

A LATE-START TAMER'S LAID-BACK LIFE

11

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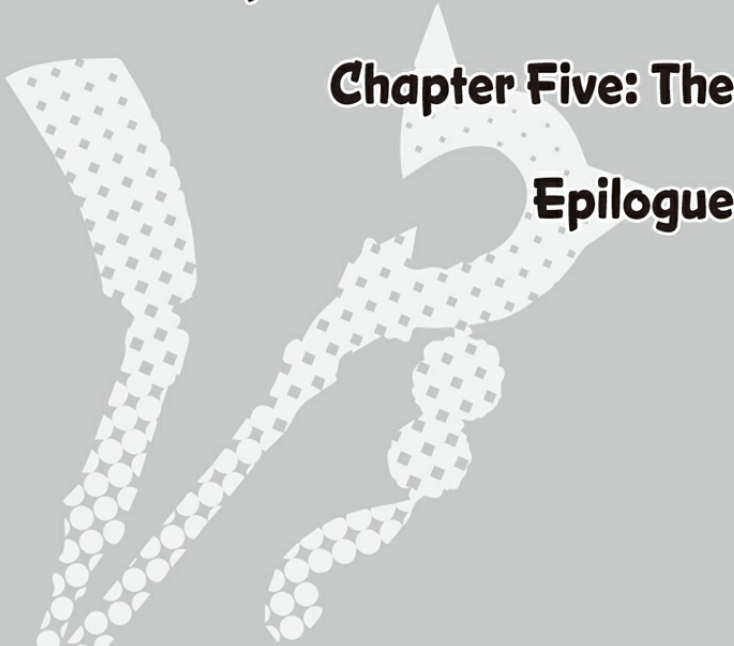
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A Late-Start Tamer's
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Chapter One: Demon Summoning

With all my event points finally exchanged, my fun side excursion had come to an end. All I really wanted to do now was catch my breath and admire the ammolites and ambers I had decorated my home with, but there was still work left to do.

“Ready to head to the farm?”

“Hm!”

“Honk honk!”

Even though I was tired, I couldn't neglect tending my farm. Olto and Sakura had already returned ahead of me to get started on work. Granted, they loved farmwork so much that they were happy to do it no matter how tired they were. Regardless, I couldn't just let myself slack off.

“How about we try and finish up quickly and then have a home renovation party?”

“Hmm!”

“Honk!”

Himka and Perca raised their arms and hopped up and down in full agreement. Then they held hands and started spinning around in circles. *I'm happy you're having fun, but stop looking at me. There's no way I'm joining in on that!*

“All right! Let's hurry to the farm!”

“Hm-hmm!”

“Honk hooonk!”

And so, we rushed over to the farm, ready to work, but it seemed I had really underestimated just how outstanding my monsters were. Or maybe this was my fault for spending more time than I meant to on remodeling the house.

“Everything’s pretty much done already.”

“Hmm!”

“...♪”

Olto and Sakura were in the middle of the last plot of land, just finishing up. When they noticed us, they started waving. *Looks like they don’t need my help.*

“What should I do now...?”

“Chirp chirp!”

“Oh, are you done working too, Rick?”

Rick scurried up my body and started slapping my head. *What, does he want to play?*

“Chirp!”

“Oh, right!”

Seeing Rick just reminded me! There *was* something I wanted to test out! Rick’s Forest Sorcery skill!

Forest Sorcery: Sorcery specialized in trees.

Honestly, besides the fact that it strengthened Rick’s main skill, Nut Bomb, I hadn’t seen much of what Forest Sorcery was capable of, but I assumed it would have even more uses.

“Rick. Can you use Forest Sorcery on the farm? I want to see what it does.”

“Chirp!”

Rick jumped down to my shoulder and raised his hands up cheerfully. Apparently, he could use it here.

“Okay then, can you try it out on this plot?”

“Chirp.”

Since I didn’t know what sort of effect it would have, I wanted him to first use it on a spot where any mistakes would result in minimal damage. So, I decided

to have him try it on the weed garden where I was growing herbs. Since I was also growing medicinal herbs and fire-starter plants at the edge of this field, I'd be able to see how the spell affected other plants besides weeds. Plus, even if it ended up destroying everything, I'd be able to restore things back to normal tomorrow.

"Okay, so what's this skill capable of?"

"Chirp."

In response to my question, Rick smugly held up four fingers. *His tiny hand is so cute.*

"Chirp?"

"Oops, this isn't the time to admire your miniature hands. So, there are four different things you can do with it?"

"Chirp!"

Four, huh? That's actually more than I was expecting.

"Chiiirp chirp chirp chiiirp!"

"Huh? Something popped up."

Something resembling a magic circle appeared in front of Rick. It was a large pentagram with another small pentagram drawn inside of it. I guess you'd call that a double pentagram? It had a very sorcery-like feel to it. At the same time, a window also appeared displaying the words "Spell of Growth." It would speed up the growth rate of all the plants in one plot and increase the probability of a mutation occurring. Since it said "all plants," that might mean my farm would end up overrun with weeds, but as long as I kept up with cleaning them out, it shouldn't be a huge problem.

"Let's see, 'Please select an item to offer for the spell'?"

Apparently, this sorcery required an offering. I opened my inventory and found that, while most of my items that were grayed out and unable to be selected, there were a few that I could still choose from. Among them were crops like medicinal herbs and fruits, as well as fertilizer. Additionally, I could choose aquatic items and items from plant-type monsters.

“Well, this is just a test run, so I’ll try several.”

First, I selected a low-quality medicinal herb. When I did, the words “Effect Level: 1” appeared on the screen. *I’m guessing that means it would only have the lowest possible effect?*

It looked like I could choose multiple items, so I tried out a variety of offerings. I could choose a maximum of ten items, one for each point of the two pentagrams, which I determined because the points of the stars in the magic circle lit up each time I made a selection.

The effect level seemed to increase depending on the rarity and quality of my offerings, and it was unclear if there was any upper limit. Selecting ten of my better-quality items gave an effect level of four, so I suspected the maximum might’ve been ten.

“I just want to see what it does for now, so I’ll go with the absolute minimum. One medicinal herb it is.”

“Chiiirp!”

I selected a medicinal herb to offer, and the magic circle started emitting an even brighter light. On my shoulder, Rick was thrusting both arms up to the sky like a mage about to unleash something powerful. Immediately, the entire field before me shone green, then a blindingly bright pillar of light burst upward from it. I’d experienced this game’s flashing light traps many a time, so by now I had a perfect defense!

“This spell’s special effects really pack a punch.”

“Chirp.”

After making sure the light had settled down, I opened my eyes and appraised the field.

“It...doesn’t look any different.”

No big change was apparent when I appraised it. It just showed the words “Spell of Growth (Active).” It looked like the spell wouldn’t have any sort of immediate effect. It had about the same look as when I spread fertilizer on a field.

“All right, show me the next one.”

“Chirp!”

Rick’s MP had only gone down by ten, so the amount of MP consumption was likely tied to the effect level of the spell.

“Next is ‘Spell of Stability’?”

This one had a pretty interesting effect. It reduced the possible variation in quality of crops grown in a field, as well as the possibility of mutations. It sounded like its purpose was to allow you to harvest crops at a consistent quality level. In exchange for giving up the possibility of getting an unexpectedly good crop, the spell minimized the chance of growing low-quality or failed crops.

This probably wasn’t super useful for my farm. After all, Olto and Sakura were always looking after things, so there were very few times where we’d had any significant failures. This spell was probably intended more for players who couldn’t put as much effort into their farms, like fighter types who farmed in their spare time.

“I’ll still try it, though. Rick, if you would.”

“Chirp!”

The special effects were exactly the same as Spell of Growth. Seriously, there was nothing new about it. Also, it didn’t change the appearance of the field either. However, I could see that both Growth and Stability were in effect when I appraised the field, so I wouldn’t have to worry about forgetting which spells I had used where. With both spells activated, I could probably produce a consistent number of high-quality crops.

“Okay, what’s next?”

“Chirp.”

“What’s this? ‘Green Manure’?”

This particular spell didn’t require an offering to activate it. For the price of clearing every plant within a certain range, it would increase the rank of the soil in that spot. I had a feeling the intention was to use the plants grown in that soil

to activate the Spell of Growth. The Green Manure spell seemed useful for clearing out overgrown weeds, but I wasn't sure how often I'd use it on my own farm. Also, it'd really suck if I made an error selecting the range and ended up losing stuff I didn't want to lose.

"Oh well, may as well try this out too. Do it, Rick."

"Chirp!"

I selected one herb garden to use as a testing ground and then had Rick use Green Manure on it.

"Ooh, it cleaned things up pretty nice."

"Chirp."

Not only did the culinary and medicinal herbs I'd planted disappear, but also the weeds around them. I supposed this was indeed a way to clean up a field and make it as if I'd just spread fertilizer on the soil at the same time. It'd be useful if I ever wanted to quickly reset a field.

"Very nice. All right, time to check out the fourth and final effect."

"Chirp!"

"Huh? Rick? Where do you think you're going?!"

"Chiiirp!"

Rick inexplicably dashed off. *Is he not able to use it on this field?*

"Hey, wait up!" I quickly rushed after him.

"Chirp!"

He's fast! So fast! That dummy, he's obviously playing around! He keeps looking over his shoulder at me!

"Ahhh!"

"Chirp chiiirp!"

Squirrels sure were fast. In the end, I wasn't able to catch up with him, but I'd ended up in the area where I'd planted the fruit trees and Lakeside Sequoia.

"Chirp chirp!"

“You wanted to bring me here?”

Rick ran straight to one of the trees. Standing at only three meters tall, it was one of the smaller trees on my farm. It had been a while since I’d planted it, but it didn’t seem like it would grow any taller than it was.

“Chirp!”

“The Sacred Tree?”

That’s right. This was the Sacred Tree I’d bought at the auction and planted on my farm. It was a sapling no more, but it was still infected with Phytoplasma Disease. That must have been what was hindering its growth.

“Can you do something to treat it?”

“Chirp? Chirp chirp.”

Rick thumped his chest. It seemed like he really could do something for the Sacred Tree.

“Really?”

Well then, he definitely has to try it!

Rick stood in front of the Sacred Tree and the sorcery window popped up.

“Looks like I have to select an item to offer.”

It was the same deal as the Spells of Growth and Stability. This one was called “Spell of Healing.” The effect was pretty obvious—it was a spell to heal trees.

“If it can heal the Sacred Tree, I’ll offer the max number of items.”

The lineup of items I could select as offerings were slightly different from those available for Spell of Growth—no actually, there were just more of them. In addition to plants, water, and earth-type items, I could also choose certain potions and demon-type items.

“Why demon? Oh, well I guess demons have something to do with the Tree of Evil...”

Was it okay to offer demon materials? It wouldn’t turn it into a Tree of Evil, would it? With some hesitation, I tried selecting it, and nothing out of the ordinary happened. It just increased the effect level like the other items did.

“Whoa, that demon item really made the effect level shoot up though.”

Demons were a rare variety of monster, and most of them were bosses. Meaning, items from demons were *super* rare, which in turn resulted in a stronger effect.

I tried selecting all the demon materials I had on hand: three Andras’s Feathers, Andras’s Claw, Andras’s Tail Feather, Andras’s Sturdy Beak, Bifrons’s Magic Core, Bifrons’s Claw, Bifrons’s Grudge, and Bifrons’s Bone Meal—exactly ten. In turn, the effect level went up to ten, which was likely the max. But even if I didn’t use all the demon materials, the level remained at ten. *Maybe I should hold on to Bifrons’s Grudge, since that seems the most rare, and use a medicinal herb instead—?*

“Huh?”

The spell name changed! Wait, Demon Summoning?

Sure, that’s not ominous or anything!

“Should I be worried? Am I seriously about to summon a *demon*?”

No way, that couldn’t be right. Demons in this game were super strong bosses... Should I really go through with this? This was gonna turn out really bad, right? Would the Sacred Tree even be fine after I used this? What if it really turned into a Tree of Evil?

Let’s take stock. If I offered demon items for all ten spots, the spell turned into Demon Summoning. If I switched out even one spot with a medicinal herb, it reverted back to the Spell of Healing. I decided to cancel the spell and try it on another plot of land. I set things up to use the Spell of Healing on another field, but even selecting all demon materials didn’t turn the spell into Demon Summoning this time. I tried it on other trees like the Green Peach Tree to similar results.

Use Spell of Healing on the Sacred Tree. Then, choose demon items as all ten offerings. Only when both those conditions were fulfilled did the spell turn into Demon Summoning.

“This seems like a rare opportunity. I sort of want to try this out...”

But if this turns out to be a boss fight, there's no way I could win. I'd seen a video of people fighting a Tree of Evil during an event; it had been a super strong raid boss fight.

What should I do?

Oh right—Alyssa said that she'd help me out if the tree turned into a Tree of Evil and a raid boss fight was triggered.

"Okay, let's go ask Alyssa for help!"

I'd sell her information about Demon Summoning, and as payment, she could assemble a force of fighters for me. Not too bad of a deal, right? I checked my friend list and saw she was still logged in. Not surprising, since it hadn't been that long since the event ended. I rang her up.

"Alyssa speaking..."

"Glad I caught you!"

"Do you, um, possibly have some new information to tell me?"

"Huh? Oh, no."

Her voice sounded kind of shaky. Was that because we were on a call? Though it wasn't like an in-game call could have issues with the connection...

"Well, I technically do have new information, but I also have a favor to ask concerning it."

"A favor... All right, come tell me the deets. You good to meet at the shop?"

"Sure. I called to make an appointment anyway."

Nice, she's going to hear me out. Her voice never lost its shakiness, though. After I hung up, I headed for the Quick-Eared Cats' shop and met up with Alyssa.

"Hello," I greeted her.

"So, what did you need to talk to me about...?"

"Right, so here's the thing."

I explained what I'd found out about Rick's Forest Sorcery skill: about its

abilities, ease of use—everything.

Is Alyssa furrowing her brow? Was this old news? Was she annoyed that I was presenting old information like it was some big breakthrough? Well, even if that was true, I had already started talking about it, so I couldn't stop now. It'd actually be more awkward if I got all sheepish and clammed up. Even if she knew about this information already, I'd just say everything I'd planned to and then at the end make a face like, *Oh, wait, did you already know all this?* Yeah, good plan!

Once I started talking about Demon Summoning, Alyssa's face grew even more stern.

"Summon a demon...? From the *Sacred Tree*?"

"Yeah. Then it hit me that maybe it would turn the tree into a Tree of Evil."

"That could be."

"Right? So, I thought maybe you'd be able to help me in some way. Instead of paying me an information fee, maybe you could lend me some fighting power or something..."

"So you just want me to assemble and coordinate some fighters, right? There's probably a limit to how many people can participate, so I'll have to put some thought into who to bring. All right, just leave it all to me."

"Th-Thanks, I appreciate it."

Wow, not only was she going to assemble a group of fighters, but she even volunteered to manage and organize everyone. *The Quick-Eared Cats are always so reliable!*

"A-And in exchange, I don't have to pay you for the information, right?" Alyssa asked.

"I mean, did I actually give you enough info though? I only told you a little bit about Forest Sorcery and about the demon thing..."

If this was news she'd already heard, then it might not be enough information compared to what I was getting for it.

"Don't worry, it's enough," Alyssa said. "This is my first time hearing about

Demon Summoning.”

“Oh, then good.”

I wasn’t familiar with all the particulars of the information fees, but having even a little help with fighting would be great.

“So, when should we do this?” I asked.

“One sec, let me check... Yup, looks like a lot of people are still logged in.”

She must’ve been looking at who was logged in on her friends list, checking to see which reliable players were still logged in.

“Right, how about an hour from now?”

“Huh? Wait, isn’t that too soon?”

I thought we’d do this tomorrow or the next day! Can she really gather people in only an hour? But apparently, I had no reason to be concerned.

“People are still in a celebratory mood, so it’ll be easy to gather players. In fact, I’ll be able to assemble an even more deluxe group than usual! Oh, would you mind if I let people live stream the boss fight? If they have permission to do that, we’ll have no shortage of candidates.”

“Oho! I knew I could count on you! They can live stream all they want!”

To be fair, there were probably a lot of people who’d want to join just because it was a raid boss fight anyway, so factoring in Alyssa’s extensive network, she’d probably be able to get a lot of people together.

“In that case, an hour from now is fine. It’s great, actually.”

Now’s my chance to use that rare drop ticket I forgot about! That was an added bonus.

“Okay then, we’ll assemble in front of your farm within the hour.”

“Thanks!”

I need to get ready too! I doubted the fight would take place right on my farm, but I wanted to harvest as many of the crops around the Sacred Tree as I could anyway. Also, the least I could do was pass around some food with buff effects to everyone joining in! I could give everyone onigiri! Some meat and miso

onigiri made with dinosaur meat was sure to be delicious enough to please everyone. Also, I had a lot of fish meat from the monstrous Dunkleosteus, so maybe I could use it to make tuna mayo onigiri.

“I’ll be no help in the fight, so I need to do this at least!”

An hour later, Alyssa had brilliantly pulled through and gathered players outside my farm.

“Has everyone gotten an onigiri?” I asked.

“I didn’t get one yet!”

“I’d rather have tuna onigiri. Anyone wanna swap?”

“O-Onigiri made by Silver-Haired... *Gulp.*”

“I’m so glad I came!”

Hmm, I think I’ve passed things out to everyone who came?

The Dinosaur Meat Miso Onigiri increased MP, and the Monstrous Tuna Mayo Onigiri reduced the consumption of MP, so I didn’t have to worry about differentiating between passing them out to front or back liners. I included apple juice with the onigiri, so now everyone would be ready to fight the boss with a full stomach. As long as it helped raise their morale a bit, I was happy.

“He’s got all the mini dinosaurs! He’s so amazing...”

“Hey, check out that pond!”

“The sea otter and the water nymph are playing in it! Screenshot, screenshot!”

“Think we can ask for a tour of his house later?”

The last time I had this many people on my farm was probably during my cherry blossom viewing party. It was a lot of fun to see the farm so lively. Actually, there might be even more people here this time. There were even top players like Holland, Huey, and Sakkyun. I had to applaud Alyssa for being so well-connected.

“Alyssa, there are a *lot* of people here. Want to clue me in?”

“Well, they’re technically all participating.”

There had to be over fifty people here. Maybe around seventy? Counting all the Tamers' monsters, the number was definitely over one hundred. However, Alyssa only introduced me to twenty people. She even told me it was fine to only give out food to those twenty people... I guess since she didn't know how big the scale of the boss fight would be, she just assembled a large group just in case.

The twenty people she introduced me to were either members of the Quick-Eared Cats or players she'd invited to come. They would be the ones participating if the fight ended up being a five-party, thirty-person raid boss. Then, the rest of the players, who were just sort of on the sidelines right now, would participate in the fight if the limit allowed more people to join. They would be compensated later if they ended up participating, so they had just come along for the time being.

"Wait, you're paying them later and keeping them on standby...? Are they really okay with that?"

"Oh, they're fine. Actually, they're the ones who came to me asking to join even under those conditions."

"R-Really?"

"Yep. They get to come to your farm and look around, after all."

"Look around? *My* farm? I mean, I know I have some unusual things here, but..."

Was that really interesting to anyone other than Farmers? Well, I guess just seeing the Sacred Tree up close was a good enough story to tell. If they were fine with it, then cool. I could give them onigiri as a sort of participation prize if they ended up joining. It wasn't much, but it was better than nothing.

"All right, I guess it's about time we head over to the Sacred Tree?"

"Finally!"

"A demon, wow! Wouldn't it be crazy if something like Bifrons showed up?"

"This is Silver-Haired we're talking about, so anything could happen."

Once Alyssa and I set out toward the tree, the other players followed us. They

seemed pretty excited.

“I wonder what sort of enemy’ll show up?”

“Mmm.”

My current party was Olto, Drimo, Reflet, Sakura, Fau, and Eine. I prioritized support roles in anticipation of a raid fight.

“Okay, Rick! It’s time!”

“Chirp!”

As everyone watched, Rick thrust his arms high into the sky, and a window popped up.

“Now I’ll add in all my demon materials—”

Three Andras’s Feathers, Andras’s Claw, Andras’s Tail Feather, Andras’s Sturdy Beak, Bifrons’s Magic Core, Bifrons’s Claw, Bifrons’s Grudge, Bifrons’s Bone Meal—I selected each item, inserting them into the magic circle.

“We’re all set! Do it, Rick!”

“Chirp chirp!”

Rick nodded vigorously in response.

“All right! Demon Summoning, activate!”

“Chiiirp chirp chiiirp!”

With a serious expression on his face, Rick thrust both hands toward the Sacred Tree. His dynamic pose reminded me of a certain old man sealing a certain green demon king inside of a rice cooker in a certain classic anime. Was he trying to put on even more of a show for all the people watching? *I get it, though.*

“Huh? The tree...!”

“Something’s happening!”

Like someone had shouted, the Sacred Tree had started to change. The three-meter-tall tree was emitting a black mist. The mist traveled down from the branches and leaves, concentrating at the trunk of the tree. Then, it began to

swell. Once the cloud was the size of an exercise ball, the mist suddenly shrunk in size, condensing and solidifying as if gaining substance. It almost seemed a pitch-black mass had suddenly sprouted from the trunk. Numerous red lines that looked like blood vessels ran along the surface of the black, rubbery lump, and the entire thing started to pulse slightly. *Is it breathing?* It was an unnerving image. Though for summoning a demon, this seemed about right. I could imagine a demon being born from that mass at any moment.

Everyone was holding their breath as they watched the black mass. Then, it started changing even more, as countless hairline cracks started to form along the surface.

“I-Is it emerging?”

“Chirp!”

As if Rick’s cry was the cue, the cracks in the mass burst open all at once, and red light flooded out from inside. *Now that’s some flashy special effects!* The red light suddenly grew in intensity, enveloping my entire farm. *I swear, every time!*

“So bright!”

“The devs are at it again!”

“My eeeyes! I can’t see!”

“Dude, you’ve run that reference into the ground. No one cares anymore.”

“...Dammit! You all used to love it!”

While everyone was clamoring excitedly, the light display soon abated. Then, once everyone’s vision was restored, we could all see just how much the Sacred Tree had changed.

“It got huge...”

“Chirp...”

Rick and I stood there gawking up at the tree. The small tree that once stood before us had disappeared, and in its place appeared a colossal tree. It had to be about fifteen meters tall now, by my reckoning. The trunk was so thick in circumference, I wouldn’t be able to wrap my arms all the way around. The tree

resembled an oak now, its massive, gnarled trunk making it look ancient. It looked much more like the Sacred Tree I had seen during the event.

“Jeez, how’d it grow so much all of a sudden?”

“Chirp.”

This sort of phenomenon happened sometimes on my farm, but nothing had ever grown *this* much. But I couldn’t get distracted by the tree right now.

“Is that...the demon?”

“Chirp.”

A black, inky, basketball-sized mass now floated in front of the Sacred Tree, undulating. *Is it a slime demon or something?* While I was contemplating what it could be, the black mass started squirming even more ferociously. Then, little by little, it changed, taking on a shape that clearly resembled a human form. It must have been transforming into a demon.

“Is it finally happening?”

“Chirp!”

The floating black fluid continued to expand and change shape. Then, it turned completely humanoid. What was it, a doll made out of black rubber? It gave off a similar impression to some of the minor demons I’d fought before. But it was strangely small. Actually, it looked like a child, and weaker than I was expecting.

No one else said a word, which probably meant they were live streaming or taking screenshots. There was one person in the very front filming next to Mamori. He looked familiar, but where had I seen him before...? *Oh, right.* He was the one who’d gotten locked out of the Hanami Vandal fight. He must’ve situated himself in the very front to make sure he wasn’t shut out from the battlefield again.

The demon continued to change as the rest of us braced ourselves for a fight to start at any moment.

“Huh? I see more colors...”

“Chirp!”

The black surface started breaking apart, revealing human skin inside. Not only that, but I started to see some hair and clothes. After a few seconds, we found ourselves facing a strange creature.

“What’s that, a demon plushie...? Cool, it’s all cartoony.”

Its violet-colored hair was styled in pigtails. Two short, rounded horns sprouted from its forehead, and cute bat wings protruded from its back. It had a demon tail with a heart-shaped tip, which it was flicking around as if showing it off. *I guess it looks pretty demonic...*

Even though it was humanoid, it didn’t have the body of a human. If I had to make a comparison, it was similar to Bear Bear. It had a big head and a childlike body. I guess that part more resembled Eine.

It looked sort of like a chibi character, roughly three heads tall. Its face was also very cartoonish. It had a big mouth with razor-sharp, sharklike teeth, and upturned eyes that looked like upside down kamaboko. Imagine the face of a certain bullet enemy in a game where you play as a plumber. The curved smirk on its face that revealed its jagged teeth made it look very fiendish. Inside the demon’s eyes were spirals that looked like something a child would doodle, but somehow those shaky, crooked lines actually made it look fierce.

Even though the cartoonish demon was around Eine’s size, I had to admit it looked pretty sinister. Its clothes were also fairly daring. I wondered if this sort of chibi character needed clothes in the first place, but since it did look like a girl, there were probably some compliance rules that needed to be followed. The demon wore a black leather miniskirt and a black leather knee-high boots. Though since its feet just ended in points, it sort of just looked like black leather was stuck to them. For its top, it wore a black leather bustier that was fairly open at the top and left its belly button exposed. Not that the demon had much in the way of curves.

On its pointed ears it wore shiny cylindrical ear cuffs, and its pigtails were held in place with skull barrettes. And I assumed that giant plastic fork in its right hand was a weapon? Even though its outfit might have seemed sensational, it wasn’t alluring at all. It was pretty much a stuffed toy, after all.

