snacks while chatting about this and that. What I saw in the Black Forest, the new workbench we developed at the lab, and all sorts of other things.

“You mean you can make my Shooting Star even more powerful...?” She asked me.

Maybe I shouldn’t have mentioned the bestowing workbench. I would never forget how hard it was to get her to back down after that.



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