Are we supposed to fight that? It’s a little intimidating, but doesn’t seem all

that strong. Actually, it looks weak. I could sense everyone's fighting spirit waning suddenly. This was obviously not the great demon they were expecting.

No, we couldn't let its appearance deceive us. This was a *demon*. We had to keep our guards up. Even cute monsters could turn out to be super strong!

"Kee-hee."

"...Aw, it's cute."

The voice that came out of the demon's mouth wasn't exactly one that made me feel like I needed to prepare for battle. I could tell I wasn't the only one unsure of what to do. Then, it wasn't long before—

Ding-dong.

"A demon has been summoned. Engage it in battle? The demon can be tamed even without fighting it."

"Huh? I can tame it?"

"Due to this monster being summoned under special conditions, it can be tamed at your discretion."

Amazingly, I could tame the demon without having to engage it in a fight. Was this similar to obtaining a monster that hatched from an egg? But still, I wasn't sure what to do... I glanced behind me to see the crowd of people holding their breath and staring at the demon. If I tamed it, that would mean all these people had come here for nothing. But I also didn't want us to fight and defeat it... This was a rare monster we were talking about here.

"U-Um, Alyssa? Can I have a word? Take a look at this."

I decided to show Alyssa my log to get her advice.

"What's up? Is it displaying the raid fight conditions?"

"Well..."

"What is it...? Huh? Ahhhhh!"

Alyssa let out a cry of shock when she looked at my log.

"Wh-What should we do?" I asked.

“I-I mean, you *have* to tame it, right?”

“B-But...”

“Ah, I see. Don’t worry about everyone else. You gave them free onigiri and showed them something they don’t see every day. They won’t complain.”

Y-You sure about that? If you say so, Alyssa, I’ll believe you, okay? And if people get mad at me, you’ll cover for me, right?!

“Th-Then, I’m going to tame it, okay?”

“By all means.”

I decided to take Alyssa at her word and tame the demon. I selected “Tame” from the options that had appeared on the screen.

“You have tamed the demon.”

Piece of cake! That really took nothing!

“Kee-heee!”

“Whoa!”

“Kee-hee!”

The chibi demon came flying into my chest. Her gaze was as intense as ever, but her voice sounded a little more affectionate toward me. She was tamed, all right. I checked her stats.

Name: Lilith Race: *Little Devil* Base Level: Lv. 1

Master: Yuto

HP: 20/20 MP: 3434

Strength: 7 Endurance: 7 Agility: 12

Dexterity: 4 Intelligence: 12 Sanity: 7

Skills: Absorb, Illusionary Magic, Imp’s Gaze, Tree Killer, Mental Resistance, Spear Skills, Flight, Dark Magic, Night Vision

Equipment: Little Devil’s Trident, Little Devil’s Outfit,

Little Devil's Barrettes

"Your name is Lilith? So you're a unique specimen, huh?"

"Kee-hee!"

Lilith proudly puffed out her chest and thrust up her toylike trident.

"Huh? What is that?"

"She's so cute!"

"Silver-Haired did it again!"

"I got to see a Silver-Haired moment live in action!"

"I-I want one too..."

"What the heck just happened?!"

Hearing everyone's boisterous voices brought me back to reality. I was currently in the center of attention. *Doesn't seem like anyone's mad, at least...*

"A-Aha ha. I, um, tamed the demon..."

Just twenty minutes after I tamed the cute miniature demon, Lilith...

"How'd things turn out like this...?"

I—I mean, *we* had moved locations. We were now in Zone Six, past the Subterranean Lake, which I had helped unlock. I had come back to this field many times for rice, but this time, our goal wasn't to harvest rice or to grind drops from weak monsters.

"It should be around here!"

"Right on! Let's do it!"

"Let's hurry, before Silver-Haired's onigiri effects wear off!"

"Time to hunt the predator!"

Predator monsters were terrifying, special bosses that could be found in each playing field. They boasted strength much higher than the average level of the area. So far, there were no reports of anyone beating the predators that appeared anywhere past Zone Eight.

The predator we were going for was a raid boss that inhabited a marsh, which was supposed to appear when more than a certain number of players congregated in a specific area of the wetland. It was a predator monster *and* a raid boss, so it was sure to be insanely strong. It was no surprise that there still weren't any reports of anyone beating this marsh predator. And yet we had come here to hunt that very same terrifying beast.

All the players that had assembled seemed to have felt that things had ended anticlimactically on the farm. They had gathered expecting to fight a raid boss, only to end up watching me tame a rare monster in one go. They also saw it as a waste for so many strong players with buff effects to just disband immediately. And so, some players suggested going to fight a predator, an idea that others latched on to, and I ended up coming along as well.

And yeah, I knew I'd just get in their way. But I couldn't turn down their invite. Everyone kept urging me to come because they wanted to see what Lilith could do. Besides, they said I could just watch from behind and not actually participate in the fight if I wanted to. They were fine with me coming along just to cheer them on. I understood their curiosity, since Lilith was such an unusual monster...

With how badly they wanted me to come, I would have felt bad about declining, and since I would just be watching from the back, I decided to join. *Am I like an officially recognized parasite? Either way, I'll gladly accept the carry.*

Since Lilith was still low-leveled, I couldn't place her up front anyway, so it was my every intention to stay out of sight this time around. But with the help of the other players, I was able to verify Lilith's skills somewhat along the way. She even grew to level 6.

Absorb: The ability to steal a small amount of HP and MP from the enemy when dealing a physical attack.

Illusion Magic: A magic technique that produces illusions.

Imp's Gaze: A technique that slightly lowers the target's

sanity.

Tree Killer: A technique that increases damage dealt to tree-type enemies.

Mental Resistance: A technique that increases resistance to mental status ailments.

Spear Skills: A technique for skillfully wielding spears.

Flight: Grants user ability to fly.

Dark Magic: A magical technique that manipulates darkness and shadows.

Night Vision: The ability to see in the dark as though in daylight.

That more or less summed things up. The ones that were new to me were the first four, and Dark Magic.

Absorb would drain a target's HP and HP when Lilith attacked the target with her spear or by biting. The skill didn't absorb much, but it would greatly help her continue fighting, so it could be pretty helpful.

Illusion magic, as the name suggested, was magic that produced phantom illusions. Lilith could conjure illusions to lure or confuse an enemy. It had a surprisingly high success rate on monsters with low sanity stats, so it could probably entirely flip the tables in a fight if used at the right time.

It was hard at first to test out what Imp's Gaze did, but it seemed to activate when Lilith stared at an enemy for a certain length of time, dealing it a debuff that lowered its sanity. Side note, but I noticed the skill had the word "Imp" in it, but Lilith's equipment was described as "Little Devil" equipment. That seemed like two ways to say the same thing, but I guess there was a distinction.

The sanity stat was tied to magic defense, but also granted resistance to mental status ailments, so being able to lower that was pretty handy. Also, since it wasn't a spell-based debuff, there was no chance of it failing. On the other hand, she had to stare at the target for a while, so it'd probably be

difficult to use on fast-moving enemies.

I assumed the Tree Killer skill came from her being created from the Sacred Tree. It was a skill that was dramatically more effective against plant-type monsters. My party was no stranger to struggling against plant-type monsters, so this was a huge help.

Lilith was the first member of my party to have Dark Magic. Not only did this type of elemental magic deal direct attacks, but it also specialized in inflicting status ailments and debuffs. By first using Dark Magic and Imp's Gaze to lower the enemy's sanity, and then using Illusion Magic, Lilith could entrap enemies in some interesting ways. These skills were effective even against enemies that were much higher in level than us, so I'd be able to get some use from them going forward. *Talk about great synergy.*

"It's here! Get in formation!"

"We're gonna be the first to bring it down!"

"Hell yeah!"

The predator appeared while I was in the middle of checking Lilith's stats. I turned to see what appeared to be a small hill emerging from the swamp. It was labeled Giant Silver Crab. It was, as you might have guessed, a gigantic crab—an oversized gazami crab with a silver carapace. It actually looked exactly like a mud crab, down to every last detail—except for its size, that is. It was over twenty meters across, with claws massive enough to snap up a whole house. Its carapace actually had a sort of beauty to it, illuminated in the moonlight, but word was that this carapace had the cheap ability to greatly reduce damage from magic spells.

"Let's go!"

"Yeah!"

Holland jumped to the front and started attacking the silver crab. He sure was energetic for a guy who had just gone through who knew how many raid bosses in one day. The other players following his lead must've been famous too, judging by all the cheering I heard around me back in the rear guard. Rather than praising their bravery, it sounded more like they were just excited to see

some celebrities. Since up to one hundred players could participate in the fight against this predator monster, there were a lot of people who had joined in on the spur of the moment. There must've been some famous players among them too. I recognized some of the participants, like Farmers Tagosack and Tsugarun. Someone had spotted them while they were doing some gathering in the area.

“Haaah! Take this!”

“Kurumi! I've got your back!”

“Hee hee hee!”

Filma, Kurumi, and Rikyu's group had also been headhunted on-site while they were here gathering rice. The food-loving trio had told me they'd been coming to this field pretty frequently, but I wasn't expecting them to be here today too. Were they actually coming here *every day*? Kurumi was in the front, striking the boss with her comically large hammer. Her techniques came with some great special effects, so she looked awesome in action.

Yodel-Ay-Hee, the painter I'd teamed up with in a past event, was also here. Just like before, he was attacking by producing a painting-like soap bubble. Actually, he wasn't just using the soap bubble this time. With a flick of his brush, he created a cutesy fireball that looked like it belonged in a kid's cartoon. The attack was, at first glance, almost comforting in its fairy-tale appearance, but it actually packed a good wallop. Even the scattering painted embers dealt more damage than the average spell. Since the move was classified as a skill and not a spell, the magic resistance effect of the predator's carapace would likely offer no defense against it.

Unfortunately, even with everyone giving it their all, the fight wasn't going in our favor. This predator was a super powerful boss that no one had defeated yet, so the extent of its fighting capabilities was beyond our knowledge.

“Kasha-shaaa!”

“Ahhhhhh!”

“Dammit!”

“That took out ten people!”

“Watch out for its pincers after it charges in!”

The crab was fearless in the face of everyone’s attacks. It charged in with its massive body and pincers and spewed poison bubbles out of its mouth, killing player after player. Its pincers were especially brutal. They extended out over thirty meters, and most of the front liners were killed instantly if they ended up in its clutches. I, meanwhile, was just running around like crazy trying to avoid those claws.

In fifteen minutes, the crab had taken out thirty people. That was a pace of two people a minute. At this rate, it would annihilate everyone in less than an hour. However, we had one person on our side who could overturn this disadvantageous position we were in.

“Heh heh... Eat this. My latest creation, Water Spider.”

It was Rikyu, the Bomber. She must have been waiting for the right moment to use her bomb safely. She sent out a spider-shaped homing bomb that skittered over the surface of the water. It slid underneath the predator and denoted forcefully, turning the tides of the fight. The predator flipped over on its back and started convulsing. The part of its underside, which was called an apron, flapped open, revealing its internal core.

Attacking its belly to force it onto its back must have been the key to beating it. Everyone attacked the glowing core together, and in no time at all, we were able to bring its HP down by twenty percent.

“All right! One more time, everyone!” Holland shouted.

“We can’t!” Filma cried.

“Why?!”

“Rikyu blew herself up!”

“*What?!?*”

Holland was understandably shocked, but Rikyu really had died. She died laughing after seeing the power of her own bomb. Exactly the way I’d expected the Bomber to go out.

Following that, everyone fought hard, prepared to die, and even as our

numbers dwindled, we managed to eke out a win. Learning the crab's weak point had really been the clincher. Even without the use of Rikyu's bombs, the attackers were able to land hits on the crab's belly and expose its weak point several more times, though we lost players each time.

"Victory is ours!"

"WOOOOOOO!"

After dealing the finishing blow with his Shining Saber, Holland thrust his giant sword up high and let out a victory yell, with other players joining in. Everyone in this game was always great at getting into the spirit of things. They loved any chance to celebrate.

"...We really won."

"Kee-hee!"

Lilith held up her toylike spear and cried out in a cute voice that didn't match her intense expression at all.



Even though I was just watching, I wasn't spared from some of the aftereffects, so I wasn't able to let my guard down. Honestly, I thought I was going to die more than once. Oh, but there was at least one moment where Lilith's Illusion Magic worked, sending the boss into confusion, so we had helped out too, in our own way.

Including all the battles during the event, today had been filled entirely with fighting. I was crazy tired, but thanks to all the adrenaline, I still felt like I had some energy left in me.

"Let's head back and have a victory party!"

"Mm!"

"Kee-hee!"

Thirty minutes later...

"Cheers!"

"Aha ha ha ha! This tanuki is sooo cute!"

"The water nymph poured water for me...! I'm keeping this in my inventory forever!"

How'd things turn out like this...? I feel like I just had that exact same thought...

After beating the Giant Silver Crab predator monster, everyone came back to my house. This was my fault for unthinkingly mentioning a victory party, but I hadn't expected to get such a positive reaction. People were already pumped up from the win, and I heard them start saying things like "Really?" "Victory party!" "A victory party at Silver-Haired's house!" and things just sort of steamrolled from there. I couldn't refuse, seeing as I had just leeches off of everyone during a super strong boss fight. And I *might* have also wanted to show off my house a little bit.

Thus, the chaotic scene before me. Of course, this didn't cause any detriment to me, and everyone was having a lot of fun, so it was fine. The girls were ogling my monsters who were serving them drinks, and the guys were cutting loose

maybe a little too much. I was pretty sure everything was still being live streamed... Were they okay with that?

“Hey, Yuto,” Alyssa said. “Sorry things got kind of out of hand. You even made food for everyone... Are you sure you’re okay with everyone live streaming?”

“The live streaming was part of our original agreement, and we talked about people pitching in for the food later, so it’s totally fine. Plus, the crab tastes delicious.”

The predator monster had dropped a lot of food ingredients, like Crab Meat and Crab Innards. I collected everyone’s ingredients, cooked them into meals, then served them. I made crab rice soup and crab hot pot, and both turned out delicious. My Cooking skill leveled up and I was able to enjoy some crab meat without using up any of my own ingredients, so all in all it was a win for me.

“I’m glad you think so.”

I was also supplied other new foods besides the crab. Tagosack gave me strawberries and Tsugarun gave me apples. Incidentally, after the event ended, various NPC shops started selling new foods and items, probably one of the new features added with the update. Tsugarun had sent a message to all his friends about how happy he was about it. I had also gone to the Town of Beginnings to stock up on apples and used them to make juice and jam. The only thing was, apples were only sold by NPCs at the moment and couldn’t be turned into saplings. Tsugarun was disappointed about that. His dream was to grow an apple orchard and become the king of apples. Despite his deep love for apples, however, he was tragically allergic to them in real life.

“It seems like you’re having a harder time than me, Alyssa.”

All I had done was provided the venue and the food, and then I could just sit back and relax. Alyssa was having to work much harder than me in comparison. She was running around collecting money and breaking up fights. She looked absolutely exhausted right now.

“That’s not the only reason I’m tired...”

Now that she mentioned it, she *had* seemed tired ever since the Demon Summoning. Maybe she was still tired from the event.

“Right, I should also pay you for the Hanami Vandal’s Wrath.”

“Oh, well, that’s on me. I used it without thinking.”

During our feast, I’d gotten carried away and used the Hanami Vandal’s Wrath as an offhand joke. Everyone else was doing some really funny things, and that was just the first thing I thought of. People went absolutely nuts over the Hanami Vandal when it appeared. The buffs from the crab meals were still active, and everyone who joined in was a strong fighter, so I thought it’d be a quick fight. But actually, we had a pretty tough time. The Hanami Vandal was a boss whose difficulty changed depending on the levels of the players. Though we were able to beat it.

“What did the Hanami Vandal drop?”

“Nothing new. Oh, but...”

“Yeah?”

“Can you take a look at this?”

What I showed Alyssa weren’t drops from the Hanami Vandal, but the spoils I’d gotten from the predator monster fight.

“Giant Silver Crab Pincer, Giant Silver Crab Bubble Sack, Giant Crab’s Innards, and ten Giant Crab Meats. And—a Foam Emblem?”

“Yeah, what *is* that?”

Mixed in among all the other Giant Silver Crab drops that everyone else also got was an item I’d never seen before. I’d never even heard of a Foam Emblem. I figured I must have obtained it because of my rare drop ticket, which ended up not being used for the demon fight I’d been expecting.

“Huh? You got an Emblem?”

However, Alyssa seemed to know what this was, and she looked pretty surprised.

“Yeah.”

“That’s amazing!”

Alyssa went on to tell me that items called Emblems were extremely rare,

valuable items dropped by strong monsters. Currently, only three types of Emblems had been found, and they were only obtained very rarely from a field raid boss in Zone Ten.

“I guess it’s all thanks to my rare drop ticket. Good thing I used it on that boss.”

That was my thought, but Alyssa explained that even using a rare drop ticket wouldn’t guarantee an Emblem would be dropped. Some bosses held multiple items that were considered rare drops, and the rare drop ticket only guaranteed that *one* of those would be dropped.

“Then, it looks like I was lucky.”

“Yeah. You never fail to amaze me, Yuto.”

“So, what does this thing do?”

“Oh, it’s really amazing!”

“Everything’s amazing today, huh?”

What I understood was that it was amazing enough that any other words failed Alyssa.

“Ah ha ha. Well, you can use it for anything.”

“*Anything?*”

“Yep.”

I thought she was obviously exaggerating, but when I heard her explanation of it, it really did sound like it could be used for anything. First of all, it could be used as an all-purpose ingredient. It could be used as a material in virtually all crafting actions, including smithing, concocting, cooking, and woodworking. Plus, it could grant various effects to the crafted items. Other possible uses included using it as fishing bait or fertilizer and mixing it into paint.

Emblems were clearly valuable items. Alyssa told me that they hadn’t completely tested them out, but had just tried out certain things to see if they were possible. Because of that, they still didn’t know the full extent of their capabilities. But no other items could be used for so many crafting actions.

“How can Tamers use it?”

“We had Carlo test it out, but so far he’s only figured out that it can be used to teach monsters skills and to upgrade the functions of an incubator if used to craft one.”

“Interesting...”

So basically it’s a type of enhancement item, right? But one that’s really valuable.

“If you want to sell it, then come straight to us! We’ll pay you generously for it!”

“H-How much, exactly?”

“Currently, it’s worth two million!”

“Wha? Two million? Are you serious?”

“One hundred percent.”

“Jeez...!”

Wh-What should I do? *Must sell...* No! This was a valuable item, so shouldn’t I hold on to it? *But two million is a whole lotta money...*

“I’m sure you can find out an interesting use for it, so you could also just sell us the info when you do.”

“A-All right.”

Yeah. I’ll hold on to it for now.

“Oh, and can we discuss the information fee later?”

“Information fee?”

I thought we had agreed to consider her gathering a group of players to be payment enough, though...

“For the new information, of course. There were a bunch of new finds, like the demon! And the Emblem!”

“Oh, I guess that’s true. I need to log out soon for the day anyway, so yeah, we can talk about it later.”

“Great, thanks.”

While we were talking, other members of the Quick-Eared Cats approached us looking harried. *Oh no, did something happen?*

“Submaster! A fight broke out over there.”

“Ugh, again?”

Oh, just a fight.

“What are they fighting about?”

“Who’s better, undines or sylphs...”

“Whoops, it sounded like my monsters aren’t entirely uninvolved. Wait, they weren’t necessarily fighting about *my* monsters specifically, right?”

“I get they’re excited being on sacred grounds and all, but seriously... All right, I’ve gotta go.”

“R-Right. Good luck over there.”

“See ya later.”

After Alyssa left to break up the fight, looking even more exhausted, my monsters came running over to me. *Were they waiting for us to finish our important conversation?*

“Kee-heee!”

“Mm-mmm!”

“Oh, you’re all here.”

My monsters were all together, with Lilith in the center. I wondered if they’d been showing her around the house. Reflet and Eine were with them too. *I knew my monsters didn’t start that fight! What a relief.*

“Looks like you’re all getting along.”

“Kee-hee!”

“Tiiii!”

“...!”

Lilith had a skill disturbingly named Tree Killer, but she seemed to get along just fine with Olea and Sakura. They were holding hands like old pals. I was super excited to see just how this cute, dark magic-wielding demon would evolve.

“I’m happy to have you on the team, Lilith!”

“Kee-hee!”

Online Forum [The Master Celebrity] Silver-Haired, Amazing as Always, Part 27

A discussion thread for the most famous of famous players.

We don't want to be deleted from the forums, so no dissing allowed.

Screenshots posted without consent are not permitted.

This thread will be deleted if we're asked to do so.

224: Takashima

The event *just* ended, and here we are discussing Silver-Haired again.

What the heck was that Demon Summoning thing?

225: Cho

Silver-Haired + live streaming = bomb drop.

That equation is going to show up on the exam, so you better remember it!

226: Tetsu

Forgetting it is harder LOL

227: Tundra

Silver-Haired didn't even live stream it himself, but a lot of people who were with him were streaming.

I felt like I didn't know what to be shocked by first. I died when I saw the lineup of famous players.

228: Tomato Mato

There's no way that demon isn't gonna be in high demand.

229: Tetsu

Yeah, I can see people who like cute monsters wanting one. And guys who want to go after the possibility of her evolving into a pretty girl.

Also, edgelords who are really into demons and stuff.

230: Tomato Mato

The demon looked pretty strong.

A Tamer friend of mine sped right over to the Quick-Eared Cats.

231: Takashima

The Cats' submaster flashed on the screen in some of the live streams, so they've definitely got info about it.

232: Tundra

Over on the Tamer message boards, two threads have already been consumed with discussions of the little demon.

233: Cho

Tamers keep an even closer eye on Silver-Haired movements than the Defenders, so that's unsurprising considering what was shown.

234: Takashima

I think this every time, but whenever I learn something's possible to get, I want to get it too!

But I guess that's just an impossible dream...

All we know is that Silver-Haired's squirrel did something, and there were the words "Demon Summoning."

Oh, and that giant tree was there.

235: Cho

That looked like a Sacred Tree. Come to think of it, it looked a lot like the Sacred Tree from that event, didn't it?

236: Tetsu

So Silver-Haired's squirrel got a special evolution, learned a skill called Demon Summoning, and then summoned a demon from the Sacred Tree?

And, for some reason, the Sacred Tree shot up in size instantaneously.

237: Tomato Mato

That giggling demon was cute and all, but personally, I was more interested in the predator fight that came afterward.

238: Tarukus

Oh yeah, that fight! Now everyone knows how to beat the crab!

239: Tomato Mato

Exactly!

It seems doable, as long as you have bombs and some tanks.

240: Tundra

The players over on the predator monster message boards already summed up a battle plan.

241: Takashima

But you know, is it really okay that that was live streamed?

I mean, I'm grateful for having gotten to see it...

242: Cho

Maybe Silver-Haired had something to do with it?

243: Tetsu

Oh, maybe?

I do appreciate Silver-Haired revealing all sorts of things through live streams.

244: Tundra

Silver-Haired wasn't the one live streaming this time, though.

245: Tomato Mato

Yeah, I think there were thirty videos in total.

Front line, back line. North south east west. We got to see the predator monster fight from every possible angle.

246: Tundra

It was super informative.

People got killed in so many different ways too, so we got to see what sorts of attacks to be careful of.

247: Tarukus

I felt this way when I watched Silver-Haired's dinosaur fight video too, but there's a lot you can learn from POV videos.

248: Takashima

You said it. I think it's going to become a trend.

249: Tomato Mato

What is it, a fashion trend?

250: Tetsu

I mean, basically. Someone popular does something, then everyone starts copying it.

251: Tarukus

Plus, live streamed boss fights get a lot of views. Take the most recent weekly rankings. Over half the top-ranked videos were boss fights.

252: Tetsu

First place still went to the undefeated Mamori.

People keep speculating she's going to be inducted into the hall of fame soon.

253: Tundra

If she keeps dominating the rankings, people are going to be less motivated to upload their videos.

254: Cho

I'm more curious about Silver-Haired's house. What was up with that place?

I'm not even sure I'd call it a grand, luxurious mansion. It was more like...an amusement park?

255: Tomato Mato

I wanna go to Silver-Haired's park!

256: Takashima

An amusement park where you get to meet monsters, mascots, yokai, and dinosaurs.

A paradise, to say the least.

257: Cho

Someone took it upon themselves to construct a map of Silver-Haired's mansion. They analyzed a bunch of live streams and figured out where everything went.

258: Tetsu

That's some next level stuff...

259: Tundra

What is?

260: Tetsu

Both. Silver-Haired's house, for being the target of study, and the persistence of the person who made the map.

By the way, just how many event points did he have to have used to build that house?

261: Takashima

I'm just guesstimating, but I think he would have had to use all his event points and tickets.

262: Tomato Mato

He ignored all the weapons and dumped everything into his home.

Silver-Haired's amazing... There's no copying him!

263: Tarukus

Here I am only obsessed with fighting. I feel so narrow-

minded...

264: Takashima

Well, it's Silver-Haired

There's no use comparing yourself to him.

265: Cho

Takashima's right. That's just the way things are.

266: Tetsu

Don't even try to imitate him. Just revere him.

267: Tundra

Videos of his home were great to see, but that party looked like so much fun, I cried.

Those crab meat dishes looked delicious too...

I wanted to eat crab hot pot so bad that I went to get some IRL.

268: Cho

Oh yeah! That did look like such a good time.

I want to be waited on by his monsters too!

269: Tomato Mato

I want to pet his mascots!

And I was pretty jealous of the rematch against the Hanami Vandal.

270: Takashima

I know there were discussions before about the possibility of a rematch against the Hanami Vandal, and I

guess it *can* be fought again periodically?

The Hanami Vandal's drops are still valuable, so I get your envy.

271: Tundra

I want to be able to use Drunken Boxing too!

272: Takashima

Huh? I thought a regular way of getting Drunken Boxing was publicized already?

I heard you can get it if you fight for a bit while in an Intoxicated state.

273: Tundra

That's not confirmed! I couldn't learn it that way...

274: Takashima

I see...

Then this is a chance for anyone growing cherry blossom trees to make a killing.

I bet some people will progress that quest chain.

275: Tarukus

I was jealous of the dinosaur viewing party.

Since that's completely impossible IRL.

276: Tetsu

Dinosaur viewing party?

That's one way to put it XD

277: Takashima

You're right though, that was impressive to see.

Damn, I want to drink and look at dinosaurs too!

278: Tundra

I want Sakura and Reflet to serve me drinks!

279: Cho

Can't Silver-Haired open his home to the public? I'd pay money!

280: Tomato Mato

Silver-Haired Park: it's chock-full of cuteness and delicacies, and it's a great spot to have a raid battle.

I can't wait for its opening day.

281: Tetsu

It's a place of dreams!

282: Tarukus

In the meantime, loads of people are looking for others to form parties with to fight the crab, so I think I'll do that.

[Assemble, Fans of Silver-Haired] All Things Silver-Haired-Related, Part 16

This thread is for people who are interested in Silver-Haired, the famously eccentric pioneer, and his monsters. Feel free to exchange information about them here.

Slander or abuse will not be tolerated.

Please treat sensitive information with care.

This thread may be deleted without warning should we receive a complaint from Silver-Haired himself.

900: Yang Yang

Silver-Haired! Too soon!

901: visitorfromanotherplanet

You don't even have to explain, I get it.

So he did something again, huh?

902: Willow

Let's take down a demon → never mind, now we're hunting a predator monster!

903: Yang Yang

Anytime Silver-Haired is involved, it's guaranteed *something* is going to happen.

Why is that?

904: visitorfromanotherplanet

I don't think there's an answer to that question...

It's just who he is.

905: Willow

I think things just spiral when it comes to Silver-Haired.

Discover something by doing something out of the norm → do something even *more* out of the norm, make more discoveries → keep playing differently from us plebs, discover something *crazy* → repeat ad infinitum.

906: visitorfromanotherplanet

Well, yeah.

Sooner or later we're gonna hear that he's playing a different game entirely.

Or maybe things have already come to that?

907: Yang Yang

We're still on the same playing field! He's not playing a different game!

908: visitorfromanotherplanet

I don't mean a literal different game, but I feel like he could discover a whole other continent or something.

Then he'll clear it all alone, then throw us into chaos with all the info he discovers.

909: Willow

I can actually see that happening...

910: Yang Yang

Also, don't forget about all the attention he's getting. That's a big factor.

We're getting wind of his exploits faster and faster now.

911: Willow

Aha, you're right. Silver-Haired's actions get a lot of attention, so word about whatever he does spreads around quick.

912: Yodel-Ay-Hee

And his connections.

That contributes a lot too, I think.

913: visitorfromanotherplanet

His connections?

914: Willow

Silver-Haired has a lot of top players around him, so we know he has great connections.

They're always honed in on what he's doing so they can jump in immediately.

915: Yodel-Ay-Hee

Yeah, that too. But that's not all.

916: Willow

What do you mean?

917: Yodel-Ay-Hee

It's like, he has the ability to get people to join him. Or maybe I should say that the people around him end up *wanting* to lend him their power.

I'm sure they all have their different reasons, but they all try to help him.

918: visitorfromanotherplanet

I don't know if I'd call that connections, then. It's more like his charisma.

919: Yodel-Ay-Hee

Yeah! That's the word!

920: Yang Yang

Charisma, huh...? I have no shred of that, nope!

921: Willow

I don't think I've ever been called charismatic in my life.

922: visitorfromanotherplanet

So it's because he's charismatic...

I wish someone would call me that!

923: Yang Yang

I think there are actually a lot of different reasons for people helping, though. They could be his friends, the Defenders, fish in troubled waters, or people who just happen to be around and join in.

924: Willow

And so that's the reason people gather around Silver-Haired?

925: Yodel-Ay-Hee

I was one of the people who happened to be around and joined in on the predator monster fight, BTW.

926: Yang Yang

Wait, really? You were there too?

927: Willow

You're not just trolling, are you?

928: visitorfromanotherplanet

Or delusional?

929: Yodel-Ay-Hee

No, I was there! I was fighting over in the corner!

I even got caught on video for a second!

930: Yang Yang

Oh yeah! That interesting soap bubble thing, that you?

931: Yodel-Ay-Hee

Yes! I was gathering rice when someone asked if I wanted to join in on fighting a predator. I was about to decline, but then I realized Silver-Haired was the one organizing it.

932: Willow

Why would you decline in the first place?

933: visitorfromanotherplanet

People are always recruiting randos to form parties to fight the predator there. They usually fail, so they've had trouble finding people willing to join.

934: Yang Yang

That's about to change, since now people know how to beat it.

935: Yodel-Ay-Hee

I thought it was just another impulsive group of strangers rushing to their deaths, but I was wrong. I figured if Silver-Haired is involved, then it's a surefire win.

I actually bowed my head and pleaded to let me join them.

936: Yang Yang

So cool. If I'd been there, I would've knelt down in the swamp to ask them to let me join.

Anything to join in Silver-Haired's party.

937: Willow

Yeah, same here!

938: visitorfromanotherplanet

This is Silver-Haired's charisma in action, huh?

I'd probably do the same. Wish I'd been there.

939: Willow

So, how was it? Did you do anything cool?

940: Yang Yang

Wait, you know Silver-Haired personally, don't you? Did you talk? Like did you at least say hi?

941: Yodel-Ay-Hee

As if a side character Silver-Haired barely knows can just go up and talk to him!

And no, I didn't do anything cool. I died in the first fifteen minutes!

I doubt Silver-Haired even realized I was gone. Or that I was even there.

942: visitorfromanotherplanet

Don't sweat it, side character.

943: Willow

H-Hey, look. We're all side characters.

944: Yang Yang

That's right. In fact, staying unnoticed in the background is the essence of being a side character!

You're a model side character!

945: Yodel-Ay-Hee

Yeah, you're right!

946: visitorfromanotherplanet

Ideally you'd have talked to Silver-Haired and brought some info back for us, though.

947: Yang Yang

You good-for-nothing side character!

948: Willow

You said it.

949: Yodel-Ay-Hee

If you all were in my shoes, there's no way you'd be able to say a word to him!

950: Yang Yang

H-Hey, you don't know that! We would walk right up to him and get loads of info from him!

Right, guys?

951: Willow

W-Well, I dunno...

Silver-Haired's got people watching over him.

952: visitorfromanotherplanet

Yeah, I'm scared of the Defenders too.

953: Yodel-Ay-Hee

I expect big things from you, ya hear?

954: Yang Yang

I-I'm gonna do it! I'll talk to him even if I get reported!

955: Willow

Aw yeah! I wanna see Yang Yang get reported!

956: Yodel-Ay-Hee

Just don't cause trouble for Silver-Haired, okay?

957: visitorfromanotherplanet

That's rule number one.

Just get reported by the Defenders so we can laugh about it later.

I'd really like to see that, actually.

958: Yang Yang

That isn't funny!

But, you're right. I can't cause trouble for Silver-Haired!

That's why I won't talk to him!

959: Yodel-Ay-Hee

So wishy-washy.

960: Willow

Yup. Wishy-washy.

961: visitorfromanotherplanet

Wishy-washy panda.

962: Yang Yang

Sh-Shut up!

Just wait and see, I'll do it someday!

I'll talk to Silver-Haired without breaking any rules!

Chapter Two: Red Town

Four days had passed since the event ended. Those four days were filled with activity, though nothing as hectic as the series of raid bosses I had fought on the last day of the event.

My monsters and I made some new discoveries and developments, from Eine making cloth from the silk she collected with her Sericulture, to Sakura and Himka crafting new pieces with their Woodworking and Pottery respectively, to me being able to cultivate Fluorescent Gentians in the darkroom of my house.

The biggest change of all had to have been the Sacred Tree. Separating from the demon Lilith seemed to have healed it from its disease, and its foliage was now thick and lustrous. Thanks to that, I was able to get my hands on some materials like the Sacred Tree Branch and the Sacred Tree Young Leaf.

The branch was a regular high-quality wood, but the young leaf really was something else. Get this—it was an ingredient to make a Revive Potion. According to the recipe I'd bought from the Quick-Eared Cats, the required ingredients were water, medicinal herb, and poison hemlock, all above a certain level of quality. And finally, a plant with a strong sacred attribute.

The Sacred Tree's Young Leaf was perfect to fulfill that sacred plant requirement. Even though the Revive Potion I made came out with a low quality due to my low Alchemy level, I'd still been able to make it. I expected nothing less from an item from the Sacred Tree.

But man, all that experimenting really *was* fun. Of course, crafting and lazing around in my new house wasn't all that I'd been up to.

For example, there were the guilds. Up to now, I'd only been a member of the Adventurers' Guild, Farming Guild, and the Magical Beasts Guild. I could join one more, but I hadn't been able to decide which one to choose. Considering my skills, I figured I should join either the Cooking or the Alchemy Guilds. The Alchemy Guild was probably the better fit, but I was lacking that final decisive push to choose either one. Joining either guild wouldn't be a bad idea, but

neither felt quite right either.

Ultimately, I decided on the Artisans' Guild. As you could guess by its name, it was a comprehensive guild that covered all types of crafting. If I had joined the Cooking Guild, for example, I would have been able to obtain higher ranked cooking equipment and cooking stations for cheaper while still at a low level. I'd be able to buy more ingredients for cheap too. But as a member of the Artisans' Guild, I'd be able to gain benefits not just for cooking, but for every type of crafting technique, including concocting, alchemy, smithing, woodworking, sericulture, and beekeeping. If you were interested in one specific craft, the Artisans' Guild could never compete with the guild specializing in that craft alone, but I wasn't really planning to completely master any single craft anyway. Being a part of the more generalized Artisans' Guild suited my playstyle much better.

This had a positive impact on my monsters' crafts too. Since I made so many deliveries to the guild, my rank already increased to 6. That allowed me to upgrade my facilities, which would make crafting more efficient. That made my monsters really happy too.

I also made some good progress with the Tamed Monster's Hearts. In these four days, I received two new hearts. One was from Reflet. Just like I had heard, she gave it to me after she played in the water of the spring. Sure enough, the condition was to provide a body of water over a certain size for her to play in.

The other heart I received from my Olive Treant, Olea. Based on the timing of things, I suspected that the trigger had been the restoration of the Sacred Tree. Having planted trees of a certain level and uniqueness might have also been an important factor there. In any case, that brought my total number of summoning beads to seven. Now I'd be able to swap monsters in and out far more proactively.

The next hearts I wanted to work toward were Himka's and Eine's. From the little I knew, besides the favorability score, there were two other conditions one needed to fulfill in order to receive a Tamed Monster's Heart from an elemental monster. The first was related to the monsters' initial crafting skills. In the case of gnomes, they had to grow crops above a certain rarity. For undines, they had to make over a certain number of meals using rare ingredients. The other

condition was related to installations in my home. For gnomes, I needed a large farm, and for undines, a large body of water.

With all that considered, I figured that I would need to have Himka craft using ores over a certain rank and I'd need to install a home object related to fire. For Eine, I probably needed to let her use Sericulture with special materials, and I needed to install an object related to air.

So, at this moment, we were mining ores for Himka to use. Our current location was Static Electricity Mountain, in the eastern part of Zone Eight. The boss here dropped Static Electric Ores and Poison Wave Ores as items, which would supposedly fulfill the condition for getting a tamed monster's heart from a salamander.

It also helped that the monsters here weren't that strong. Since the static electricity gimmick presented enough of a challenge, the monsters on this field were consequently less difficult. Or so I had been led to believe, but—

"G-Grooowl!"

"Ahhh! Bear Bear!"

Bear Bear just went flying!

"Crap! Everyone, let's all attack at once! Let's bring that thing down!"

"...!"

"Kee-hee-hee!"

My current party was Olto, Bear Bear, Sakura, Fau, Lilith, and Perca. I'd formed our party by choosing the monsters that seemed least likely to be affected by the static electricity. Things had gone swimmingly so far, thanks to the strategy I'd learned about in advance...but now, a strong monster had appeared before us, and we were in a tight spot.

"I can't believe we actually ran into this thing here!"

We found ourselves face-to-face with the most formidable monster that inhabited this field, a unique Tourmaline Golem. Since it was a unique specimen, it was one or two grades stronger than the regular specimens. Its move that was especially brutal was when it stored up the field's electric shocks

and then discharged it in an AoE attack. Not only was it a powerful attack, it also had a high chance of inflicting paralysis. Moreover, the golem's electric shock attack in turn activated even more field gimmicks. What it activated this time around were two traps, one that stunned us for an instant with an electric shock attack and one that blinded us with a flash of light. Neither Olto or I could open our eyes, which was why we hadn't been able to protect Bear Bear, who was now paralyzed.

Paralyzed...and devoid of party support. In a situation like that, even a tank could expect to take a lot of damage from a strong physical attack from the golem, which was exactly what had just happened to Bear Bear.

Nevertheless, we managed to concentrate our attacks and take down the Tourmaline Golem. Lilith's Illusion Magic did amazing work against the golem, which had low sanity. She was able to keep it confused even though it was a higher level than her.

"Great job, Lilith!"

"Kee-hee!"

"Grooowl..."

"Bear Bear! You doing okay?"

"Growl!"

I was counting on Bear Bear for the boss fight. They had just learned two new skills after reaching level 40. The first was Nullify Poison, the effect of which was pretty self-explanatory. The other skill was called Store Food. This was a skill that allowed Bear Bear to recover HP by consuming their hunger status, and they could additionally now fill their hunger gauge to two hundred percent.

With these two skills, Bear Bear would be an excellent tank against the Poison Golem, which was the boss of this area. So, I would be less than amused if Bear Bear died before we even got there. I had heard that the boss was pretty strong, but our strategy was solid. I was sure we'd manage.

But even with Bear Bear's new power-ups, the Static Electricity Mountain threw one hazard after another at us. Maybe I shouldn't have been surprised that Zone Eight would require more than the usual tricks to get through. As we

kept progressing after the second half, the path grew perilous, and stronger and stronger monsters started appearing.

We'd been able to get through Zone Seven much more smoothly. Even a one-zone difference bumped up the difficulty level by a noticeable degree.

That's right, in the four days following the event, my party had broken ground in new areas while simultaneously leveling up Lilith. Even I was surprised at our progress. Since my monsters had leveled up a lot during the event, we were able to get through the maps much faster than I'd imagined. By now, we had made it to each town in all four cardinal directions of Zone Seven.

In the eastern part of Zone Seven was Mining Town. It was a town of stone and iron built in a valley and inhabited mainly by dwarves. Monsters like gargoyles appeared in the mountains that surrounded it, making it the perfect environment to mine ores.

Beyond that town was Zone Eight, which split into two areas. One side was Blazing Tree Mountain, which was a mountain home to strange trees that spouted flames. The place was swarming with fire-type monsters, and had a field gimmick that made fire burst out in spots all over the mountain. Videos of monsters going up in flames were circulating around online. *Bear Bear is pretty weak to fire...*

The second area was where we were now: Static Electricity Mountain. It was filled with magnetic and electric shock traps, so carrying metal weapons was a bad idea. There were potions to ward against static electricity, but using those on one's entire party would get pretty expensive. For that reason, warriors who wore light armor were indispensable in this field. Both mountains weren't to be underestimated, but getting this far, neither was going to be an easy field.

The town in the western part of Zone Seven was Oasis Town, which was surrounded by desert. Past that was the Rock Desert filled with rocks obstructing the way through, and Quicksand Corridor, which was filled with traps, such as antlion pits. Quicksand Corridor was where Tagosack had told me seaweed could be harvested, so I wanted to try going there at some point.

To the north of Zone Seven was Forest Town. Like its name suggested, it was a town hidden in the forest and inhabited by Elves. It was famous for being a

place to buy high-quality bows. Past that, in Zone Eight, there was the Dark Forest, where undead monsters roamed, and Predator Forest, where you always had to be watching out for mimic plants. It was a horror fest in full swing. I didn't want to go to either area, to be honest.

The town to the south of Zone Seven was Canal Town. It was a Venice-esque city built on the water where people used gondolas to get around. This town was the most recent to be unlocked, so there were a lot of players there sightseeing and exploring. Beyond that, the field split into the Peatland and the Grand River. Neither had been conquered yet, but death by drowning and suffocation were frequent occurrences. Though they might have had plenty of natural beauty to offer, they were by no means easy areas.

This far into the playing field, everywhere sounded difficult. Even Static Electricity Mountain was several times more relentless than I'd anticipated. I couldn't get used to the electric shocks. Each time, my body would jolt, sending me into a miniature panic attack. Still, we continued on along the mountain slowly and eventually approached the boss area.

The worst part had to be when we were attacked by bird monsters while rock climbing. We couldn't see the enemies thanks to the blinding flashes of lights, so we nearly fell. This mountain really was no joke.

"We're almost at the summit! Keep it up, everyone!"

"Grooowl!"

"Just you wait for us, boss! I've got all the strats on how to beat you, so there's no way we'll lose!"

"Growl growl!"

We trash-talked on our way up and made it to the top of the mountain in high spirits, when suddenly—

"Groooooonk!"

"Aaaghhh!"

"Mmm!"

I never learn, do I?! My battle strategy completely collapsed in the face of the

boss's strength, which was much higher than I'd expected. *Who was it?! Who said we wouldn't lose as long as we had the right strategy?!*

The boss's static-electricity-charged attacks had a slight effect on Olto's hoe. When he blocked the attacks, his arms went numb for a second, slowing down his movements. Because of that, he couldn't take part in the fight as actively as he normally could.

Also, the boss's long-range rock-throwing attack I'd heard of was much quicker than expected. I'd heard it was fast, but I'd also heard that I'd be able to avoid them once I got the hang of it.

"No I caaan't!"

When a fighter-type said something like "It's easy once you get used to it," that was equivalent to saying it was straight up impossible for me. I took damage from the attack once every three times. What was with those super fast rocks flying at me?! They should've thought of slowpokes like me when they made up their strategy! Just doing my best to dodge wasn't going to cut it here!

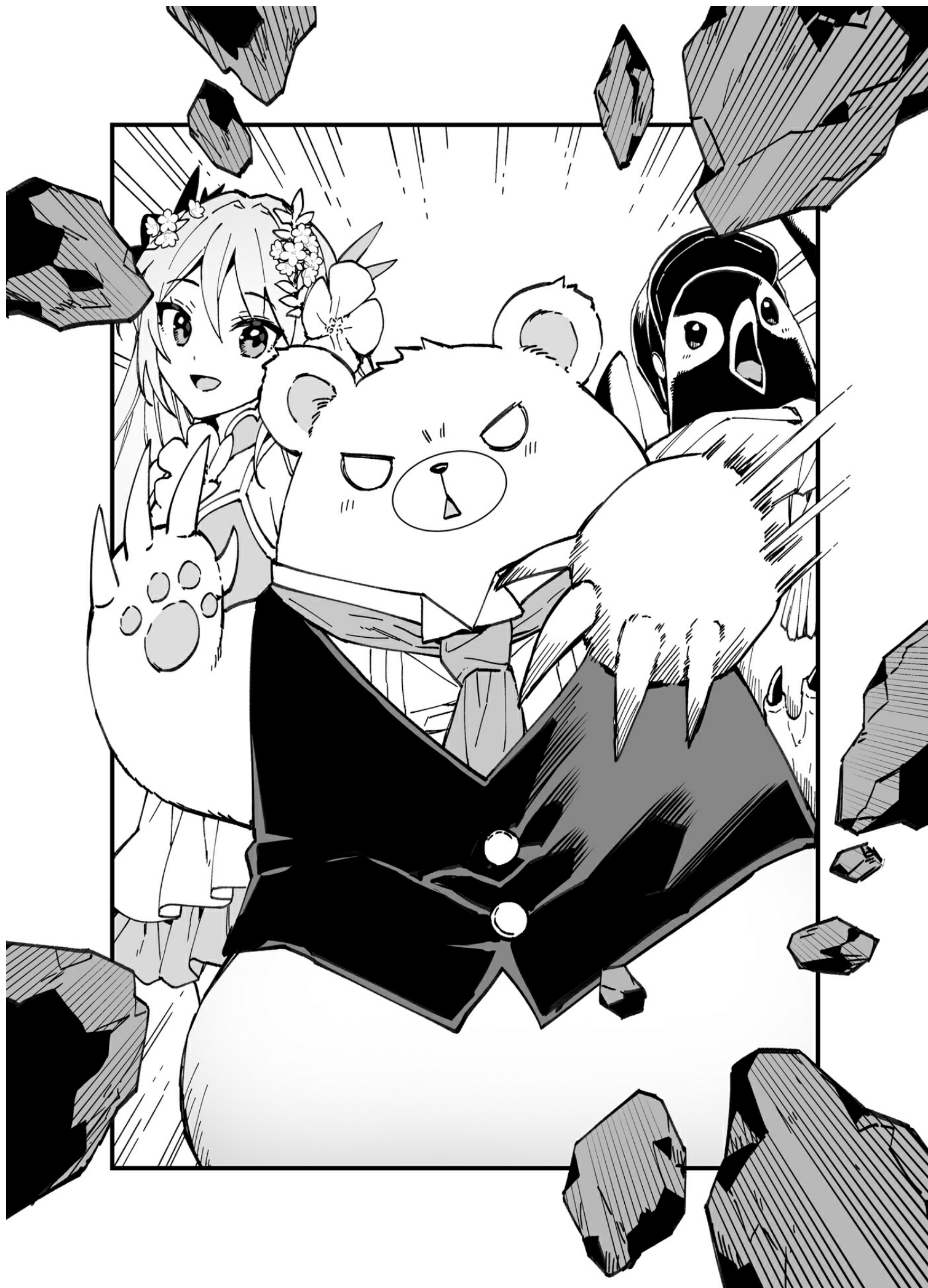
"Bear Bear! It's up to you!"

"Grooowl!"

The only thing that saved us from wiping, despite all odds, was Bear Bear. They nullified the golem's poison and stolidly blocked its attacks. We weren't getting out of this without a scratch of course, but I figured that already. Bear Bear's Store Food skill was also instantly replenishing their HP. Each time Bear Bear consumed their stored food, their stomach loudly rumbled. *Just hold on a little longer this time! I promise, later I'll treat you to some of your favorite honey!*

"Keep that up!"

"Growl growl!"



Bear Bear looked small going up against the massive rock golem, but they persisted in fighting hard. I had known their skills would be a perfect matchup against the golem, but even so, their moves were truly impressive. They swiftly sidestepped the golem's attacks and chipped away at its HP with a swipe of their claws.

"Groonk!"

"Growl!"

Meanwhile, the rest of us attacked the golem with long-range attacks. I figured this out while we were fighting, but recovery wasn't the Food Storage skill's only effect. It also gathered the enemy's hate. Since Bear Bear was healing themselves, they were drawing the same amount of hate as a healer would. For a tank, that was extremely useful. It would get a rearguard position killed, though.

"Hunh-groooooonk!"

The boss raised both arms high and let out a roar, clearly signaling it was about to do something different.

"Ack! Already?!"

It was the Poison Golem's special move that activated after it took a certain amount of damage, or after a certain number of its attacks were blocked. The attack was extremely unpleasant—it discharged an electric shock that dealt poison and paralysis across the entire field. Being both paralyzed and poisoned would put us in a real crisis. I thought we had more time before it would use this attack, but maybe Bear Bear had gone a little overboard.

"We won't be able to cancel it in time!"

"Aye!"

"Kee-hee!"

My original plan had been for Fau and Lilith, who would've been keeping a watch on the boss's movements, to drop bombs on it and cancel its special, but, well, it was obvious how that turned out.

Our entire party took damage, but miraculously no one died. I switched out

my party members using summoning beads and we continued fighting doggedly against the golem.

Then, twenty-five minutes after the fight began...

“Growl grooowl!”

Bear Bear charged forward, undaunted by the golem’s attack, and sunk a straight right punch into its abdomen with all their strength. They really put their shoulder into the punch, looking like a character straight out of a boxing manga. *With claws!*

“Hrn...gronk...!”

“We did it! We won!”

Bear Bear’s attack ended up being the killing blow, bringing home the win. Zone Eight bosses really were powerful as all get-out.

“Considering how strong it was...we’ll definitely get some good rewards from this.”

I checked the dropped items from my window, and saw that I had gotten plenty of the ores I’d been aiming for. *All that struggle was worth it!*

“Bear Bear, you’re this fight’s MVP! Awesome job!”

“Grooowl!”

I patted Bear Bear, then my other monsters surrounded them and gave them a round of applause, seemingly in agreement. Bear Bear bashfully scratched their head.

“Growl growl”

“I’ll give you a treat later—”

“Chirp chirp!”

“Tra-la-la!”

Oh, so even though they acknowledged Bear Bear as the MVP, they weren’t okay with them being the only one to get a treat? Rick and Eine were clinging to my head and protesting.

“Okay, I get it! *Everyone* gets a treat! But you have to be good, or you won’t get anything!”

“Chirp?”

“Tra-la?”

These two... They’re trying to look cute on purpose now! Stop looking up at me while tilting your head in the same direction! Now I have to take a screenshot!

“Gimme a break.”

“Chirp?”

“Tra-la?”

“Hm?”

“Hum?”

Himka and Reflet too?! Who’d they learn that from? They sure looked cute, though.

“Ahh, Drimo. You get a treat even though you’re not doing a cutesy pose.”

“Squeak.”

You don’t have to look so relieved... Okay, I’ll admit it! I wanted to see Drimo act all cute too!

“Let’s get on with checking our loot.”

The items I’d been aiming for were among the drops I got from the boss.

“All right, we got the Static Electric and Poison Wave Ores, and a good haul of other ores too.”

“Hm!”

Himka would be able to work more efficiently now. Also, everyone leveled up.

“Hmm, Perca still didn’t evolve, huh?”

He wasn’t in our party at the moment since I’d sent him back, but Perca had also leveled up. He was currently level 27. I’d been expecting him to evolve at level 25, but it didn’t happen. There was still no change at level 26 or 27, though I figured that would be the case, given that he didn’t evolve at level 25. He

might evolve at level 30, a nice round number, but I didn't have high hopes for that.

I had done a little research when he didn't evolve at level 25, and I read that most monsters evolved at level 20 or 25. Monsters that didn't evolve then were, more often than not, already-evolved races. According to the information I read, monsters hatched from special eggs or received as rewards could be evolved forms even though they started out at level 1. There was a high chance Perca was one of those types of specimens and was an evolved race from the very start.

In that case, maybe he would evolve at level 50? There was a long way to go until then, though. My next monster to evolve would probably be Lilith, who was now level 21. Though she was also born under special conditions, so I wasn't sure if she'd evolve normally either.

"Okay, I'm done checking. Let's head to the safety zone."

"Chirp chirp."

"Growl."

Once we started walking, I got a message notification.

"A message from the devs? Ooh, what is it?"

An update notification? Adjustments and additions, huh? It was business as usual, but this time there were some things relevant to me. Several job classes were getting revisions, and some skills were too.

"Let's see what changed for Tamers... Hmm? It got a nerf?"

The Tamed Monster's Orbs were nerfed—or rather I should say, they had gained a usage restriction. The new maximum number of tamed monster's orbs you could equip was now twelve.

Although monsters' fighting power couldn't compare to a player's, being able to switch them out was essentially a free way to recover a party's HP and MP. However, since there were plenty of recovery items available now, I didn't think using orbs for that purpose was the preferred method... Plus, there was the fact that if the Tamer died, it was considered a party wipe anyway.

“Well, that doesn’t affect me so much right now, so that’s fine.”

Adjustments to job classes were to be expected in online games. There was no use complaining about it. It wasn’t that rare to see jobs considered really strong getting ridiculously nerfed to the point that they became the weakest class. Compared to that, this sort of modification was almost cute.

On the other hand, I’d probably want to complain too if suddenly one day my job class became the worst in the game, but Tamer had an iffy rating to begin with. I kept reading and saw that other job classes also got some adjustments anyway. The forums were probably blowing up with discussion about all the revisions right now.

“All right, now I should probably check out the skills that got updates... How’s it look for detection skills?”

It looked like the detection and stealth skills that enemies used were weakened. That would lower the possibility of enemy ambushes. The rest of the changes had to do with lowering the Blow Away effect of certain skills and adjusting the flame effects on others. Nothing that seemed to affect me much.

“We should take our time checking out the town next. Sorry for keeping you all waiting. Now it’s really time to head out!”

“Growl growl!”

“Tra-la-la!”

We embarked on our journey into new territory, and after ten minutes...

“I see it! There’s the town! Man, I really got scared for a second there.”

“Squeak.”

“Humm.”

We had plunged into Zone Nine, but the path to the town was much longer than I’d thought it’d be, so we ended up running into several enemies along the way. The Flame Beast was one particularly strong monster that was very resistant to physical attacks. We’d just gone through all that trouble to beat the boss, only to nearly die after. Drimo got engulfed in flames *twice*. That was not a pretty sight to see.

My water magic had increased to level 50 following the boss fight, and I learned a new spell called Aqua Cannon. Without that, we might not have made it. It was a water magic spell that dealt heavy damage to a single enemy, and it had a very satisfying effect against the Flame Beast, which was already weak against water. I had to use up all my mana potions, but it was worth it to stay alive.

“We finally made it!”

“Hm!”

“Tra-la!”

This was our first time in Zone Nine. I was sure we’d find plenty of interesting items for sale here. The town was called Red Town, and true to its name, even its gates were red. They resembled massive torii gates with a door attached.

We passed excitedly through the entrance and were met with a novel sight.

“Whoa! The first traditional Japanese town!”

“Hm!”

“I’ll register the teleportation circle first, then we can wander around.”

The gates, more than just resembling torii, were in fact torii. The town looked like it was from the Edo period. The main difference was the color—the pillars, window frames, and shop curtains were all painted crimson, and other spots also were varying shades of red. The white walls of the buildings made the red stand out all the more. Even the leaves of the trees lining the streets were red. Red maple and other autumn leaves adorned the town.

The people walking around town were also dressed in Japanese-style clothes. Not many people were wearing proper kimono, but rather jinbei, samue, and yukata. I wondered if anyone was wearing furisode too. The players wearing Western-style armor and robes intermingled in there looked really out of place—myself included.

Maybe I could get a few pieces of traditional clothing to wear at home as well as out and about. Wearing a jinbei and having a drink on my veranda... *Sounds pretty nice!*

“I have the fabric you wove, Eine, so maybe you could sew a jinbei with that?”

“Tra-la-la!”

“And on that note, let’s go find a store that sells Japanese clothes!”

“Tra-laaa!”

“Chirp chirp!”

And so, my monsters and I walked around Red Town, but I was overwhelmed by all the things I wanted to buy. I couldn’t believe they even sold soba here.

Yep, this town sold soba. I bought a whole bunch of it. And you can bet I went to the Farming Guild and to get buckwheat seeds too. Eventually I’d be able to enjoy my own homegrown soba. I was counting down the days. I had upgraded my farm at my home base to its maximum size, so I figured I’d grow it there.

I couldn’t wait to make some tempura soba. And recently, low-rarity eggs had become pretty affordable, so I could make as much tsukimi soba as I wanted too. Maybe I could even try making galettes. It didn’t look like they were for sale anywhere in this Japanese town, but I was a big fan of them.

Traditional-style home objects were also for sale, so it would have been silly for me to pass up on buying some to furnish the inside of my house. Paper lanterns would be the perfect choice for lighting a tatami mat room. Some sliding doors with an autumn leaves pattern would also look really great. The town also sold objects that I had no idea where I could possibly display, like an inari shrine with lion-dog shisa guardian statues, and giant, ten-meter-tall stone garden lanterns. The selection of items on sale here was really starting to make me want to upgrade my house.

The traditional Japanese clothes, like the jinbei, were sold all throughout town, not only at clothing shops but even in general stores. Unsurprisingly for equipment sold in Zone Nine, the expensive ones came with abilities adequate enough to wear them in battle. Though I wasn’t particularly looking for something with high defense. I just wanted a cool design.

I decided to check out one of the larger clothing shops first, and I was pleased to see they were selling hakama and yukata.

“Whoa, this one’s great.”

Displayed front and center in the shop was a piece of strong armor that was black and featured a falling cherry blossom pattern. It had high defense, and it even had fire resistance. Plus, the design was so extravagant, it looked like something the protagonist of a period drama would wear. It piqued my interest right away, but it was too heavy for me to equip. People playing as samurai probably wore this type of sword fighter gear. It even granted a skill that enhanced slashing attacks.

“Looks like the jinbei and samue are over in this corner. Ooh, there are some more affordable ones too.”

I was actually curious how a piece of equipment could have only +1 Defense. That was weaker than the starting armor.

By using the newly implemented fitting room feature, I could see how the clothes looked on me via a preview picture that displayed on a screen.

“There are a bunch of designs I can choose from. I can even pick the color. What should I get...?”

“Chirp chirp!”

“What is it, Rick?”

“Chiiirp!”

Rick, who was riding on my shoulder, started pulling on my hair trying to get my attention. Then, he ran to a corner of a shelf.

“Chirp!”

“Ah, I get it. Is that what you recommend for me?”

Rick had pulled out a green jinbei with an acorn pattern. He seemed to like it, but didn’t it look a little too childish? My avatar did look a little young, but still...

“Hm!”

“Hum!”

“Y-You guys have suggestions too?”

“Hm-hmm!”

“A bright red jinbei, huh?”

Large orange flames were embroidered on the back, giving it a very mischievous look. I felt like I’d seen a group of troublemakers loitering outside a convenience store wearing jinbei like these before.

“Humm!”

“Th-This one’s pretty unique too, Reflet...”

It was a bright blue samue with slightly see-through fabric at the shoulders.
Isn’t this for women? Oh, it’s unisex? Really?

“Oh, no. I’m getting déjà vu—”

“Tra-la-la!”

“I knew it!”

Eine brought over a jinbei with sleeves of different lengths and was more open at the neckline than I would’ve liked. It was very asymmetrical.

“The left sleeve is long enough to cover my hand, and the right sleeve stops at my upper arm...”

“Tra-la-la!”

I felt like this would make me look like I was trying too hard to look cool. It reminded me of what a traditional Japanese-themed visual kei band might wear. I wouldn’t feel comfortable wearing something like that out every day. Eine, however, was looking at my preview portrait with stars in her eyes.

“E-Eine, are you a fan of these sorts of bold designs?”

“Tra-la!”

So even if Eine learned a skill to make clothes, she might make some really out-there stuff. *A-As long as its abilities are good, I guess that’s okay...*

“Growl growl!”

“...It’s bright yellow, with jars of honey on the back...”

This one was also pretty childish. *Bear Bear, you definitely just picked what you like and not what you thought would look good on me.* I wasn’t expecting

this place to have a clothing option that perfectly pinpointed Bear Bear's tastes to a T. It was truly an unwanted miracle.

"Squeak."

"Drimo, I'm so glad you're here."

The last time my monsters started picking out their "recommendations," Drimo had also been there to provide me with a safe choice. This time, he'd chosen a simple, blue-gray samue. It was a perfectly subdued style that I would even wear regularly in real life. Drimo had pinpointed my taste exactly. I had no complaints about choosing this one.

But if I rejected the others by saying "Your picks were kinda lame," that'd only make my monsters sad. I had to be gentle.

"Okay, everyone has kindly shown me their recommendations, but I'll be choosing—"

"Chirp."

"Hm."

"Hum."

"Tra-la."

"Growl."

H-Hey, stop that. The way they were looking at me with pure eyes, fully expecting me to pick their choice made me feel *really* guilty. *I've already decided. I'm not picking any of yours.*

"Th-The one I'm choosing is..."

"Chiiirp."

"Hmm."

"Humm."

"Tra-laaa."

"Grooowl."

Stop it! Don't look at me with those innocent eyes! Urgh... I can't do this!



“A-All of them!”

How could I tell them I was only buying Drimo’s?! I could never be so cruel!
Everyone started jumping up and down with full delight. When they high-fived me, I knew I’d made the right call.

“S-Sorry, Drimo. You went through all that trouble for nothing.”

“Squeak squeak...”

Drimo shrugged his shoulders and shook his head like he was saying, *Oh brother.*

“I-I had no choice. You get it, don’t you?”

“Squeak.”

Drimo patted my hip as he walked past me. *Dang, he’s so cool! Hard-boiled through and through! Is he trying to steal my heart?!*

“Squeak...”

“D-Don’t give me that look. I’m chill!”

I went ahead and bought all the jinbei and samue my monsters recommended. I only planned to wear them at my home anyway, so no one would see me in them. It was fine that the designs were a little particular.

“All right, now let’s head to the area with the player shops!”

We headed to the center of Red Town, where a bazaar was being held in a large plaza. A lot of players had set up stalls here, selling all sorts of interesting wares. There were some shops that seemed dubiously profitable, like a shop that specialized in selling bandages for wrapping around your hands. Were fighter-type job classes that particular about their hand wraps?

Himka seemed interested in the swords—he stopped in front of a weapons shop to stare at them. My other monsters were interested in some traditional Japanese sundries. People occasionally called out and waved to us as we wandered around the plaza—they must’ve been people who had seen my monsters during the event and become fans of theirs. I sort of felt like the manager of a bunch of celebrities. Everyone was really well-behaved, though. I

didn't even have to say anything like, "All right, move along, don't touch the idols, please!" They just cheered happily when my monsters waved back at them.

"Well, well, well! If it isn't Silver-Haired!"

"Shuella? So you're here today?"

The person who had called out to me was the flirtatious, girlish tailor, Shuella. As always, she was wearing a frilly, coquettish outfit—an aquamarine lolita dress with white polka dots. *Did she make that herself?* The colors reminded me of a pop idol outfit from bygone days.

According to Seki, Shuella was a middle-aged woman, but I wasn't sure if he was being serious. It was impossible to tell someone's age by their avatar. Though based on how angry Shuella had gotten when he'd said that, it seemed like it was probably true.

"Huh? No Seki today?"

For a guy that looked pretty plain, his presence was strangely noticeable. Also, without Seki here, who would rein Shuella in?

"Oh, him? He left for his elementary school's summer camp yesterday. It's a two-day trip, so he won't be on for a few days."

"...Don't tell me about his real life."

"Aha, sorry! Forget I said anything."

"It's okay, it's not like I'll spread it around."

So, I guessed that meant Seki was an elementary schooler? He didn't seem like one at all. He always spoke with such composure, so I'd assumed he was in his twenties. The nature of Seki and Shuella's relationship continued to elude me. They didn't seem like mother and son, and as siblings, they'd be pretty far apart in age. Maybe they were extended family? If she knew what Seki was up to, then it seemed like they had a pretty close relationship...

Actually, wait. Students weren't the only ones who went on elementary school trips. Considering how mature he acted, he could be a teacher. I was super curious, but asking about real life was against etiquette. I'd better just let

it go.

“So? Can I help you find something?” Shuella asked.

“I’m not really looking for anything in particular, just browsing for good deals. And if I can find some good Japanese clothes, I might buy some. I’m about to upgrade my equipment.”

“Did you ask someone else to make armor using event materials for you? Tsk, you should’ve come to me!”

“Ha ha, I met up with Lewin right after the event, so I just asked him on the spot. It’s supposed to be ready for me tomorrow.”

“Well then, now you *have* to buy something from me! Whaddya say? Pretty please?”

Mm-hmm. Even though I was fully aware of her true nature, I couldn’t say I disliked having a girl put on such a cute, flirty act to get me to buy something. *Men don’t get fooled by cute girls! They let themselves be fooled!*

“Do you have any jinbei or samue?”

“Huh? Jinbei are fine I guess, but wouldn’t you rather wear *this*?”

“A yukata?”

Shuella had pulled out a black yukata with white vertical stripes all across it. The sash was also white.

“Ehh, that one’s kind of loud. Besides, I don’t think I’d look good in a yukata. You don’t have any jinbei?”

“Now now, that may be true for your real-life self, but your in-game avatar is a cutie! You’re like, small but legal!”

“Huh? No way. Am I really?”

Talk about a shocking revelation! Though it’s true I’m short!

“Well, loosely speaking, considering your personality. It’s just, you’re more cute than handsome. That’s why I *know* this would look amazing on you!”

I-I guess she has a point. My avatar was good-looking. Even a slightly ostentatious yukata would probably look good on me. And what was that about

my personality? *I'm a gentleman, I say!*

"Well? Well? C'mon, try it on!"

"A-All right. I'll try it on... How's it look?"

"Oh, it looks so good! Hee hee hee, what a glorious sight."

"Stop bowing at me! It does look nice, though. It even matches my hair color. I think I look pretty cool."

Saying this sort of stuff in real life would've made me sound like a total narcissist, but I was just talking about my objectively handsome avatar right now. Shuella was right—it looked good on me.

"See what I mean? So, does this price seem reasonable?"

"What? That seems pretty cheap. That has to just be the cost of materials."

"Actually, I'll even give it to you for free, if you'll do me a favor. I'll give you more than one, in fact. Take a look at this."

"Whoa! Traditional clothes for tamed monsters?!"

The window Shuella showed me displayed kimono, yukata, and jinbei for monsters to wear. The clothes didn't come with any added defense, but instead, they could be equipped disregarding equipment limitations. In effect, they were equipped in the accessory slot as something that went over your avatar. There were all types of clothing options for men, women, animals, and monsters with amorphous forms. Also, even mascots and yokai could wear them.

"This is awesome!"

"Right? If you'd like, I'll give you clothes for all your monsters, mascots, and yokai to wear—for free! I'll even give you three sets for each!"

"...E-Everything for free? And three each? Really?"

"You betcha!"

Wasn't this a little *too* good of a deal? She didn't know how many monsters, mascots, and yokai I had, did she?

"I've got a pretty big household, you know?"

“That’s A-OK! Don’t worry about it, I’ll take care of everything! It’s on the house!”

“Y-You’re being so generous, I’m scared of what you’re going to ask me for.”

Something legal, right? She wasn’t going to ask me to commit any crimes, was she?

“I want to advertise the yukata that you and all your entire crew wear!”

“...That’s all?”

“Silver-Haired, think about how much influence you have! Don’t you know how many fans your monsters have?! My clothes will fly off the shelves if people know you like them!”

“Oh, I see your point.”

There was no small number of fans who wanted to wear the same clothes their favorite celebrity wore. This was similar to that—people wanted to wear what my monsters were wearing, or even dress their own monsters in the same thing. I was well aware of how adorable my monsters were, so it was no surprise that they had those sorts of fans!

“Giving you free clothes is a bargain compared to the advertisement I’d get in return! Take as many as you want!”

Oho? Was that a challenge? She probably thought I only needed enough for twenty at most. *Very well! I accept your challenge!*

“Don’t mind if I do!”

“Yay! Okay then, pick out whatever you like!”

“I’m really going to pick three sets of clothes for everyone, okay?”

“Ah ha ha, sure, by all means! A good girl keeps her promise!”

“All right.”

A few other customers started crowding around Shuella’s shop, so I made my selections quickly so I could get out of their way. First, I chose clothes for my current party—Bear Bear, Reflet, Himka, Eine, Rick, and Drimo. Then, I picked out ones for Olto, Sakura, Fau, Lilith, Perca, and Olea; for my yokai, Sunekosuri

and Kettle; and then I went ahead and got one for the Hanami Vandal too. Next up were my mascots: Nuts, Dango, Mamori, Rinne, Taro, Floof, and Ochiyo. And I couldn't forget the new mascots I just welcomed in—the mini dinosaurs and the sea otters.

“...Huh? That's a lot more than I was expecting.”

Heh heh. Finally, she noticed something was up. But it was too late now!

“Hey, do you think large mascots can also wear yukata?” I asked.

“Th-There's an option for oversized monsters, so that should be fine.”

“Great! Then I can get some for my dinosaurs too!”

I had no idea if the dinosaurs would look cute in the yukata, but I was going to take what was being offered to me. I was sure there'd be an opportunity for them to dress them up. I had all the large dinosaurs, like the Tyranno and Spino, as well as a flock of Raptors and Pachycephalos.

I also needed yukata for my bear cub, calf, piglet, and lamb. And I might as well get some for my great white shark, coelacanth, and dunkleosteus. Naturally, I had no clue if fish could wear yukata, but I was up for any challenge.

“Hmm, I think that's about everyone. That brought it over two hundred, though.”

“...S-Since when did you have so many?!”

“Huh? Oh, from the recent event. It's too much, isn't it? I'll unselect some.”

Getting to see Shuella's shocked face was enough for me, so I reduced the number to one set of clothes for everyone. I had been planning to do that all along. Shuella, however, stopped me from doing so.

“Nope! It's not a problem! I already promised you could, so really, don't hold back!”

“What? But—”

“It's fine! I don't want people to think I was trying to trick you! So go ahead, take them! Please!”

“Well, okay. I'll really take them, then.”

“Yes, go right ahead! Just let me use them for advertising! Go on, take them!”

As long as Shuella’s fine with it. A huge throng of people had gathered around us now, so I left to get out of their hair. Plus, I wanted to get back home and have a yukata party!

“Come one, come all! Take a look at Shuella’s traditional clothing, also worn by Silver-Haired’s monsters! Wearing matching outfits with your favorite monster has just become a reality!”

“YEAAAHHH!”

Wh-What was that? I just heard some loud shouting coming from Shuella’s shop... My monsters and I all jumped when we heard it. W-Well, it didn’t sound like anything bad was happening, so it was probably fine to ignore it. It was probably just a bunch of guys cheering at Shuella’s flirty poses.

We returned home using the teleportation circle, where I had fun dressing everyone up in traditional clothes. My garden was now hosting an impromptu fashion show. To start, I picked out clothes that I thought would suit everyone the best.

“...♪”

“Aww, you look adorable, Sakura!”

Sakura was wearing a sprout-green yukata with a cherry blossom petal pattern. She looked so lovely with her hair done up, I couldn’t help but take screenshots. My other monsters all looked adorable too.

“Humm!”

“Mm-hmm, you look very tidy and cute!”

Reflet was wearing a white yukata with light blue polka dots, which made her look very refined. She looked like a classic water nymph.

“Aye?”

“A flying courtesan? I wasn’t sure it’d work, but it does!”

Since Fau had wings, I had dressed her in a courtesan-style kimono that was wide open in the back. Despite her tiny stature, she was able to pull off such a

mature style of clothing—*You're truly awe-inspiring, Fau!*

"Tra-la!"

"You look cute too, Eine! Very sporty."

I went a different route with Eine and picked a dark green jinbei. It made her look like a typical kid, but it suited her surprisingly well. Next time, I'd have her try on a yukata.

"Kee-hee!"

"Looks like the yukata fit stuffed toy body types too."

Lilith was looking spiffy in a pitch-black yukata. Even though she looked cartoonish, her outfit strangely gave her an air of allure. Not even her regular leather outfit did that. Such was the magic of yukata. A girl in a yukata never failed to make a guy swoon.

"The boys are looking good too!"

"Hmm."

"Mmm."

Himka and Olto were wearing yukata that matched their respective hair colors. The way they were standing silently in their yukata made them look like a couple of handsome young models. Judging by the poses they were striking, they must have liked them too. If Olto would just put down his hoe, he'd have looked perfect.

"Squeak."

"Growl!"

"Chirp chirp!"

"Honk."

"And the animal crew isn't looking too shabby either!"

Drimo, Bear Bear, Rick, and Perca were all wearing colorful jinbei with an insignia of their respective animals on their back. Bear Bear's jinbei had a silhouette of a bear catching a salmon. Rick's had a squirrel with full cheeks, and Drimo's had a mole poking its head out of a hole in the ground. Perca's alone

seemed to be a clear reference to his in-game race, a Highway Penguin—the insignia on his back was a flying penguin.

Drimo and Bear Bear were posing with their backs together, while Perca and Rick hopped up and down in front of them. *Thanks for making it easier to take screenshots of all of you, guys!*

“Tiiii.”

“Olea, looking classy!”

Olea was wearing an understated, gray samue, which actually complemented their wood-grained body really well.

“Ya-ya!”

“This is weird. I don’t have any younger relatives who are girls, but there’s something oddly nostalgic about seeing you wearing that.”

Mamori looked absolutely charming in her bright red yukata. I didn’t think she’d look that different since she already wore traditional clothes normally, but the difference was there. Why was that? I felt like I wanted to buy her a candy apple.

I was able to dress my yokai and mascots in traditional clothes too, though I was hesitant to say that the sheet ghost, Rinne, and the unnatural-looking butterfly, Ochiyo, looked good in their yukata.

Taro the mini kappa pulled off wearing its blue festival happi coat bizarrely well. *Wasn’t there a similar-looking regional mascot character out there somewhere?* The coat suited it so perfectly that I couldn’t help but think so.

As for ones like Sunekosuri and Nuts, I could only see them as poor pets forced to wear a yukata by their owners. They seemed to be enjoying themselves, but I just couldn’t shake the mental image.

Kettle was wearing a hachimaki headband and a blue happi coat. It looked like it was about to put on a performance at a festival or something.

“I really wasn’t expecting to be able to dress the regular-sized dinosaurs and the great white shark in jinbei too.”

“Groar?”

Right before my eyes was the massive Tyranno wearing a black jinbei. In the spring I could see a little further in the distance, the sea otter pair were having fun swimming in their light blue yukata. I'd wondered if the great white shark's dorsal fin would get in the way of its clothes, but the fabric in the back was raised to fit around it. When I took it off the shark, there was no impression on the cloth where its fin had been, so I figured the clothing must change shape in accordance to the wearer's body shape.

The only things that I couldn't dress up were the trees—Olea's main body, the Olive Treant, and Sakura's, the Lakeside Sequoia. Unsurprisingly, it was impossible to dress those two up.

I had plenty of other clothing options to work with to keep myself occupied dressing everyone up in different outfits for a while. I could just imagine if I dressed everyone up in happi coats. I couldn't wait.

It was already nighttime, but our surroundings were sufficiently lit thanks to the luminous moss balls I had placed around my home, which bathed everything in a dreamlike glow. Sakura had built up a decent stock of the moss balls in her spare time.

"Mm-mmm!"

"Hmmm!"

"Growl growl!"

Before I knew it, my monsters started dancing in the garden. There was no music playing and no scaffold, but for some reason, I felt like I was at an Obon festival.

"La-di-daaa!♪"

"Tiii-triii!"

Oh, and now Fau had started singing. It wasn't really the type of music danced to at an Obon festival, but it was a lighthearted tune that made everyone form a circle and start dancing. Olea was showing off some unexpectedly good dance moves. Because of their puppetlike appearance, I wondered if they'd be good at performing a certain dance move from a beloved RPG series about dragons.

“...♪”

“Tra-la-la!”

“Huh? You want me to join?”

“Kee-hee-hee!”

Everyone was pulling on my hands to bring me into the circle.

I really wasn't much of a dancer...but okay. It was fun enough to play around with my monsters. No one was going to laugh at me for dancing badly, anyway.

“Ya-ya!”

“Sneeeh!”

“Hup! Hah!”

“Gyaaa!”

“Rawr!”

My mini dinosaur mascots also joined in, and my garden turned into a complete dance party. With everyone dancing like crazy, I couldn't help but get hyped up too!

“Aha ha ha ha ha! Dance, dance!”

“Poko!”

Kettle's such a good dancer! It had pulled out a couple fans with a picture of the rising sun on them seemingly from thin air and waved them around as it danced nimbly.

“Graaagh!”

“Groooooaar!”

“Wha? Whoa, the dinosaurs can dance too?! Awesome!”

I'd thought the mini dinosaurs' voices sounded a little more guttural than usual, but it was actually the big dinosaurs coming to join in on the dancing. They shimmied their massive bodies as they took wide steps. They were surprisingly good at it. They must have learned by watching the other monsters and mascots. That was really some learning ability they had. I might actually be

able to train them to balance on a ball or something. The Pteranodon was happily gliding around in the sky, while the yukata-clad Plesio, shark, and Dunkleosteus were leaping about in the water.

The chaos had reached its peak. If someone were to peek in from the outside, they'd be freaked out to see what was going on. Fortunately, no one could see into the garden, so I didn't have to worry about us causing a disturbance.

"Chirp chirp!"

"Hey, Rick! Don't dance on my head!"

"Tra-la-la! Tra-la-la!"

"E-Eine! I know you're excited, but it's dangerous to move around so much while riding my shoulders!"

"Honk honk hooonk!"

"Don't pull my hand! I'm gonna fall!"

"Squeak."

"Drimooo! Don't just sit there, help me!"

This was fun, but boy, was it exhausting!

Alyssa's POV

"WAAAAAAH!"

"Wh-What's the matter?!"

I had inadvertently let out a shriek, making Lewin next to me jolt in surprise. His hand slipped and he messed up what he was working on, and he gave me a reproachful look. But I couldn't help it! It was impossible not to react to what I'd just witnessed!

"Look at this."

"Eh? What's this, a video? The streamer's name is Mamori... Ah, Yuto's Zashiki-Warashi?"

"You know how she uploads videos she takes at his house and farm, right?"

“Is there anyone in the Quick-Eared Cats who doesn’t know that? So, is this a new one?”

“Yes, it is!”

“All right, I get it! Could ya calm down a tad?”

“How can you expect me to be calm?!”

Mascots wearing traditional clothes, fine! But I didn’t know fish and dinosaurs could wear them too! At least, it should have been impossible with the traditional wear that already existed in the game. Someone must have discovered a new method to make them. That alone was serious info, but then when I realized how many mascots he had...

“He sure has his fair share of dinosaurs.”

“That right there! I’m almost positive there was a limit on how many dinosaurs you could buy! It’s weird that there wasn’t for him!”

“Eh? Well, maybe that has something to do with his titles or his rank?”

“Maybe! Oh wait, it could also have something to do with how many dinosaurs he felled or his actions during the event...”

It had been impossible to choose more than five dinosaurs as mascots, *and* I was sure you couldn’t buy the Tyranno and Spino at the same time. But here was Yuto, with *both*. That must’ve meant he’d found a special way to procure them.

Dang it... I didn’t notice when I was at his house! I was too busy dealing with everyone else! I should have taken a better look...! Not all of the dinosaurs were caught on video!

In this game, there were barely any items that were limited to a single player, besides some unique titles. The dinosaur mascots had a lot of passionate fans, so there should definitely be a way to get them after the event too.

That was how it worked in the prior event. After the event, it eventually became possible to buy the crops that were sold in the village, and armor could be acquired if you completed enough events in the village. It was more complicated to obtain the items that way, but that meant people should be able

to get the rewards of this event too.

“We can go to the event island using a teleportation circle, so it’s possible to go back there to fight dinosaurs.”

“You’re right. I’ve made a few visits there myself to get dinosaur materials. And you can buy materials at the Bazaar too.”

“I knew it, there must be something there to complete... Ahhh! We need to verify this ASAP! We’re gonna get a surge of people who noticed the same thing in the stream!”

“But ya gotta hand it to him. He must’ve spent all his event points on mascots, right?”

“Ugh, I can’t believe it! He should’ve come to us to sell his information *before* he streamed it!”

“I reckon Yuto doesn’t know just how unbelievable this video is.”

“You’re probably right...”

As always, he probably didn’t even realize the stunt he pulled! I could just see his clueless face!

“*Sigh...* For now, I’ll call back Highwood and the others and have them go to the Bazaar.”

“Sounds like a plan.”

“We also need to find out where he bought those clothes.”

“I’ll do some research.”

“Thanks.”

I didn’t know which merchant sold him those clothes, but they got one hell of an advertisement out of it... Or maybe getting inundated with Yuto’s fans wanting what he bought would actually overwhelm them?

They’re probably screaming right now.

Shuella’s POV

“Gimme this jinbei with the squirrel design!”

“I want this yukata!”

“Hey! Wait your turn!”

“Is it my turn yet?”

Ahhhhhh! What is happening right now?!

I happened to run into Silver-Haired, so I just thought he could help me out by advertising my new traditional wear! I got a huge crowd right after he left, but then that video was streamed and my shop was dropped into customer service hell!

It wasn't until after I wore myself out that I remembered my stall's automatic customer service function. Once I turned that on, I didn't really have to interact with the customers... But dealing with customers wasn't the only hard part. It was the other stuff that was worse.

Once I enforced a limit of one piece of clothing per person, they started booing at me, and some people even demanded I make the design they wanted right on the spot! I had configured things so I could easily make them just by selecting the materials to use, but still!

I sold out of things faster than I could restock them. I had no more materials... I even used what I was saving for Seki. What was I supposed to tell him...?!

Also, people kept asking what designs Silver-Haired bought, but how should I know that?! He bought over two hundred of them! There was no way I could remember all that!

“Excuse meee! The Sakura model is sold out!”

“I want the same thing Mr. Mole got!”

“Is it my turn *now*?”

Seki was going to be pissed when he got back! He even told me not to do anything without him while he was gone! I needed to get things settled down before he came back, or he'd have my head!

Ding-dong.

Huh? A message from outside the game? Oh, right. If you had someone's ID, you could send them a message in the game from your phone. And the sender was—*Seki?!*

Gaaah! He saw Mamori's video? He wanted to have a chat when he got back? *Oh no, he's definitely mad!*

"Excuse me, what did Silver-Haired—"

"This isn't what I wanted—"

"Is it my turn yet—"

Ahhhhhh! I should have just laid low!

Management's POV

"Baha ha ha ha ha! He did it again!"

"He certainly did."

"But this time, he did something really great!"

"Can we really say what he does is either bad or good? Well, I suppose this time he did something that had no negative repercussions for us."

"You know, my daughter likes watching videos in her free time. And apparently she saw Silver-Haired's video this time around."

"Is that so? And?"

"She phoned me up and said, 'This is the game you work on, right, dad? It's sooo cute! That's awesome! I want to play!' She even sent me an email for the first time in three years!"

"Oh, you mean that one you told me about? The one that said, 'Dad, you stink, so go take a bath before you come home.' You made me come with you to drink your sorrows away."

"That's the one! But this time, she said something nice about meee!"

"...How nice."

"It is, it really is! *Bwaaah!*"

“Please don’t cry. You’re going to wake the people in the nap room.”

“Silver-Haired! Thank youuu!”

POV of the Defenders Contributing to Mamori’s Diary Taking First Place Yet Again

“Aw, so cute!”

“Indeed. I could never tire of watching this.”

“I’ve already watched it ten times.”

“Of all his new mascots, I have to say the parent-child sea otter pair are the cutest by far.”

“What’d you say? The bear cub is ten times cuter!”

“Wait, hear me out. The coelacanth in the yukata...”

“I like the mini dinos! It’s like a whole new world has opened for me!”

“*Sigh*... I could watch this forever.”

“Isn’t there some way I could insert myself in that scene?!”

“Man, dinosaurs are so cool!”

“Yokai! I want yokaaai!”

“Heh heh... I want to bring fireworks there.”

“Hmph! That Yuto, he never ceases to amaze me!”



After we had a blast with our Japanese clothes party, I headed to another location with Sakura and the others. We were going to visit the underground altar, which had become our regular practice every Tree Day.

Still in our traditional wear, my monsters and I slipped under the bridge, opened the door, and descended underground. But man, people had *really* been staring at us as we made our way there. Japanese-style clothes were unusual to see in the Town of Beginnings, and it was extra rare for monsters to be wearing them too. My monsters always attracted a lot of attention already,

but today it was even more so.

“What in the world?!”

“So adowwable...”

“Sakura... *Wheeze.*”

Mwa ha ha ha! Go on! Admire my cute monsters!

My monsters had waved back at them all, as if they were indeed a group of idols. We’d kept walking as people stared, and less than five minutes later, we arrived at the door that would lead us to the altar. Some other people had tagged along behind us, but from this point on we’d only be able to enter with our respective parties.

“Welcome, adventurer. And daughter of mine.”

“...♪”

As per usual, the Sequoia Dryad and Sakura chatted amiably. Sakura looked bashful yet pleased when the Sequoia Dryad patted her on the head. Then, as usual, things ended there. No event was triggered or anything.

I figured that would be the case, but Sakura had given me her tamed monster’s heart right after the Sequoia Dryad had stroked her head. That had to mean her favorability score increased when she interacted with the Lakeside Sequoia Dryad.

Since I had already been given her heart, I didn’t know if there was a point in continuing to raise her favorability score. But a high favorability score meant a happy Sakura, so I wanted to bring her here as often as I could.

“You two are so cute.”

“...♪”

Mm-hmm, it’s worth coming here just to see Sakura’s smile!

Once she was done interacting with the Sequoia Dryad, we returned to the surface to find the players who had tagged along behind us had already dispersed. They must’ve known that waiting to ambush us was against the rules.

However, there was one player standing imposingly in front of the door. It was really intimidating to see a bulky warrior standing stock-still in the dim light under the bridge. I even let out a short, high-pitched shriek. But when I got a better look, I realized I knew who it was.

“Tsugarun?”

“Hey! It’s been a while, Silver-Haired!”

Standing by the door was the apple-loving farmer, Tsugarun. I hadn’t recognized him right away because he was wearing different armor from before. He must have upgraded it using materials from the event. Unlike the stony armor he was wearing before, Tsugarun was clad in bulky armor made of a combination of brown scales and metal. Basically, he was wearing dull-gray full-body armor with dinosaur scales attached to his gauntlets, breastplate, and shoulders. If only he had a long blade slung on his back, he would’ve looked like a super powerful heavy warrior. But instead, he carried a hoe. Such wasted potential. It almost looked a little comical.

“Are you going to the altar too, Tsugarun?”

“No, I was actually waiting for you. I saw you go in, and I know visiting the Sequoia Dryad doesn’t take up much time, so I figured you wouldn’t be in there long.”

I wondered why he hadn’t just called me, but he said he hadn’t wanted to bother me while I was at the altar.

“So, does that mean you have something to talk to me about?”

“I do. Me and a few farmer friends were talking about going to clear the Earth Elementals’ trial, and I was wondering if you’d want to come too.”

“The Earth Elementals’ trial? That’s right, the strategy’s been made public.”

The full strategy and a labeled map of the dungeon had been posted on the Quick-Eared Cats’ home page. With all that on hand, most players should be able to clear the dungeon as long as they were above a certain skill level.

“Gnomes are essential to clearing it, so we were trying to think of a tamer we could invite along,” he said, explaining that he then happened to spot me and

decided to extend an invitation.

I knew it was a good offer. Even though Tsugarun was a farmer, he was also a skilled fighter. But I said players above a certain skill level could clear the dungeon, didn't I? Did I really think I was at that required level?

"Would you say the dungeon is on par with Zone Eight or Nine in difficulty level?" I asked.

"Yeah, the boss is about that strong too."

"Hmm, I really appreciate the invite, but it might be a little hard for my party."

I was just trying to make myself look better! A little hard? Try impossible!

"No way, you've got tanks and healers, right? We have enough attackers, so all we really need are supporters. Besides, isn't your gnome at a high level?"

Gnomes, or rather earth magic, was needed to beat the dungeon, and the gnome should ideally be pretty strong. More than participating in battle, Olto would be required to help with clearing the dungeon's gimmicks. I guess as long as we didn't have to help with attacking, my party would be able to contribute in some way.

"Hmm, well, I have time, so as long as it's okay with you, I don't mind."

"Nice! So it's a plan, then?"

"Yeah. I'm looking forward to it."

Our group would be Tsugarun and Tagosack, as well as two other farmers named Charm and Ikaru. Additionally, Akari would also be joining. I was surprised to find out that Akari had recently purchased a farm and even joined the Farming Guild.

"She said she's been cooking with vegetables she grew herself."

"Wow. She did say she was starting to cook, but I didn't realize she was getting that into it."

"She's become something of Tagosack's apprentice. She's learning a lot about farming from her."

So Akari was like a novice farmer now? But she could hold her own in a fight,

so it was reassuring to have her on the team.

“You guys only have five people, so who’s going to be your sixth?”

“Oh, well Ikaru’s a tamer, so she’s bringing her gnome.”

“If you’ve got her, then why do you need me?”

“Ikaru’s a second-wave player, so she’s still weak. And even though she’s a tamer, she’s also half a farmer, so she’s still underleveled.”

“Ah, I gotcha.”

Just like me, she was playing the game without making combat her main objective. Having monsters around really helped out with different crafting tasks, so it was an understandable route to take. Even though I had never met her, I felt a sort of affinity for her.

After we briefly discussed the plan for tomorrow, I parted ways with Tsugarun.

“Tomorrow we’re taking on the Earth Elementals’ trial... Man, I can’t wait!”

“...♪”

The last time I was there, I’d leeches off Amimin and Mattsun, and we managed to defeat the miniboss. I had become a lot stronger since then, so hopefully I’d be able to contribute more this time around.

Chapter Three: The Dungeon Depths

After I logged in, I did some farmwork and took care of some other tasks, then my monsters and I went to visit Tagosack's farm. Since we were neighbors, she was only a short walk away. We frequently visited each other's farms to swap ideas, so it wasn't like there was anything new for me to see there.

Actually, today there *was* one thing that looked unfamiliar. In the field where she'd previously been growing herbs, there was a sapling I'd never seen before. Had she turned her herb garden into a field solely for growing this sapling? The sapling was entirely black from its trunks to its trees, which looked rather disturbing.

"Oh, that caught your eye, did it?"

I wouldn't say that. It was more like the sapling had a commanding presence that prevented me from *not* noticing it.

"What sort of tree is this?" I asked.

"A Tree of Evil."

"What? You mean, *the* Tree of Evil?"

"The very same! Go on, try appraisin' it."

I did what she said and appraised it. It really was a Tree of Evil.

The Tree of Evil was a raid boss that came to be when a Sacred Tree was fully corrupted by a demon. It had caused a lot of trouble for players in one of the earlier events. Fortunately, the tree in my server hadn't become a Tree of Evil. I had only found out about it after the fact through word of mouth and pictures.

The Sacred Tree in my farm might have turned into a Tree of Evil if Rick hadn't used his Forest Sorcery on it, but anyway, this was my first time seeing the tree in its sapling state.

"Heh heh heh. I won it in the last auction. I finally got the fertilizer and stuff I needed for it, so I just now planted it."

“Wait, this was an auction item?”

Starting last week, weekly auctions were being held every Monday. Naturally, there was one this week too, and I had checked it out to see if there was anything good up for bid. It should go without saying that I had scanned over the saplings, seeds, and other items that seemed usable for crafting, but I was pretty sure I hadn’t seen the Tree of Evil there.

“Well y’see, it was a surprise to me too. I got it from a mystery box.”

“For real? You can get an item this rare from a mystery box?”

“Like I said, it was a surprise.”

Mystery boxes were like grab bags—they contained all sorts of random items within. The boxes were auctioned off by all the guilds too. The boxes put up for sale by the Magical Beasts Guild, for example, contained items Tamers and Summoners would need or could otherwise make use of. I’d bid on my fair share of them too, but mystery boxes had become pretty pricey, so I wasn’t able to make a successful bid on any of the guilds’ boxes.

It looked like with the influx of second-wave players, more and more people were participating in auctions. I hadn’t even been able to obtain Passing Time paint this time due to how high the bidding went, and I even had to give up on buying another Sacred Tree Sapling. I might have been able to get it if I really tried, but I hadn’t known how high the bidding would go.

But there were a few things I did get, like some yokai hanging scrolls. Back in the Mayoiga, I had chosen the Zashiki-Warashi’s scroll over the others, but now they were all up for auction. Their prices had also increased a bit, but they were cheap compared to other items, so even I was able to get them. That was probably due to them not being very popular, since no one knew exactly what the other scrolls were useful for yet. I was able to get all four types—the kappa, ghost, satori, and cocoon.

I knew what I wanted to use them for, and that was decorating my tatami rooms. The Japanese-style paintings on the yokai scrolls were as unsettling as I remembered, but they really added to the ambience once they were displayed. I wanted to sit in front of them and tell ghost stories.

“Maybe I’ll try to get a box in the next auction,” I said.

“Same, it’d be nice to get another one. But I think the cost is just going to go up even more.”

“Yeah, I figured.”

There were sure to be lots of players who would try harder to get a mystery box if there was a chance they’d get an item on the same level as a Tree of Evil sapling from it. I knew I would. But Tagosack’s sapling wasn’t the reason why she expected the box’s price to shoot up. After all, she’d only told a few close friends that she had gotten the sapling in the first place.

“Huh? You’d tell me a secret that big?”

“Well, I know you wouldn’t spread it around, would ya?”

“O-Of course not.”

It made me kind of happy to know she considered me a close friend. I felt like she was placing a lot of trust in me, but it wasn’t like I had any plans to betray that trust.

“The reason’s the price’ll skyrocket isn’t ’cause of the sapling, but a weapon. Word is someone got a crazy powerful weapon from a mystery box. The front liners are goin’ nuts over it, so you know it’s gotta be good.”

“Wow, really?”

That would certainly draw the attention of most players. Any item that was the same rank as said weapon, whether it be a material or a tool, would undoubtedly be a great get.

“You’ll help me out if this saplin’ turns into a raid boss, won’t ya?”

“I don’t know if I’d be any help, but I’ll do my best.”

“If ya do, we’ve as good as won!”

“Why do you say that? Please tell me you’re asking some *actually* strong players to help too?”

From what I could tell, there were many people interested in participating in a Tree of Evil raid battle, and Tagosack wouldn’t have any issue going to Alyssa for

help like I did either. While Tagosack and I were discussing the Tree of Evil, our other party members showed up.

“Let’s make it a good one today,” Tsugarun said.

“Looking forward to working together!” Akari followed up.

I was comfortable around those two since I knew them, but this was my first time meeting Charm and Ikaru. At least, we hadn’t ever formally met.

“Happy to be here! My name’s Charm. I fight with a sickle, so leave the vanguard to me!”

Charm was a tall, female lizard-human hybrid, but the only lizard-like aspects about her were her eyes, the scales on her arms, and her tail. She looked more human than reptilian. Her short gray hair matched her bubbly personality. But, were those supposed to look like antennae or something? Only the hair at the sides of her head was long and braided. For equipment, she wore a white dress. The top half of the dress was a little baggy, but the bottom half was a supertight miniskirt. It was short enough that she’d expose herself completely if she did anything other than walk, but she wouldn’t have to worry about that—the game prevented any such mishaps. *N-Not that I’m disappointed or anything! Don’t get me wrong!*

From what I remembered, lizard people were a race with low magic and stats that were better suited playing as a soldier. Just like she’d said herself, she was probably good at fighting at the front.

“And this right here is Ikaru. Go on, say hi.”

Ikaru seemed shy. She’d been hiding behind Charm this whole time, but now she was being pushed forward with so much force she almost toppled over.

She was shorter than me, probably about 140 centimeters, and she had superlong, straight blonde hair that reached to her knees. Her race was Human. For armor, she wore a green cloth dress, which must have been pretty light considering the material it was made of. It looked a little big on her, making her look even more childlike. This game offered some flexibility in changing clothing sizes, so her clothes must have been made like that on purpose to get that oversized look. It seemed like the tailor had really put their all in it—it suited

her very well.

I had actually seen her somewhere before. It was when I had gone to watch the second-wave players log in for the first time. She was the one who had a gnome as her starter monster. Even though she was wearing different equipment now, I was sure of it.

Ikaru bowed enthusiastically and introduced herself. “M-My nabe is I-Ikaru! P-P-Plezzzer to meech you!”

An impressive fumble! She’s almost too shy! Her downturned eyes only added to her timid appearance.

“...Ngh.”

After stumbling through her introduction, she kept her blonde head lowered and started shaking. She was probably embarrassed for having fumbled her words so badly. This made me feel pretty awkward too. I was trying to figure out what to say to her, when a green-haired boy poked his head out from behind her.

“Mmm?”

“Whoa, a unique gnome!”

It was rare to see another player who had one.

“Mm-mmm?”

“Mmm!”

The gnome tilted his head cutely to get a look at us, and Olto walked over and struck up a conversation with him. Olto raised his hand up, and the other gnome responded with the same gesture.



“Mmm!”

“Mm-mmm!”

“Mmm?”

“Mm!”

They're resonating! They looked like they were having fun. I was glad.

Ikaru's gnome's eyes looked a little droopier than Olto's. His hair was also a little curlier, like he'd gotten a perm. He seemed like a softer, calmer type of gnome compared to Olto. Since Ikaru's gnome hadn't reached his evolution yet though, I could easily tell the two apart by their equipment and wouldn't have to worry about getting them confused.

I was fondly watching over Olto and the other gnome when before I knew it, Ikaru was standing right next to me, watching the gnomes with a smile on her face. She must have really adored her gnome. When she noticed me looking at her, she dropped her gaze for a second, but then soon looked back up with a determined look in her eyes. Then, she introduced herself again.

“U-Um, my name's Ikaru.”

“I'm Yuto. Nice to meet you.”

“Y-Yes, you too!”

It seemed like watching the two gnomes' cute interaction had relieved her nerves somewhat. Her voice was still shaking a little, but she hadn't flubbed any words this time.

“So, that gnome playing with yours—his name is Olto.”

“My gnome's name is Esk.”

“That's cool. Esk is very cute.”

“Isn't he? Oh, but Olto's really cute too!”

“I know, right?”

“Yes!”

We continued raving about how cute our gnomes were for several minutes. It

reminded me of a similar thing happening back when I lived at home and would take my family dog, Fran, out for walks. I would always get caught up talking about our dogs with another neighbor who was also walking their dog. I was sure all dog owners could relate to that.

“Hey, you two. Think we’d like to head out soon. You ready or what?”

“Oops, sorry, Tagosack.”

“I-I’m sorry!”

“Ha ha ha! I can’t believe you were able to keep up a conversation for this long with a guy ya just met, Ikaru! I guess with both you bein’ Tamers, you’ve got lots to talk about.”

So I was right about her being shy. Like Tagosack said, the reason Ikaru and I were able to jump right into a conversation was because we had similar interests. In fact, our conversation ramped up even more as we exchanged information on the way to the Earth Elementals’ town.

“So, does Esk have an EX skill too?”

“Yes! He knows Watering EX.”

“Oh cool, is it useful?”

“Oh, so useful!”

Similar to Olto, Esk had come with knowing an EX skill from the start. Esk’s Watering EX skill slightly improved plant growth and reduced the conditions required to grow crops. It might have sounded uninteresting and vague at first, but when used well, it helped out a lot. For example, if you needed to use water above a certain quality, or if your soil needed the right levels of nutrients, you’d be able to grow the crops with Watering EX. It couldn’t bypass *all* growth requirements, but being able to alleviate some of them would increase the types of crops you could grow.

The condition of your farm wasn’t visible data, so it was hard to know the full details, but I had read that even crops that couldn’t grow without spreading fertilizer could be grown with Watering EX. In my case, I had Olto, who worked hard to keep our crops alive and healthy. But if it would help me get higher

rarity crops, maybe I'd try it out.

At that point, Akari joined in on our conversation, and we started talking about herbal tea.

"You're making your own, right, Akari? Are you making any blends?"

"I'm just copying the herbal teas I've enjoyed before. I haven't made anything original."

"Me neither," Ikaru chimed in. "But I'd really love to try making my own delicious herbal tea someday!"

"Me too!"

Both of them seemed pretty into herbal tea. Akari said she had been inspired by drinking the herbal tea I made, which I was pleased to hear.

"The food and herbal tea you served that one time were absolutely delicious!"

"Oh, right," I said. "That was when you said you were determined to learn Cooking."

"Thanks to that, now I can live my solo adventurer life in comfort!"

Me, impacting others? What was I, a top player? When I voiced that curiosity, Ikaru spoke up and said, "You've had an impact on me too, Yuto."

"Huh? But you're a second-wave player."

"I am. I didn't make it into the first wave, but I didn't give up. I watched a bunch of videos online instead... That's when Olto here stole my heart!"

To my amazement, Ikaru said she'd been watching videos of Olto before she started playing the game, which was why she wanted to have a gnome as a tamed monster. Her goal from the very start was to get a gnome like Olto and play as a half-Tamer, half-Farmer. *Yeah! Olto is a cutie! I totally get your feelings!*

"So! You had an impact on me too!"

"O-Oh, okay. I-I'm happy to hear that."

Wasn't that more Olto's influence than mine? Though to be fair, Olto was *my*

tamed monster. His achievements were my achievements. Even his cuteness was my own accomplishment. Okay, that was the accomplishment of the game's developers and graphic designers. But I was the one who brought out his cuteness even more.

While we were chitchatting, we made it to the Earth Elementals' town. I was already familiar with this town, but it still held some novelty for Ikaru. She and Esk were looking around at the town with stars in their eyes. I asked her how many times she'd come here before, and she said this was only her third time. *No wonder, then.* I'd been the same way in the beginning. Each visit to this town was like an exciting adventure.

"Man, this place really is amazing," I said.

"Mmm."

Ikaru's excitement was rubbing off on me. *I feel like a newbie all over again.*

"Mm-mmm."

"Mm?"

"Mmm-mm-mm."

"Mmm!"

It looked like Olto was giving Esk the full rundown of the town. Esk was looking at Olto, his eyes sparkling with respect, much to Olto's satisfaction.

"Awww, Olto is so adorable."

"Right? The way Esk acts so amazed is adorable too."

"You're so right!"

"You two'll just go on gushing over each other's gnomes for eternity if we let you, huh?" Charm said, looking at us in exasperation.

"Oops, sorry," I said.

"I'm sorry, Charm."

Olto alone was cute enough, but add Esk to the mix and the cuteness doubled, so I couldn't help myself. We followed Tsugarun and the others toward the Earth Elemental's trial, discussing our formation as we went.

“Yuto, that new equipment you got there?” Tagosack asked me.

“It sure is. It’s superstrong. Enough so that even my party could make it through the beginning areas of the trial alone.”

“Is it made with dinosaur materials?”

“Yeah. Proudly made by Lewin.”

I’d actually gone to pick my new equipment up from Lewin’s shop before meeting up with everyone.



Right after I logged in, before heading to the meeting point, I had gone to Lewin’s shop.

“Hello,” I called out to Lewin. “Is my equipment ready?”

“Chirp chiiirp?” Rick trilled in imitation of me from my shoulder, raising his hand up in greeting.

“Got it right here for ya,” Lewin responded, his face twitching. Maybe he was trying to keep himself from smiling at how cute Rick was being. *Heh*. I knew Lewin was a big fan of Rick’s. Not that that was a problem or anything.

“Okay, lemme see.”

“Chirp chirp.”

Rick and I peered at the screen Lewin displayed for us. There, I saw details for the staff, cloth armor, and innerwear I’d requested.

First, the staff.

“A rarity of six?! Sweet!”

“That’s thanks to the great materials ya brought me. They’ve even got all the abilities ya wanted. I have to say I’m mighty proud of how they turned out.”

The weapon displayed on the screen was a mystical-looking white staff with numerous blue lines drawing geometric patterns all down it. It was a little shorter than my height, and the tip was shaped like a ring. It had the look of an excavated artifact from some ancient civilization. *It’s so cool!*

Name: Hollywood Rod

Rarity: 6 *Quality*: 7 ★ Durability: 580

Effect: Attack +39, Magic + 99, medium increase in attack power when using water spells, minor reduction in energy consumption when using water magic, medium increase in attack power when using tree magic, minor reduction in energy consumption when using tree magic.

Requirement: Intelligence 20, secondary job or higher.

Weight: 4

This rod increased my magic power by almost a hundred. That was strong enough in itself, but it even came with effects that further boosted the power of my spells.

“It has both an attack power boost and a consumption reduction for water *and* tree magic!”

“That was the hardest part!”

You could say my magic attack power had skyrocketed. I couldn’t believe how good this staff was. I had given Lewin a bunch of the materials I had, including the dinosaur materials and the Sacred Tree Branch, and it had really really paid off. The rod turned out a little heavy, but my Strength stat was higher now that I had leveled up, so that shouldn’t be a problem.

“Man, I can’t wait to see the others now. Next up is the robe.”

“This one’s a great one too. I used a good amount of materials to make it.”

“Oh yeah? You’re really raising my expectations here.”

“Bah ha ha ha ha! Good!”

Name: Dinosoul Garb

Rarity: 6 *Quality*: 9 ★ Durability: 590

Effect: Defense +128, minor magic resistance, minor

status ailment resistance, minor blow away resistance, major boost to leadership abilities, grants the skill Dinosoul.

Requirement: Strength 10 or higher, Sanity and Intelligence 20 or higher.

Weight: 7

“Whoa, dang! This is awesome!”

Defense +128? That’s almost three times as much as my last robe! Those effects were nothing to sneeze at either. The requirements to equip it were pretty high, but like with the rod, I just managed to meet them. Having increased leadership ability would raise the effectiveness of command-type skills and my ability to support allies. For Tamers, this was a very useful effect. And it was a *major* effect, which was great.

But there was one thing listed under the effects that was new to me.

“Hey, what’s this Dinosoul skill?”

Skill-granting made it possible to use a skill just by equipping a piece of gear. Granting a useful skill was enough to shoot up the value of any piece of equipment.

Dinosoul. Did it have something to do with a dinosaur’s soul?

“This is my first time seein’ that too. I’m guessin’ it’s because I used all those dinosaur materials. Gear that’s made usin’ materials from every type of dinosaur ain’t exactly common. Oh, and I know what that skill does.”

The skill had the impressive ability to boost the user’s stats and various resistances when fighting against dinosaurs. I didn’t know I’d be fighting dinosaurs again anytime soon, but if the situation ever arose, this skill would be a huge boon.

The equipment was a slightly loose-fitting outfit that was white and blue with a splash of yellow. That’s right, it wasn’t a robe. The top half was a hoodie with a wide, high neck that covered the bottom of my chin. The bottom half was a

pair of pants with tight cuffs at the ankles, resembling knickerbockers. Some stylish silver accents were placed in a few spots of the entire outfit.

The outfit was a lot more casual than what I'd been wearing so far, but it was fair to say it would be a lot easier to move around in. It might actually be a lot more comfortable for me.

"By the way, you can change the skin if ya like. How 'bout it?"

"The skin?"

"Yeah, you can change the appearance of yer favorite equipment. It's free t'do once per piece of equipment."

"And if I want to change the skin after that?"

"It'll cost ya real-world money. Five hundred yen each time, if I remember right."

"Ah, of course it does."

Very crafty, devs. But I was sure there were many people who were happy to pay for that. There were a lot of players who prioritized gear abilities and so went around in mismatched outfits. When requesting equipment to be made by a craftsperson, it was possible to tweak its appearance, but that wasn't possible with items obtained as drops or from dungeon treasure boxes. There were probably a lot of people who'd want to change their appearance up just by changing the skin without having to sacrifice their equipment's abilities.

"I think I'm good for now. I might want to do it in the future, though."

"I hear ya. Oh, but be careful. Clothes that're originally made as skins can't be changed."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean like those yukata yer mascots were wearin'. Those aren't considered equipment, so ya can't change the skin."

"Oh, so that's how it works."

Basically, since the yukata were already considered skins, another skin couldn't be added on top of them.

“And then we’ve got the innerwear. It’s a combined top and bottom, huh?”

“That it is. You equip it as a set.”

It was a shirt-and-shorts combo, both parts of which had to be equipped at the same time.

Name: Dinosaur Innerwear+

Rarity: 5 *Quality*: 8 ★ Durability: 470

Effect: Defense +49, medium resistance to hindrances to movement, medium resistance to Roar.

Requirement: Endurance 10 or higher.

Weight: 1

The abilities were impeccable. The set was green and loose-fitting. It even had some embroidery, making me feel like some kind of noble lord. This also bumped up my abilities considerably, which wasn’t really surprising seeing as I had been wearing the innerwear I’d bought at the beginning of the game. *All hail dinosaur materials!*

“These I’m throwin’ in for free. They’re not much, but I reckon they’re better than what you have now.”

Name: Dino Boots

Rarity: 5 *Quality*: 6 ★ Durability: 420

Effect: Defense + 10, minor walking assistance, minor water resistance, minor heat resistance

Requirement: Endurance 10 or higher.

Weight: 1

“Are you sure? These look really strong!”

They didn’t seem like the sort of thing to throw in for free... Could I really just

take them?

“I just cobbled them together with some leftover materials. Take ‘em.”

“Thanks, Lewin!”

Lewin handed me a pair of black boots. Sure they probably couldn’t be considered first-rate shoes, but they were perfect for me.

“Very nice, I have absolutely no complaints. So, how about the others?”

“Don’t you worry, I finished up Rick and Bear Bear’s equipment too. Take a look.”

“Oho!”

“Chirp chiiirp!”

Name: Fangscale Scarf

Rarity: 5 *Quality*: 7 ★ Durability: 470

Effect: Defense +41, major paralysis resistance, major terror resistance, medium tremor resistance

Weight: 2

Name: Enhanced Throwing Bracelet+

Rarity: 5 *Quality*: 6 ★ Durability: 430

Effect: Defense +39, medium boost to Throwing.

Weight: 2

“Let’s see... Rick’s equipment looks about the same appearancewise, but those abilities! Wow!”

“Chiiirp! Chirp chiiirp!”

“Oh, do you like it?”

“Chirp chiiirp!”

“Whoa there, Rick!” Lewin cried. “Bah ha ha ha! That tickles! Hold on now, you’re messin’ up my beard!”

“Chirp chirp chiiirp!”

Rick was bursting with excitement at his drastically enhanced armor. He dashed over to Lewin and rubbed his face against the blacksmith’s. He’d waited until I was distracted to go nuzzle Lewin’s beard. But even though Lewin was acting slightly annoyed, I knew he was probably enjoying himself, so it was a win-win situation. *I’ll let them be.*

“And this must be Bear Bear’s,” I said, moving on.

Name: Inverted Scale Poncho

Rarity: 5 *Quality*: 5 ★ Durability: 410

Effect: Defense + 68, minor status ailment resistance, medium blow away resistance.

Requirement: Strength and Endurance 20 or higher.

Weight: 8

Name: Magic Resistance Vest

Rarity: 6 *Quality*: 5★ Durability: 530

Effect: Defense + 47, medium magic resistance.

Requirement: Intelligence 7 or higher.

Weight: 4

Name: Amber Pendant

Rarity: 6 *Quality*: 5 ★ Durability: 540

Effect: Defense +28, minor increase in skill attack power.

Requirement: Sanity 10 or higher.

Weight: 3

Bear Bear’s equipment was a set of three pieces of gear: a green, rainproof poncho, a blue vest, and an amber pendant. His old poncho-style cape was cute, so I was happy he’d be keeping the look. Lewin must have had the same thought.

“Could I also ask you to make a new scarf and shoulder bag for Perca?”

“Eh, what’d you say?”

“Rick, come on and let go of him. We can’t talk like this.”

“Chiiirp.”

I picked up Rick by his scruff and pulled him off of Lewin. He’d made Lewin his playground the entire time.

“Right, so about Perca’s equipment...”

“Leave that to me. I still made out with a little more in this exchange, so if I make the equipment for your penguin, that’ll be ’bout even.”

I hadn’t requested Perca’s equipment in advance, since I thought he might evolve. There was a chance his size would’ve changed and his equipment wouldn’t have fit him. Except he didn’t end up evolving.

For payment, I told Lewin to keep any leftover materials. It wasn’t a very exact exchange, but I trusted Lewin, so I didn’t mind. Besides, he’d produced such quality equipment for me. I would’ve had no complaints if he even asked for a little extra money.

“Okay then, I’m off. Thanks again.”

“Chirp chiiirp!”

“Come back soon, y’hear!”

Pretty sure Lewin’s only looking at Rick... Oh well.



“We’ve upgraded our equipment to gear specially made by Lewin! We’re no longer the weaklings we once were!”

“Chirp chirp!”

“Grooowl!”

“That’s great to hear. I’m actually a little worried about the boss fight, so we’ll be countin’ on you.”

“Oh, uh, sure.”

That was some heavy responsibility, but that was what I got for running my mouth. I’d really have to work hard not to mess anything up.

After all that, we finished up some shopping in the town, and then stepped foot into the Earth Elementals’ trial. Even though this wasn’t my first time here, I always felt nervous taking on a dungeon. But this time, I was with someone else who had even less combat experience than I did—Ikaru. As the more experienced one of us, I couldn’t let myself look pathetic in front of her. In fact, I had to protect her.

“An enemy! Olto, get in front—”

“Esk! Protect everyone!”

“Mm!”

“Take this!”

Huh? Ikaru? How is she so good at wielding that bow? Also, she didn’t seem all that nervous. Ikaru explained that she had challenged this place once before and was familiar with the early areas.

I just stuck by Tsguarun and Tagosack, which made things easy. The enemies in the beginning were also pretty weak, so the others were able to crush them in an instant. Instead of me protecting Ikaru, it was more like I was the one being protected. *I-I’ll do better!*

Fifteen minutes after we entered the dungeon, we finally ran into something that gave us pause.

“Hmm, it’s in this room, right?”

“Yeah. I mean, I think so.”

Tagosack and Tsugarun were looking at the map and consulting each other. I

seemed to remember this being a room with a hidden passage. Then, Tagosack called out to me and Ikaru.

“Hey, Yuto! Ikaru! C’mere a sec!”

“Yes, ma’am! How can I help!”

“Find something?” I asked.

“You probably know this, Yuto, but there’s a hidden passageway in this room. We’re thinkin’ Olto and Esk could help us out.”

I had also briefly looked into the strategy for this dungeon. There were various switches to activate along the way, and if you didn’t get all of them, the final gate wouldn’t open. Those switches were located inside hidden passages, and apparently some passages were dummies. I could only imagine how difficult finding the right passageways had been for the players that had found them on their own. It was all thanks to the information those players had unearthed by taking the initiative to explore uncharted ground that we could get through the dungeon with ease. *Thank you for your hard work!*

“All we need to do is find the hidden button and push it. Easy as that. But we have no idea where exactly in the passageway that button is.”

The hidden passageway was so cramped that people had to stoop down to enter. Inside, there was a button hidden somewhere in the walls that was generated in a different random spot every time.

“Findin’ the button is gonna take a while, so we’re thinkin’ Olto and Esk could go find it. Sound good?”

“Mm-mmm!”

“Mmm!”

“Ack! Olto, wait!”

“Mm-mmm!”

Olto was excited to have been given a job to do. He charged into the passageway at full speed. Caught up in Olto’s excitement, Esk dashed off after him.

“Be careful!”

“Mmm!”

Are those two gonna be okay by themselves? I wondered.

“Monsters don’t show up in the passageway, so they’ll be just fine.”

“I hope so...”

“Leave that to them. We can do some gatherin’ while we wait.”

We didn’t particularly need any items from here, but standing around and waiting was boring.

“Tsugarun, this place is filled with ores!” Ikaru exclaimed.

“Oh, yeah?”

“Yes! I think I can use them to make cutlery!”

Ikaru, however, was ecstatic to do some mining. The items here were still special to her. She looked oddly adorable as she moved about swinging her pickax. Given her short stature, she sort of reminded me of a gnome herself. The others were also warmly watching over Ikaru. I wasn’t trying to act all superior as a first-wave player, but I couldn’t help but feel like I wanted to help her. Tagosack and the others started lending her a hand too, so they must have shared a similar sentiment.

While we were doing that, we heard the heavy clunking sound of metal hitting metal, like two giant gearwheels grinding together.

“They must’ve found it.”

“Yeah, sounds like it...”

We’d have to repeat the same process to activate five total switches. We were able to find a hidden button in the very next room too. I thought maybe I’d be able to find the button too, but I was completely wrong. I even tried hitting the spot Olto found using his earth magic, but I just couldn’t discern any difference in the sound. Maybe having a skill that enhanced my hearing would have helped, but it seemed like finding the button was hard for regular players. No wonder the gnome rental system existed.

“All right, next room is the miniboss,” Tsugarun said.

“Finally!” cheered Charm.

“Hell yeah! Can’t wait to flex my skills!”

Charm and Tsugarun chuckled at Tagosack’s declaration. They were all farmers, but apparently they also enjoyed a good fight.

On the opposite end was Ikaru, whose face was ashen with nerves. Fighting must not have been her strong suit. Though to be fair, I thought she was fighting better than me earlier. She must just not have a lot of experience fighting bosses.

“Yuto, can you and Olto guard Ikaru?” Tagosack asked me.

“Sure thing. Is it cool if Sakura does too?”

“Yeah. The rest of us should be able to handle the miniboss. No need to push yourself.”

“Got it.”

“Th-Thank you, Yuto!”

“I’ll try my best.”

I felt bad that I couldn’t instill a little more confidence than that, but I’d do what I could.

“Make sure you stay behind me—I mean, behind Olto and Sakura, okay?”

“Yes, of course! Esk, same goes for you, okay?”

“Mmm.”

“I mean it, it’ll help a lot.”

Ikaru and Esk were both still underleveled since they spent all their time doing farmwork. There was a chance they might die just with one direct hit from the miniboss.

“Okay, let’s go in to face the miniboss. Akari, Charm, y’all go in first.”

“Right.”

“You got it!”

Akari wielded a large sword; Tagosack had a giant shovel with an abnormally sharp tip; Tsugarun fought with a hoe; and Charm was equipped with a giant sickle. Even though their weapons were just farming tools, they looked even more vicious in their hands. Especially that sickle, which Charm was carrying over her shoulder. It looked exactly like a reaper's scythe and nothing like a grass-cutting sickle. It was called a Tree Ripper, though, so maybe it was an upgraded version of a grass-cutting sickle.

"Let's head in!"

We rushed into the boss room, where a giant beast was waiting for us. The miniboss of the Earth Elementals' trial was the Earth Elementals' Guardian, whom I'd had the pleasure of fighting before. It resembled an anteater and was covered in a hard shell, and it attacked with incessant earth magic. Last time I had fought it with Amimin and Mattsun, but even with them on my side, it had been a real tough fight...

"Hraaah! Take thiiiis!"

"Don't underestimate us farmers!"

"Hyaaah! I'll have your head!"

Tagosack lifted the Earth Elementals' Guardian with an upward swing of her shovel, then Tsugarun and Charm followed up by attacking with their respective hoe and sickle.

Farmers? I don't see any farmers. They were more like a tribe of hunters. I almost wanted to tell the guardian to make a run for it. Neither the hoe and sickle looked anything like farming tools at this point. Strangely enough, Akari's giant sword looked less vicious by comparison, though she was dealing overwhelmingly more damage than anyone. *Just goes to show, you can't beat a professional.*

"Ahhh! Blade Storm!"

Akari swung her sword multiple times, and twenty sword-shaped auras sped toward the boss. Any one of those swords alone probably had as much attack power as one of my spells. Each strike of the swords produced an explosive burst of scattering light; I felt like I was watching a fireworks show. The guardian

had assumed a defensive posture, but that flurry of attacks was so powerful it sent the boss flying. It landed face up on its back.

Akari didn't let up there—she followed through with another attack.

“Haaaaah!”

Her helmet was made to look like a dinosaur head, so she looked fairly intimidating as she rushed forward, her body low to the ground. She wasn't wearing the black, berserker armor she used to wear. Her equipment was still black, but it wasn't made out of metal now. Instead, her full-body armor was made out of dinosaur scales. She'd explained that the scales had been dyed black. As for her helmet, that must have been modeled after a spinosaurus. It looked pretty foreboding, save for her pigtails sticking out from the sides, which softened the effect a bit. She had apparently specifically requested that the helmet have holes for her pigtails.

It would probably be easiest to describe the rest of her armor, in comparison to the armor worn by a certain traitorous dragoon character who appears in the fourth installment of a famous RPG series—I could just imagine her saying one of his famous lines: *I've returned to my senses!*

Before, her armor had resembled that of a vengeful berserker, and now, that of a traitorous dragoon. Akari seemed to have a preference for dark, gloomy characters, with the difference being she wielded a sword instead of a lance.

“You're finished!”

Ultimately, it only took us ten minutes to win the fight. The miniboss never even made us feel like we were in a crisis. I guess that wasn't all that surprising, considering we'd all leveled up and upgraded our equipment.

“That was easy. Guess we've gotten stronger too, huh?” I said.

“Chirp chiiirp!”

“Growl growl!”

My monsters and I didn't do much, though. Okay, technically we were guarding Ikaru. Olto and Sakura blocked the occasional AoE attack that came her way.

“Chirp chirp.”

“Growl.”

“I hate to break this to you two when you’re looking so proud of yourselves, but you really didn’t do anything.”

Like me, Bear Bear and Rick had just been watching the fight. Though I *had* been the one who ordered them to stay back.

“O-Oh, come now! It was very reassuring to have you two by my side!” Ikaru insisted.

“Chirp...”

“Growl...”

“Don’t look so bashful! Don’t forget that guarding Ikaru is your top priority in the first place,” I told them. I knew these two could get carried away at the drop of a hat. The enemies past here would be even stronger, so I just hoped they wouldn’t get careless and trip up.

It looked like I hadn’t needed to worry about that, though. While monsters did get more difficult past the miniboss, nothing really gave us a super hard time. At least, no fights were so difficult that anyone died. It was all thanks to Akari and the others’ fighting power.

In fights against the regular monsters, Akari and Charm took over fighting in the vanguard, while Tagosack and Tsugarun conserved their energy. It seemed like they had decided to take turns fighting, but since Akari and Charm were plenty strong by themselves, that wasn’t an issue at all.

How would my party have fared by ourselves? Ha ha ha! Get real! Don’t you know who you’re talking to?

Seriously though, if we really prepared ourselves, we might’ve been able to hold our own up to a certain point. But it would’ve been a challenge. At the very least, we probably wouldn’t have been able to clear the dungeon this far as easily as we just had.

The mob monsters alone were enough of a problem. The types of monsters weren’t any different, but they were much higher leveled, and even evolved

specimens popped out occasionally. Just then, actually, we'd just run into a giant snake that was clearly a different version of the Stone Snakes we'd encountered previously.

"It's a Rock Snake!" Tagosack shouted.

"Ikaru, Esk—get behind Olto!"

"O-Okay!"

A giant snake, nearly six meters in length and made of stone, was perched nobly in the middle of the room we'd entered. It was the evolved form of the Stone Snake—as Tagosack said, it was a Rock Snake. It looked more or less like a Stone Snake, but its body was about fifty percent larger and made up of even more rugged rocks than its unevolved form.

The snake could use earth magic, had venomous fangs and high defense, could camouflage itself with the rocks, and was equally capable of close combat and long-range attacks. But on its own, it was no match for our party.

"All right! Leave this to me!" Tsugarun cried. His hoe had a powerful earth-type attack ability, so he was able to take down the monster surprisingly quickly. I knew if I'd been here alone with my monsters, it wouldn't have been so easy.

The dungeon's primary gimmick also became much more complicated in this second half. Some rooms had as many as twenty dummy hidden passages, and in some rooms, the buttons were blocked by guardians we had to defeat. The worst of all was the room that kept spawning monsters until we pushed the button, which was nearly impossible to find in its mazelike hidden passages.

Higher-leveled players typically took advantage of that room to farm items, but that wasn't really feasible for us. We really found ourselves struggling when a bunch of Rock Snakes spawned in at the same time. The oversized snakes showed up right behind Ikaru; Rick and Bear Bear had moved too far to the front in order to fight off the other enemies, so they weren't able to get back to her in time. If Sakura hadn't been there to guard Ikaru, things would not have ended well. *Just remembering the scene gives me chills.* Fau and Reflet couldn't block heavy attacks. Rick was a lightweight too, but he could at least cancel an enemy's attack by using Nut Bomb.

“So, Rick. Bear Bear. Do the two defendants have anything to say for themselves?”

“Chirp...”

“Growl...”

Good, they seem repentant. Actually, were those overly repentant poses and expressions of theirs really sincere? It almost looked like they were faking.

“...Um, I’m okay, so please don’t get too upset at them,” Ikaru said.

“Chiiirp!”

“Grooowl!”

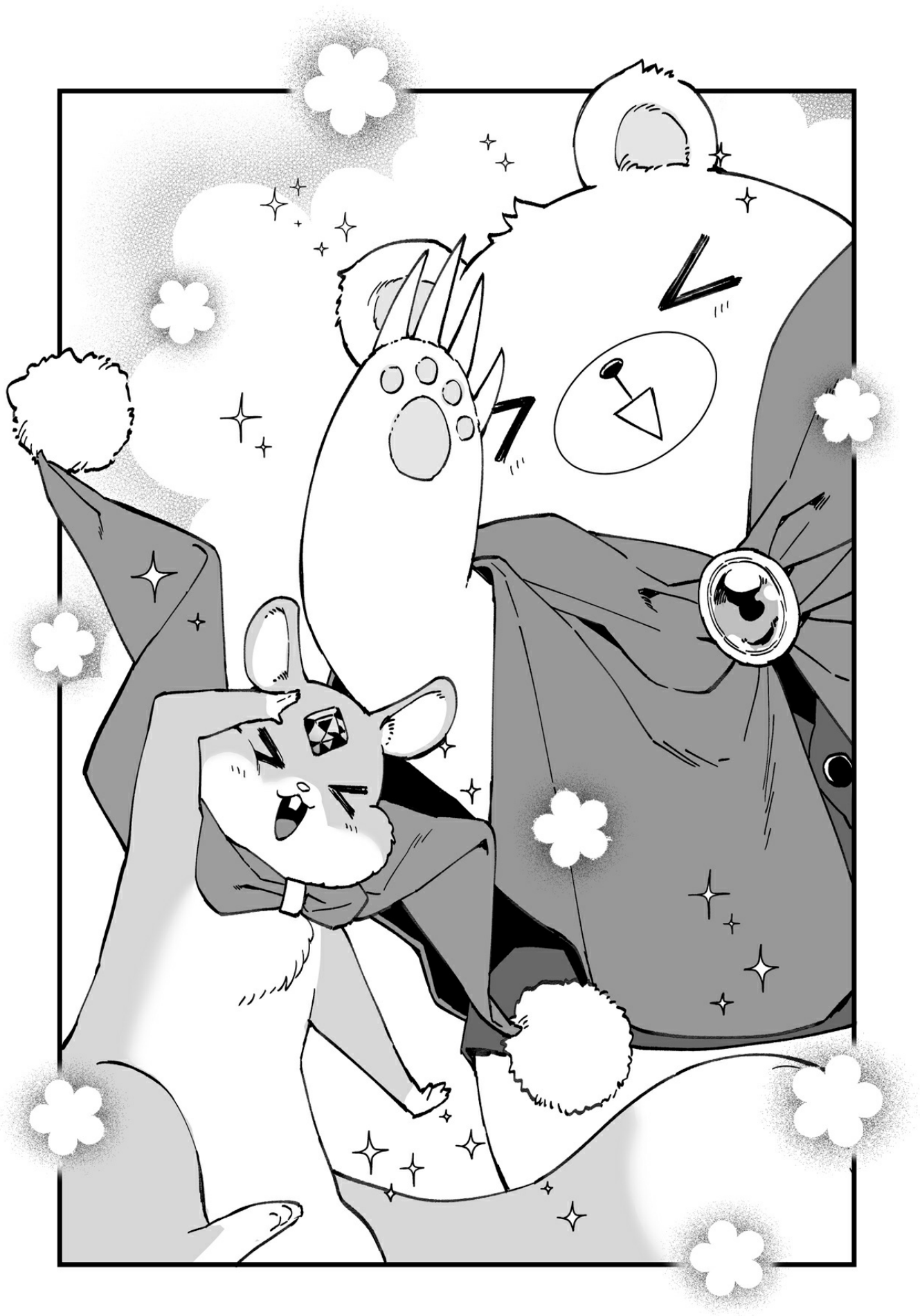
I knew it, they weren’t repentant at all! They sure changed their attitude fast. They were trying to hide behind Ikaru, but Bear Bear was still visible. *Hey! Don’t peek out from behind her!*

“...I’ll let you go this time, but only for Ikaru’s sake, but don’t let that happen again, got it?”

“Chirp chiiirp!”

“Growl grooowl!”

I’ve never seen a more beautiful salute! I’m taking a screenshot!



We'd ended up running into some close calls along the way, but we managed to arrive at the depths of the dungeon without losing a single member.

"Is the boss up ahead?"

"Yeah, this is it."

A massive gate with shiny gold double doors stood imposingly in front of us. It was close to ten meters tall, and each door was about three meters wide. The frame, metal fittings, and pillars were all made out of gold too. If this were the real world, its worth would have been astronomical.

The entire surface of the gate and its doors was engraved with hieroglyphics, which gave it an overwhelmingly daunting presence. It looked so distinctive I would've been shocked if the boss *wasn't* on the other side.

"Let's open this baby up," Tagosack said, rolling up her sleeves as she approached the door. "Everyone gimme a hand."

"Huh? Can we open this huge door just by pushing it?"

I questioned whether this door could be opened with muscle power alone. It really looked like something that would take more than just a simple push to be moved. Wasn't there a switch or something to open it?

"It'll work. This *is* a game."

"Ah, fair enough."

The brute force method was the way to go, apparently. Like Tagosack said, we all pushed against the door, and it opened up almost disappointingly easily. It felt heavy at first, but after just a bit of effort, the doors opened up automatically. There was a low rumbling sound as the doors opened backward. I felt like this sort of thing had happened before. Game logic, I guess.

Past the opened doors of the giant golden gate stood a small figure.

"Mm! Mm! Mmm!"

It was a single gnome. He stood there dauntingly with his arms crossed, laughing boldly. *And looking very cute.* His reason for being here, however, was entirely unbelievable.

“Th-That’s the final boss of the Earth Elementals’ trial?”

“Yup,” said Akari. “The Gnome Grand Fighter. The most powerful—no, the most brutal enemy there is.”

That’s right—this cute, cheeky little gnome was the final boss of this trial. He more or less resembled the other green-haired gnomes, but his equipment was very different. He wore green and brown full-body metal armor, and carried a giant ice ax on his back. He looked nothing like a farmer, and everything like a warrior.

The Gnome Grand Fighter must have been the evolution that came after Gnome Fighter, since his armor had a similar appearance to the equipment worn by that evolution.

“H-He looks strong.”

Just thinking about getting attacked with that sharp, pointed ice ax was terrifying. Akari had said this boss was considered the absolutely most brutal boss in the entire game, so it must have had unthinkable power. Otherwise, how could he be called that, considering the existence of the dinosaurs and demons?

“He ain’t fast, but he can attack from any distance,” Tagosack explained. “You and your monsters focus on defense.”

“Got it.”

“But you, Rick, and Sakura should attack the boss with tree magic. We can try to make it flinch by attacking it with its weakness.”

“Okay. Ikaru, you stay behind my other monsters and be ready to use potions.”

“Okay!”

This would be the time to approach the boss and start the battle, but—

“Mm!”

“Mm?”

As if as a form of provocation, the Gnome Grand Fighter thrust his ice ax in

Olto's direction. Olto responded with uncharacteristic seriousness.

"Mm-mm!"

"Mmm-mm!"

"Mmm."

"Mm!"

I had no clue what they were saying, but two gnomes talking so seriously to each other was pretty cute. Although, I hadn't heard about this sort of event occurring with this boss.

"Tagosack?"

"Don't ask me. Everyone else that got here had a gnome with 'em too..."

She was right—having a gnome was absolutely required to get to this point. There might have been other methods, but at least right now, bringing a gnome was the best proven method out there, so it was extremely likely that most people who had gotten to this point had also had a gnome with them. And unique gnomes must have been among them too.

"So basically, this isn't happening because Olto's a unique gnome."

"Probably not."

Then what could this be?

"I-It's the Silver-Haired effect..."

"I shouldn't be surprised..."

"I can't believe I got to witness it in person."

Everyone was muttering about something behind me. They must have been shocked by this unprecedented event.

"Mm!"

"Mm!"

Oh? The gnomes seemed to have finished their conversation. Esk hadn't joined in at all, so Olto must have triggered this interaction. Both gnomes smirked at each other in a way that looked at odds with their cute appearance,

then they returned to their original positions. Had they been telling each other to have a good fight or something?

“Olto, what’d you talk about?”

“Mm! Mm-mmm!”

Olto waved his hoe around, showing me he was ready to fight, but that told me nothing. Unfortunately, I wasn’t able to ask for any more details.

“Mmm!”

The Gnome Grand Fighter started to move. The battle had begun.

The boss acted first with a surprise attack.

“Mmm!”

“Huagh?!” My voice cracked in a surprised yelp.

The boss slipped past the vanguard and came right for meee!

“Mm-mmm!”

How can he go straight for the rear guard with that cute face?! That’s not fair!
Did this also have something to do with the gnomes’ interaction? Had his hate toward me increased since I was Olto’s tamer?

However, Olto blocked the boss’s giant ice ax with his hoe.

“Mm!”

“Mmm!”

Even a boss couldn’t break past Olto’s defense with just one hit. The Gnome Grand Fighter—the “boss gnome”—glared in annoyance at Olto as he was forced to take a big step back. After that, the fight progressed as normal.

As things went on, I realized the boss wasn’t actually that strong. Take his defense, for instance—he was definitely strong against physical attacks, enough so that he had even easily repelled Amimin’s arrows. But on the other hand, it seemed his magic resistance wasn’t very high.

“Hydro Pressure!”

“Mm-mmm!”

The boss gnome clearly disliked my magic attacks, since he kept running from my line of fire. I saw that in just a short amount of time, I was able to deplete his HP bar by quite a lot.

“Huh? That’s super effective!”

Even my spell could deal the boss a lot of damage. I couldn’t believe how well it worked, even considering that he was weak to water. This had to have been my first time since starting the game that I had made a boss flinch. It felt a little bit like a letdown, since I had been so on guard after reading what everyone had to say about this boss. Wasn’t this boss supposed to be the most brutal boss? This little gnome? Did he have some super powerful long-range attack he hadn’t used yet or something? If we played our cards right, we’d win this for sure.

However, I soon realized that I should have never let my guard down. Akari rushed up to the gnome and was about to strike it with her sword when—

“Hyaaaa— Aaaah! Dang it!”

“Mm-mm!”

At the last second, Akari’s attack missed, and her sword swished through empty air. She lost balance, then the gnome hit her with an explosive punch.

“Ack!”

“Akari! Are you okay?”

The gnome’s punch looked nothing more than that of a kid throwing a tantrum, but it sent Akari flying several meters. While it didn’t deal that much damage, the key point was what happened before the punch. Why had Akari’s giant sword changed course so suddenly like that? An invisible wall? Some sort of illusion? Though I hadn’t heard about anything like that happening...

Next, Charm threw herself at the boss gnome. She spun herself around and swung her sickle down on the boss.

“Gaaaah!”

But yet again, the same thing happened.

“Mm?”

The boss gnome tilted his head as he stared at the approaching blade.

“Ahhh! I can’t do it!”

“Mmm!”

The point of her sickle veered to the side, not even grazing the boss gnome. Then came another one of the boss gnome’s childish punches. Charm took even more damage than Akari did—she tumbled to the ground.

Hey, seriously, what’s going on here? Did it have absolute defense that required special conditions for us to hit him? Did bladed weapons not work on him? Or maybe he was just invincible to all weapon attacks? If that were the case, that certainly *was* a brutal ability. I could understand why he was called the most brutal boss if he forced players into a battle of attrition with his transcendently high defense.

“Take thiiiis!”

“Mm-mmm?!”

“What?”

Never mind—in the next second, Tagosack was easily able to deal damage to the gnome with her weapon. And Tsugarun dealt a follow-up attack that worked just fine. So the boss didn’t have absolute defense? Or maybe farming tools were effective? Oh, but Charm’s sickle was also a farming tool, wasn’t it?

“Get it together, you two!”

“Focus!”

Tagosack and Tsugarun were looking at Akari and Charm with exasperation, and the latter two responded on the verge of tears.

“But, c’mon! How... How can I attack such a cute little gnome?!”

“Uh-uh! No way! Not happening!”

Huh? Wait, they can’t attack him just because he’s cute? Sure, he *was* cute, but he was also our *enemy*. And we had come here with the explicit purpose of defeating him.

“Ugh... He really is the most brutal boss...”

“He’s got the perfect defense!”

Akari and Charm looked dead serious.

So that’s what they meant?! Really? He was too cute to attack? I almost thought they were joking, but no one was cracking a smile.

Tagosack sighed. “Fine. Tsugarun, it’s up to us.”

“I guess we knew this would happen...”

Apparently, Tagosack and Tsugarun had predicted this outcome.

“Let’s do what we planned. Akari and Charm will tank.”

“Seeing their reaction, I can believe the rumors of those gnome fans coming here over and over and getting wiped.”

S-Seriously?! The reason Akari and Charm had taken on most of the work during the battles on the way here must have also been because they knew this would happen. They pulled their weight in the fights leading up to this to make up for not being able to do much for the boss fight. Although, being unable to fight a monster even when it came at you as an opponent—in a way, that was like a paragon of a fan.

The devs really had created a criminally difficult boss.

“There are a lotta real rabid fans out there ’cause of Yuto.”

“So this is Silver-Haired’s fault...?”

“Huh? Did you just call me?” I asked.

“Nah, don’t worry ’bout it,” Tagosack responded. “I figure you’ll have no problem attackin’ it, right?”

“Well, yeah. Gnomes are cute, but right now, he’s our enemy. Besides, I’m used to seeing Olto. I’ll be fine.”

“Good to hear. Akari and Charm’ll handle guardin’ Ikaru, so could ya attack a little more?”

“Got it.”

Nice. I hadn’t been able to contribute much so far, so now I had to do my

best! It was my time to shine for the final moment!

“Guys! Let’s head to the front to fight!”

We joined in on fighting, and then after five minutes...

“Mm-mm?”

“Yes! My tree magic spell finally hit!”

A green whip had extended from my hand and wrapped around the boss gnome’s feet, stopping him from moving. He’d been nimbly dodging the whip that entire time, but now I’d finally caught him. I knew he might be able to wriggle right out, but this was the moment I’d been waiting for!

“Do it, Rick!”

“Chirp chiiirp!” Rick responded to my command by sticking his tail straight up and letting out a valiant cry. He started glowing green, then that light flowed into the blue acorn in his hand. After a few seconds, the acorn transformed into a green fruit the size of a peach. Rick had used the skill Deep Green Heart, which he’d learned from evolving into a Sequoia Squirrel, to turn the acorn into a Deep Green Fruit. It had as mighty of a presence as ever. And it looked mouthwateringly delicious.

Unfortunately, though, Deep Green Heart was a combat skill. Despite many attempts to get him to do so, Rick wasn’t able to produce the fruit outside of battle. A shame, since it seemed like it’d be so useful for cooking and concocting... Ultimately, I had had to give up. But even though it could only be used in battle, it was a guaranteed powerful hit. Also, this time around, Rick didn’t just throw the fruit normally.

“Mm-mm?!”

“Chirp chirp chiiirp!”

Amazingly, Rick threw the Deep Green Fruit in an arc toward the boss gnome, who stepped backward in an attempt to dodge it. Had Rick put a spin on his throw in anticipation of the boss trying to sidestep it in that direction? The gnome was blown backward by the fruit and was sent rolling on the ground.

“That was awesome, Rick! You aimed that curveball perfectly!”

“Chirp chirp!”

Rick jumped up and down as he pumped his fists. But unfortunately, that single blow brought about a new crisis.

“Mm... Mm-mm!”

The boss gnome, crawling on his hands and knees, started emitting a red aura.

“H-He’s rabid!” I shouted, and in the next second, the Gnome Grand Fighter vanished.

“S-So fast!”

The boss had entered his rabid state, which activated once a boss’s HP dropped below ten percent. While the only outward change was being enshrouded in a red aura, other aspects changed so drastically the boss almost seemed like a whole different being.

First was his speed. He had already been fast, but now he was even more so. He darted all over the field at such a high speed that we couldn’t catch up to him.

Second, his attack patterns.

“Mm-mmm!”

“Huh? Again?”

The boss started attacking the rear guard even more aggressively than before, to my unwelcome surprise.

“Why’re you coming at me?! Damn it!”

He had been targeting the rear guard since the battle started, but he hadn’t ignored hate drawn from elsewhere. If the vanguard used a skill to provoke him, he’d be drawn right back over to them.

But that didn’t work this time. It came as a total shock when he completely ignored the vanguards’ efforts to draw his hate and instead slipped right past them toward the back. And, that speed—he was so fast, it was almost impossible to believe he was the same gnome. Clad in metal full-body armor,

the boss gnome looked like a cannonball.

It was a miracle that I was able to block his attack with just my rod. I'd thrust it out in a blind panic, and I just happened to get it in the right position. My hands tingled from the impact and the force made me fall backward onto my backside. Thankfully, I was able to keep hold of it.

But I wasn't in the clear yet.

"Mm-mmm...!"

"Urk!"

The boss gnome put even more strength into his ice ax in an effort to push past my weapon and attack me. I lost out to his overwhelmingly higher strength, and my staff was pushed back in a single breath. I tried my hardest to resist the force, but not only was I weaker, I was in a worse position. The sharp point of the gnome's ice ax was inching closer and closer to my face.

I had to say, having a smiling child coming at me with a weapon was scary as hell! This was far more frightening than ghosts and other monsters like that. He almost looked insane.

"Urgh..."

"Mmm..."

The gnome's face and the tip of the ax were right in front of me! *Crap! His weapon's only a few centimeters away from stabbing me!*

"Silver-Haired! I got you!" Tsugarun yelled.

"Hurry!"

"Gyaaaaah!"

"Mmm!"

H-He saved me! I was eternally grateful to Tsugarun. But a burly dude sending a gnome flying with a kick like that almost looked criminal! He seemed to understand that too.

"I'll get a lot of hate if that shot of me kicking the gnome gets shared around online!"

“I’ll delete my video.”

“Me too!”

Since there weren’t many videos of the Gnome Grand Fighter fight, we’d all been recording POV videos. My and Ikaru’s videos were especially great, since we had a view of the entire fight from the back... But if we kept them, someone was bound to see them eventually, so it was better we deleted them for Tsugarun’s sake. However, we were currently right in the middle of a boss battle, so we didn’t have time to think about that.

“Hey! He’s about to do somethin’!”

Tagosack’s shout brought us back to the task at hand. I’d been so relieved to have been saved, I’d completely lost focus! I whipped around to see that at some point, the boss gnome had put a lot of distance between himself and us.

“Mmm-mm-mmm... Mm-mmm!”

He’s chanting! He’s gonna cast a spell!

“Mm-mm-mm-mm-mmm!”

The gnome let out one last loud chant, completing his spell. Then, near the top of the room’s high ceiling appeared a large clump of dirt. The surface of the clump wriggled profusely as multiple needlelike objects protruded out of it.

“Oh shit! It’s Grand Rain! He’s about to use an AoE attack!”

Tagosack’s shout made me realize just what that spell was. I’d seen it in a spell showcase video. It was an advanced earth magic spell that made spikes of dirt rain down over a wide area. The dirt rain itself dealt a lot of damage, but it also hindered movement if it clung on to you. Getting hit with the rain head-on could be fatal. But only if it could hit us.

“Everyone, gather around me! Aqua Barricade!”

As soon as I realized we wouldn’t be able to stop the boss gnome’s attack, I had started chanting a defensive spell. It was the newest spell in my arsenal, which I’d learned after acquiring Water Magic (Advanced). The spell produced a giant umbrella made out of water to block attacks. It could even be used as a shield if I held it out in front of me.

The other day, I'd maxed out my water magic at level 50, so I'd acquired the advanced version of it. The only thing was, this spell used a lot more MP, so I hadn't had many reasonable opportunities to use it.

I had also learned another offensive spell, Aqua Slash, which I had been making good use of. But its range was somewhat limited, so I was still using my regular water spells fairly often. That would probably change once I got used to the new spells or learned another advanced water magic spell.

I had just wanted to use a spell that offered us the most defense, even if it ended up not working, but it seemed like this was the exact right way to go. My water umbrella effectively blocked the dirt raining down on us. The thundering sound of dirt pelting against the umbrella and the vibrations I felt attested to the power of the earth magic spell. The booming noise was harsh against our ears.

"Yuto! This water umbrella's startin' to evaporate! Is it gonna hold up?"

"I-I don't know! I know it's supposed to have a high localized defense, but..."

Can it defend us against an opponent using a stronger magic spell?

As Tagosack had observed, the umbrella's surface was starting to get smaller and thinner. I could see the dirt needles piercing into the umbrella more clearly than before.

"Ahhhhhhh! Silver-Haired! Keep it up!"

"There's not really much I can do!"

I can only cast the spell! The rest is out of my hands!

"Eeeeeek!"

The umbrella started shaking even harder, and we were assailed with even more intense tremors than before. Ikaru's shriek reverberated underneath the umbrella.

"God, Buddha, devs! Please, save us!" Charm cried.

"Fat lot of good prayin' to the devs'll do!"

"Yeah! They're all just a bunch of sadists!"

Tagosack and Tsugarun shot back angrily. Charm started praying again.

“God, Buddha, Silver-Haired!”

“Much better!”

“Perfect!”

How will that help?! Why are you praying to me?! I know my spell's the one blocking the attacks right now, but still!

“Mmm!”

“Mm-mmm!”

Olto and Esk had their hoes at the ready, looking up at me like they were prepared to handle things if the worst happened. *You're the only dependable ones here!*

But just when it seemed like the umbrella couldn't get any thinner, the dirt rain stopped.

“Is it over...?”

My water umbrella looked like a hedgehog thanks to all the dirt needles lodged in it. Then, the umbrella quietly disappeared, as did the dirt needles that had pierced the battlefield, making it look like that furious attack had never occurred.

“Mmm-mm.”

“Mm-mm!”

Olto and Esk patted my leg in appreciation for my efforts. Then, they readied their hoes and faced the boss gnome. At the same time, the boss gnome started to stagger. He must have used up all his energy with that strong attack.

“Silver-Haired, you saved our necks!”

“This is our chance! Let's bring this gnome down!”

Tsugarun and Tagosack rushed forward together. Leave it to a couple top players never to let an opponent's opening go untaken.

“All right! I'll help too!”

Time to switch out my party members!

In order for my monsters to gain experience, they needed to participate in battle. I kept Olto, Himka, and Eine for defense, and summoned in Drimo, Lilith, and Perca.

“Take down the boss!”

“Squeak squeeeeak!”

“Honk hooonk!”

Drimo and Perca sprinted after Tagosack and Tsugarun the moment I summoned them in. Looking fully determined to contribute as much as they could to the fight, they started attacking the gnome alongside the others.

“Kee-hee!”

“Hey! Lilith, wait!”

Lilith went following right after Drimo and Perca! *She only just joined us, so her level's too low for this! Even with her spear, it's still too reckless!*

“You attack from the back, Lilith!”

“Kee-hee...”

“D-Don't look so disappointed. That boss is strong, okay? It's too dangerous for you. You can cast spells from a distance and keep it on its toes from here instead. How's that sound?”

“Kee-hee.”

Good. Looks like she got the picture. Lilith languidly lowered her spear in and didn't move from her spot. This wasn't a sign of her losing motivation or boycotting or anything—she was simply using Imp's Gaze on the boss. After she stared at the boss gnome in the distance for a while, I saw his body start to glow faintly.

“Nice, you did it!”

“Kee-hee!”

The boss gnome now had a lowered Sanity stat thanks to Imp's Gaze, so he would also be weaker against magic. Even though it took some time to activate,

a debuff that actually worked against a boss was a priceless asset.

“Lilith, attack with some long-range spells!”

“Kee-hee-hee!”

Lilith shot out a sphere that looked like solidified darkness. Dark magic spells weren’t that powerful, but they could inflict debuffs. The sphere Lilith launched at the boss was another spell that lowered an opponent’s Sanity. Imp’s Gaze, then dark magic; with the doubled effect of their debuffs cast on the boss—

“Aqua Shock!”

“Mm-mmm!”

“Yes! Major damage!”

Even my low-powered AoE spell visibly brought the HP bar down.

“Lilith! Keep casting those debuffs!”

“Kee-hee!”

The boss turned his gaze to us. We must have gotten his attention. Unfortunately for him, he had no chance to attack us.

“Honk honk hooonk!”

“Mm-mm!”

A blue projectile crashed into the boss gnome’s back. It seemed like the boss was also weak to ice—he was blown forward and tumbled along the ground.

“Mmm!”

“Honk honk!”

“Mm?”

“Hooonk!”

The boss gnome sprung back up and leaped toward Perca, but since he wasn’t able to catch up to the swiftly gliding penguin, his attack didn’t land. Perca was using Ice Cloak to slide across the floor on his stomach. As Perca slid away from the gnome, he occasionally looked over his shoulder to provoke him with a derisive smirk. He was slapping his butt and sticking out his tongue at the boss.

“Mm-mmm!” the boss growled angrily, then started chasing after Perca. But Tagosack and the others launched magic spells at the gnome’s back, causing him to fall back to the ground.

“Mm-mm...!”

Even though he must’ve taken a lot of damage from that attack, his bold smile never wavered. It was like he was thinking *Finally! I get to fight a worthy opponent!* As I shuddered at the boss gnome’s battle mania, he grinned, and then his body started emitting a magical glow—he was about to cast another lethal spell.

Who knew what sort of attack he’d throw at us if we didn’t strike him down here and now?! It was time to pull out all the stops!

“Drimo! Use Dragon Blood Awakening, and then charge at him!”

“Squeak squeeeeak!”

The cute-yet-cool mole instantly transformed into a dragon. He was still only about the size of a human, but I could keenly feel his draconic power. *Behold, Drimo’s ace in the hole, Dragon Blood Awakening!*

“Squeeeeak!”

As he let out his usual adorable squeak, Drimo charged straight at the boss gnome.

I’ll follow up Drimo’s attack with another spell! I started chanting a spell as I watched dragon-form Drimo charge over to the boss.

“Squeak squeeeeak!”

“Mm-mm!”

A direct hit! Drimo lifted the gnome off the ground with his two large horns and sent him flying, as if he’d been hit by a certain muscled character’s Hurricane Mincer.

Perfect—now all I have to is hit him with a water spell when he lands and—

“Mm... Mmm.”

“Huh?”

It looked like the damage the boss gnome took from the fall wiped out the rest of his HP. After rolling several times on the ground, the Gnome Grand Fighter gave us a thumbs-up, wearing an expression like he was saying *Thanks for a good fight*. Then, he broke apart into polygons and vanished.

I canceled my spell. All my excitement earlier to crush the boss felt a little embarrassing right now.

“Phew, we did it. Nice job, Yuto.”

“You too, Tagosack.”

“We won!”

“Victory!”

“Please, you two were only tanking,” Tsugarun quipped. He was right, Akari and Charm hadn’t attacked at all. But since he and Tagosack knew that was going to happen beforehand, I refrained from commenting. Besides, Tagosack and Tsugarun, who had fought the hardest against the boss, just laughed it off. Akari and Charm had been actively fighting on the way here, anyway. In fact, the amount of fighting they had taken over up to the boss had probably made up for not fighting him at all. In any case, they had helped more than I had. I knew that for certain.

“We sure did it...” Ikaru, a lover of gnomes, said with a conflicted expression. Even though she was happy we’d won, there was probably also a part of her that was sad we had defeated a gnome.

“Mm?”

“Are you trying to make me feel better, Esk?”

“Mmm!”

Esk would have no problem cheering up Ikaru. Seeing a small gnome stroking the head of Ikaru, who was also small, was a very heartwarming sight.

“Should we check our drops?” Tsugarun suggested.

“They say earth crystals are a guaranteed drop. Tsugarun and me both got ’em. How ’bout you, Yuto?”

Tsugarun and Tagosack had started checking their drops, so I joined them in doing the same. I had ended up with a pretty solid turnout.

“I got an earth crystal too. I also got something called Hoe Material, some ores, and fertilizer.”

I knew how to use silver and gold ores. This was my first time seeing a gold ore, but it was still an ore. It couldn't be much different from iron or silver ores. As for the Earth Elemental's Fertilizer, this was the rarest fertilizer I had ever obtained so far. Apparently, Tagosack had also been aiming to get this fertilizer. I decided I'd try it out on my farm the moment I got back. But what exactly was “hoe material”? This was completely new to me. Was it an item to make a hoe?

“Hoe material? Never heard of it. Any clue, Tsugarun?”

“No, I've never heard of it either. I bet it's a new discovery!”

Shockingly enough, this material wasn't included in the information they'd bought from the Quick-Eared Cats either.

“Hmm, when I select it, it gives me an option to use it. But I can only use it on Olto.”

It seemed like I could use it to enhance Olto's hoe.

“Th-The Silver-Haired Effect...”

“That's Yuto for you...”

If neither Tsugarun or Tagosack had heard of it, then this had to be a super rare item.

“Maybe I'll take a look at the forums.”

However, even after searching through the forums, I couldn't find any information about hoe material. Was I the only one who'd obtained it? Or were others just keeping it a secret? Either way, it seemed like an item that wasn't widely available. I had already taken a screenshot of the item's data, so I decided to try using it on Olto.

“It's called hoe material, so it'd make sense if it had some effect on your hoe, right?”

“Mm?”

“All right, choosing it now—”

Then, I confirmed my selection.

“Mmm? Mm-mmm!”

It had an immediate effect, but it didn’t last long. Olto glowed brightly for a second and then stopped. As for his hoe—*was* it any different? I guess it did look like the blade of his hoe was a little shinier.

I checked Olto’s stats. His weapon had changed to an Earth Elemental’s Hoe+, so at least I knew his hoe had been upgraded after all. It looked like it was somewhat more powerful now, but honestly not by much. Seeing the item’s effect, I had to wonder if it was more likely that the reason there wasn’t a lot of information about this item wasn’t because people were keeping it a secret, but because they didn’t think it was actually that big of a deal.

“Well, let’s go ahead and get the proof we cleared the trial and then get outta here.”

“Yeah, let’s.”

Tagosack and Tsugarun walked off toward the opposite end of the room. A wide passageway had appeared there after we defeated the boss. We walked through it and ended up in a small room. The walls and ceilings were engraved with geometric patterns, giving the room a very peculiar ambience. This had to be the very depths of the dungeon.

In the center of this small, solemn room sat a large treasure box.

“Okay, I’m opening it.”

Tsugarun opened up the treasure box, and a light poured out from inside that engulfed the entire room. The devs always pulled the same trick. *Heh heh. You won’t get me with this anymore!*

Those of us who had seen this coming had closed our eyes immediately, so we came out unharmed, but Ikaru and Esk still weren’t used to this. I heard them shriek.

“Aahhhh!”

“Mmm!”

“Mm-mmm!”

Huh? A second gnome yelled?

I opened my eyes to see that in addition to Ikaru and Esk, Olto was also covering his eyes in agony. *Oh, Olto.* He’d looked right at it. Well, they’d recover soon on their own. Right now, I was interested in the reward.

I checked my inventory—I now had an item called the Earth Elementals’ Trial Proof of Completion. This was an accessory that granted major earth resistance when equipped. This item allowed you to go through the Earth Elementals’ trial more efficiently, so it was very popular among blacksmiths and players who earned money through mining. However, it was impossible to transfer or sell, so it couldn’t be given to other people.

Once we were all done checking our inventories, the treasure box vanished into thin air. Then, in the same spot appeared a large magic circle. It was a teleportation portal to transport us back out of the dungeon.

“We accomplished what we came here for. Should we head back?”

“Sounds good!”

Akari and Charm passed through the portal first.

“Let’s go too!”

“Mm!”

“Right, let’s go.”

Ikaru and Esk excitedly went into the portal, and I followed after them. No options appeared for me to choose from—it automatically teleported me away. I reemerged in the first room of the Earth Elementals’ trial.

And now, there was someone else in the room. I knew it couldn’t be another player, since this dungeon separated people by parties.

“Congratulations on completing the trial.”

It was the Gnome Chief.

Huh? Did we trigger some event? I hadn’t heard anything about the Gnome

Chief appearing here. I looked over to the others, but they didn't seem to know why the leader of the gnomes was here either. Everyone was shaking their heads.

"I-I dunno what's going on."

"Me neither."

This was obviously not an event that occurred every time a party cleared the dungeon.

The Gnome Chief was unabashedly staring right at me. Did that mean this had something to do with me? Did I set something off? Amid my confusion, Olto ran right up to the chief. He clung to him and started talking to him.

"Mm-mmm! Mmm!"

"Hey there. You look well."

"Mm-mm!"

They looked like two friendly brothers. The Gnome Chief also seemed to be happy to see Olto—he was stroking his head.

"My, don't you look happy and loved. You must have a wonderful master."

"Mmm!"

Olto turned around and pointed at me as he went *Mmm-mmm!* It didn't seem like he was saying anything bad about me, so he must've been praising me. Maybe.

"Oh, is that right? Do you love your master?"

"Mm-mmm!"

Olto hopped up and down with a smile on his face. Seeing him like that, the Gnome Chief smiled. Things seemed to be going well.

"Excuse me, but why are you here?"

"Well, because you successfully completed the trial. I came to congratulate you."

"Th-Thank you...?"

I looked at the group again. And once again, they were all shaking their heads, telling me they had no clue what was going on either. Ikaru asked Esk if he needed to talk to the chief too, but Esk didn't move from his spot.

I wondered if that meant this was an event specifically for Olto. Maybe his interaction with the boss prior to the fight was related to this? But still, why was all of this happening to us? I could see that this probably had something to do with Olto, but I couldn't imagine what was special about Olto alone, among everyone else who had cleared the dungeon. There were other unique gnomes, and other Gnome Leaders too. And having a tamed monster's heart wasn't all that rare either. I'd have to give it a thorough think-through later. First, we needed to make sure this event went smoothly.

Despite that thought, however, the event didn't really go anywhere from there.

"Olto, stay by your loving master. As long as the two of you traverse the world together, you'll continue to grow strong."

"Mm!"

"And you, Olto's master. Cherish this boy. If you continue to treat him well, he will be of great use to you."

"Y-Yes sir."

"Glad to hear it. Now then, Olto and Olto's master, best wishes to you both!"

The Gnome Chief spread his hands apart in a meaningful gesture. But then, nothing happened.

Huh? Is that it? I'd even braced myself in preparation for some special effect. But ultimately, the chief took his leave, without him nor Olto radiating any light. I checked my stats and inventory, but nothing had changed.

"What was that about?"

"Mm-mmm!"

Olto was still waving his hand, even though the Gnome Chief had already teleported away. He must have really adored the chief.

Still—was that really it?

“Hmm. Maybe I should talk to Alyssa about this.”

“That’s a good idea,” Tagosack agreed. “It might not be obvious now, but it could be that you triggered something.”

“You think so too?”

“Yeah. That seemed way too significant an interaction for it to be nothin’.”

“Yeah, that’s true.”

With the others’ encouragement, I decided to part ways with the group here and head to meet Alyssa. Maybe someone else had witnessed the Gnome Chief’s appearance. Or maybe it had happened in a different trial. I wanted to ask her about all that.

“Olto, let’s go.”

“Mmm.”

Then, after ten minutes, I arrived at a location not far from the Quick-Eared Cats. The thought of having majorly important information made me feel impatient, and before I knew it, I had started half-jogging.

Also, I had other information I wanted to sell too—information about a title I had obtained. And no, I wasn’t talking about the title that was given after clearing the trial.

Title: The Earth Elementals’ Blessing

Effect: Two bonus points. Increases damage dealt and decreases damage received when fighting earth-type monsters.

I got it right as I left the Earth Elementals’ trial. This one was already pretty well-known, though. In fact, I had already heard about it from Alyssa. No, I wasn’t talking about *that* title—I had received one more.

I was completely flabbergasted when I heard the second announcement: *Congratulations, you are the first person among all players to earn twenty titles. For that, you will be awarded the title “Speediest Title Collector II.”*

I checked out my titles, and sure enough, one more had been added to the list.

Title: Speediest Title Collector II

Effect: Receive 300,000 G, four bonus points, and one random skill scroll. Agility +3.

This title was the next level of another title I had earned, called Speediest Title Collector. Since I had to be the only one with this title, I figured I could sell its information. I felt like titles were just falling into my lap. Me, of all people, had the most titles in the game. That was sure to make people resent me. I figured I had better not tell anyone else.

“I’ll use the random skill scroll later.”

Before that, I wanted to get information about the event I’d just witnessed. With that thought, I started half-jogging again and made it to the Quick-Eared Cats. However...

“Huh? Isn’t this where it is?”

“Mmm?”

In the spot where the Quick-Eared Cats’ shop used to be was a deserted, empty storefront. I peeked inside—the place had been emptied out. The signboard had also been taken down. The place had been completely vacated.

Was I in the wrong place? Did I make a wrong turn or something? I tried walking around, but I still wasn’t able to find the Quick-Eared Cats’ shop. Everything else in the vicinity looked familiar. This shop was the only thing that was different. It was possible they had moved locations. But I hadn’t heard anything about that. Oh, but I guess I couldn’t expect them to inform their entire extensive clientele...

I’d thought Alyssa and I were pretty tight, though. Maybe that was just me? Maybe to Alyssa, I wasn’t close enough that she felt she needed to inform me of their shop moving...? *Oof, that stings! Now I’m embarrassed about acting like I was some sort of regular!*

“Hnnghhh— Huh?”

I was clutching my head in shame, when it happened.

Huh? Do I hear something? I stopped groaning and listened carefully—it was the notification of an incoming message from a friend.

“I-It’s from Alyssa!”

It was titled *Regarding the New Location of the Quick-Eared Cats’ Town of Beginnings Branch Store*, and the message stated that they had acquired a new home base that day and had moved their store’s location.

Oh thank god! The fact that I had gotten a message meant I *was* considered a regular, right? So my past overly familiar behavior got a pass, right? *Right?*

“Phew, that was close.”

I must have arrived at the old shop just after they shut down and moved to their new location. It was just a matter of bad timing.

The address of their new location was attached to the message, so I headed over there. The shop was in a prime spot, along the main road and close to the Central Square. It was only five minutes away from their old location, and much larger.

“Hello.”

“Hello. Welcome to the Quick-Eared Cats.”

“Huh?”

Who the heck is that? A woman greeted me in an oddly intense manner. Maybe she was in a bad mood? Her black hair was styled in an updo, and she gave off the impression of a capable, beautiful woman who was a bit aloof. Her blank expression was a little intimidating. Just who was she?

...Oh, she was an NPC. And she wasn’t in a bad mood—her speech was just a little flat.

“Oh? Yuto?”

“Hey, Alyssa.”

“Y-You sure are fast. We only just sent that message five minutes ago...”

“Ha ha, I’d just arrived at your old location to buy some information right when you sent that message.”

“Ah, gotcha.”

“Anyway, looks like you have a lot more space here.”

“Oh, for sure. Also, unlike our last place, which was pretty limited, this place has the same full range of features as a regular home base.”

Now that she mentioned it, I remembered her telling me about how their previous shop had limited functionality. Apparently, this new place could utilize features for both a home base and a shop.

“Looks like you even got yourself an NPC shop assistant.”

“Yup, that’s one of the features of a shop-style base. This place can employ up to four NPCs. We’re highly ranked with the Merchants’ Guild, so they’re fairly high-leveled.”

Apparently, the shop NPCs were equipped with an even more sophisticated AI than regular NPCs, and even came with Commerce skills.

“They’ve been a huge help. We’ve been short on hands lately.”

“You have?”

“More areas have been unlocked, and our clan’s gotten more notoriety. But we haven’t been able to get many new members to join...”

The Quick-Eared Cats often had to send their own members how to verify information they bought. However, as more and more areas were explored, the difficulty level also increased, meaning they needed more and more personnel to send out on the job. Alyssa explained how that resulted in a shortage of workers elsewhere, so in order to make up for that shortage, they’d been making active use of NPCs.

“Oops, sorry. I’m talking your ear off.”

Alyssa must’ve been pretty happy about the new shop. She apologized with an embarrassed giggle, something I didn’t normally see her do.

“So, you said you wanted to buy information?”

“Yeah, about the Earth Elementals’ trial.”

“Oh, are you finally going to try to clear it? I can sell you the map for that. Or, I also have the deets about the rewards. You know that once you clear it you get the Earth Elemental’s Blessing title, right? That dungeon has been fully explored, so I can tell you anything you want to know.”

Alyssa presented a list of information to me, but I had no need for any of that.

“Nah, I’ve already cleared it.”

“You did? But you still want info about it?”

“Yeah. So—”

“Wait, can you give me a sec?”

As soon as I was about to start explaining, Alyssa stuck her palm out to stop me. Then, keeping her hand up, she took several deep breaths.

“The second we cut down on staff in the beginning areas, he makes a new discovery in Zone Two? No, wait. Not even Yuto could discover something new in an area that’s been combed over meticulously... But, this *is* Yuto we’re talking about... I know it’s scary, Alyssa, but you have to be brave. You can do this, you can do this, you can do this!”

What’s going on? Alyssa was mumbling to herself about something. Was she talking to someone else? Maybe she’d gotten a message from someone important. That happened occasionally. She *was* the Cats’ submaster, after all. She was a busy lady.

After several seconds of waiting, Alyssa faced me again. She looked oddly resolved about something, like she was a hero about to take on the demon king.

“Um, everything okay?” I asked.

“Just fine. So, can I hear what you have to say?”

It wasn’t just her expression—her voice was also strangely tense. *Is she sure she’s okay?* I guessed as long as she said she was, I’d give her my spiel.

“So the thing is, after we beat the Earth Elementals’ trial and teleported back

to the entrance, the Gnome Chief was there waiting for us.”

“What? The Gnome Chief?”

“Yes. He patted Olto’s head and said nice things about him.”

“The Gnome Chief?”

“Y-Yes.”

Alyssa had repeated the same question with a super serious look on her face. It was a little scary.

“So I was wondering if any other players had witnessed the same thing.”

“Wa—”

“Alyssa?”

Oh, I knew what was about to happen. Now I understood—that scary face of hers was to set the mood for what came next. I bet she wanted to keep me alert by shaking things up. I actually kind of enjoyed this little routine.

“WAAAAAH! I should’ve known!”

Mm-hmm. As always, she role-played her cat-human hybrid identity perfectly. It was a magnificent yell. Once I had my fill of her scream, we shifted gears to discuss the information.

I felt this way every time, but I couldn’t help but be impressed by Alyssa’s ability to revert to her composed self again. She was a pro at switching between role-playing and acting like herself.

“So the Gnome Chief appeared right after you cleared the Earth Elementals’ trial?”

“Well, so, you know how a portal appears after you beat the boss and open the treasure chest?”

“Yeah. The one that teleports you back to the starting room, right?”

“Right. After we used that to teleport, we encountered the Gnome Chief.”

I gave Alyssa all the details and showed her the log of our conversation with the chief.

“I see, very interesting... It’s safe to say this is brand-new info.”

“I figured that might be the case.”

“Yeah. As of now, no one else has reported something like this happening.”

It seemed my suspicions had been correct. It was an undiscovered event.

Did that mean it was worth a lot of money? Even if I split it among the entire party, we’d all probably still make out with a good amount. Although, since I had no idea what triggered the event, my information might not actually be worth that much.

Alyssa was mumbling to herself as she read through my conversation log—then, she spoke.

“About how this event was triggered—”

“Yeah, about that. I have no idea.”

My only idea was that Olto was a unique gnome, and his favorability was high enough that he gave me a tamed monster’s heart—but there had to be others who had received tamed monster’s hearts from unique gnomes too. Could it have been the hoe material I obtained? Though that wasn’t helpful, since I didn’t know how I’d obtained that either.

“I can’t be completely sure, but I think it has something to do with Olto’s favorability score,” Alyssa said.

“Huh? You think so?”

“I do.”

“But I’m sure there are lots of other players who received a tamed monster’s heart from a gnome, right?”

There even had to be second-wave players who had already received a tamed monster’s heart. Could that really be the trigger?

“What do you mean?”

“Think about it. We can’t actually view favorability scores, right? So, just because someone got a tamed monster’s heart, it doesn’t mean that their monster hit max favorability.”

“Oh, good point.”

I’d had the same thought when I brought Sakura to meet the Sequoia Dryad—that was, whether she was at her highest favorability or not.

“Based on what I read from your conversation log with the Gnome Chief, I think that has to be it.”

I took another look over the log too. Now that she pointed it out, there were several lines that seemed related to Olto’s favorability score, like how the chief called Olto happy and loved, and told me to continue cherishing him.

“This game has only really just started, right?” Alyssa said.

“Yeah, it hasn’t even been a month in real time. I guess we’re still in the early stages.”

“There’s still a long way to go, level and skillwise. So considering that, is it really believable that monsters’ favorability scores are the only thing that would have maxed out this early?”

“Hmm, I get what you’re saying.”

“So, this is what we’ve been thinking. If favorability is maxed out at, say, one thousand points, then maybe tamed monsters’ hearts are given at like, one hundred or two hundred points, as a bonus.”

“Then, maybe something else is given around four or five hundred points?”

“I’m thinking yes.”

That certainly opened up a lot of possibilities. That also meant it was worth doting over my monsters. Although I’d do that without any sort of reward anyway.

“But still, if the requirement was a high favorability score, that should mean others would’ve run into the same event, right?”

Gnomes were a popular tamed monster, so a lot of players had tamed one. And there had to be people who spoiled their gnomes even more than I did. There were even people who uploaded videos of themselves just fawning over their gnomes the entire time. Then there was Amelia, who had so many gnomes, her home base almost looked like a day care center. At the very least,

she should have a much higher favorability score with her gnomes than I did.

But apparently, things weren't that simple.

"A lot of verification has been done on gnomes since they're the number one tamed monster. It looks like there are several ways to raise their favorability score."

"So you can't just give them their favorite foods and play with them?"

"Yeah, that too, but it looks like farms are very important."

"Farms?"

"Yup. The size of the farm, the rarity, variety, and quality of crops grown, and having crops that are favored by the gnome. It seems like there are a lot of factors that go into it."

Olto always seemed to enjoy growing new crops on the farm. I guess it really was something that made him happy.

"And there aren't many tamers that have a farm on the same level as yours, Yuto."

"Well sure, I've had a farm since the very beginning. And I've been fortunate enough to obtain a variety of plants."

I had the Lakeside Sequoia, the Sacred Tree, and numerous other rare plants. Since Hydroponics was needed to grow seaweed, there probably weren't many people who were cultivating that.

"I think, without a doubt, that Olto has to have the highest favorability score among all the gnomes."

"So it really does have to do with favorability?"

"Plus, if we take the Gnome Chief's words at face value, then if you keep raising Olto's favorability, then that might unlock a special evolution route."

"Huh?"

"What he said about 'as long as you traverse this world with you master, you can continue to grow strong,' and 'if you treat him well, he'll be of great use to you.' Doesn't that sound like he's hinting at a special evolution?"

“Oh, now that you say it, yeah!!!”

Another fun thing to look forward to! Maybe Olto would eventually be able to evolve into a gnome similar to the Gnome Chief?

Now there was even more I wanted to know.

“So if letting gnomes do farmwork is the way to increase their favorability, what about the other elemental monsters? I’d like to know how to raise the favorability of tree nymphs, undines, sylphs, and salamanders too.”

“Hmm, all of that’s not really confirmed yet. Oh, but I think undines need some sort of water installation.”

Undines were the second-most tamed monster following gnomes, so a good amount of information had been verified for them too. Eulen, for instance, was doing a lot of his own verifying, so he had undoubtedly made some amazing discoveries on that front. His motivation was clearly lust—I mean, love and affection. *Yeah, let’s go with that.*

“As for sylphs and salamanders, you can give them a place to work and upgrade them, and also install things in your home that have a connection to their respective elements. That’s what people have speculated, at least. We don’t have definite proof yet.”

“What about tree nymphs?”

“That’s anyone’s guess. There are hardly any of them. If *you* don’t know, then we don’t either.”

“Dang, really?”

Alyssa explained that, even at this point in the game, there were only ten tree nymphs, making them a super rare monster that everyone aspired to have. I never imagined there were so few. With the addition of the second-wave players, I’d been under the impression that there had to be at least fifty to a hundred tamed tree nymphs.

“So, if you ever have new information, make sure you sell it to us!”

“Will do.”

Next, I sold Alyssa the information about the titles I’d received, but maybe

because what I had told her about the Gnome Chief was so shocking, she didn't seem all that surprised.

"All right, now for what I owe you..."

I thought I'd bought a pretty sizable chunk of new information myself, but I still ended up receiving seven million G. Apparently, everyone wanted information on gnomes, so that was priced extremely highly. The price of information must have been increasing due to people progressing further in the game and having more money in their possession.

Naturally, she couldn't pay me in one lump sum, so she sent me half for now—3.5 million G. Still a monumental sum.

In the past, Alyssa hadn't been able to pay me more than 500,000 G at once, but now that she had leveled up her base level and Merchants' level, the limit of the amount of money she could transfer had increased. Even if I split this sum among the party members, we'd all still get about 1,170,000 G each.

"I'll contact the others now. We need to talk about how to transfer the money to everyone."

I sent a message to everyone, but they all responded saying they didn't need the money.

But that event had only triggered because we cleared the Earth Elementals' trial, and I wouldn't have been able to do it alone. So I felt like they all have the right to a part of the information fee...

They all firmly refused, saying it was information that belonged to me. They were all such selfless people.

"Hmm, I guess I can't force them to take it..."

This meant I now had over a whopping ten million G at my disposal. *Yeesh, that's a hell of a lot of money.* The question was, what should I use it for? I wandered around the Town of Beginnings as I considered the possibilities.

I had just upgraded my armor, so not that. Maybe something for my house? Considering how I eventually wanted to clear the rest of the elemental trials, then I wanted to obtain installations that would raise Reflet, Himka, and Eine's

favorability scores.

“On second thought, it might not be a bad idea to save this money for the auction.”

The next auction would be held the day after tomorrow. It could be a smart move to try to get a mystery item box. Even though there was a slim chance I’d get a Tree of Evil like Tagosack did, I’d still probably make out with something interesting.

“Decisions, decisions. Some crafting equipment for my home might be nice too...”

Many people had their eye on the mystery item boxes, which meant a successful bid was bound to be expensive. But despite their cost, it wasn’t a guarantee that I’d get a great item from it. It was better to invest in something I *knew* would be beneficial. With ten million on my hands, I could upgrade to an All-Purpose Workshop (Model 2), which I had passed up before.

“That settles it! I’m heading to the realtor!”

Thus, I sunk nearly all of my money into upgrading my home equipment. First was the All-Purpose Workshop (Model 2). This was a significantly upgraded version of the All-Purpose Workshop, which was capable of handling all types of crafting. It held up even in comparison to the first model of specialized workshops, such as woodworking studios. In a sense, it could also be called a collection of specialized workshops.

In addition to that, I also obtained two other special installations. The first was a Mining Machine for Home Use II, the upgraded version of the one I already had. The old mining machine was only able to produce iron ores at best, but this version could produce silver ores and aluminum, as well as elemental ores like water ores and fire ores. It could even churn out some low-quality jewels. I knew Himka would love it.

The second installation was an aeroponic farm, the next upgraded version of an aeroponic fence, which I could use to grow air plants like the Gale Plant.

The farm looked very different from the aeroponic fence, which had the appearance of a wisteria trellis. The farm was made out of two five-meter-tall

stone walls that stood parallel to each other, and between the walls were several thin rods with grooves carved into them for the seeds to go in. There was always a strong breeze blowing between the walls, but I was relieved to find out that the wind would have no effect on my other fields.

The aeroponic farm was an air-type installation, and when I asked Eine if I should install it, she looked thrilled with the idea. Once I saw her reaction, I knew I had to buy it. The air plants could also be used to feed the silkworms. Apparently, eating gale plants made them produce silk with an air-resistance effect. This would help Eine make even better progress with her work.

All these purchases rendered me penniless, but I'd say they seemed worth it.

Once I returned to the farm, Eine immediately started playing with the aeroponic farm.

"Traaa-la-laaa!"

"You look like you're having fun."

"Traaa-laaa!"

Eine rode on the wind blowing between the walls, and just when I thought she'd zoom out the other side, she turned around and flew toward the wind. She flew forward at the same speed the wind was blowing against her, making it look like she was hovering.

"Traaa-laaa!"

I knew just what she reminded me of—a little kid leaning forward against the wind on a windy day, excitedly yelling "I can flyyy!" I used to do that when I was younger too, on days where there was a typhoon. I couldn't tell you why that was so entertaining, I just remember those being really fun memories.

"Just don't get in the way of other people's farmwork, okay?"

"Tra-la!"

Eine saluted at me and was blown back by the strong wind in that same position. That seemed fun for her too—she was smiling even as she was turned upside down. I was glad Eine liked it. It really had been a worthwhile purchase.

"Next up, the mining machine."

I'd set up the Mining Machine for Home Use II in the basement of my house. I headed there and found Himka already waiting.

"Hm-hmm!"

"Okay, okay! I'm opening it, so you don't need to pull me!"

At Himka's incessant urging, I opened the doors that led to the inside of a five-meter-deep cave. At the very end of the cave was a metal box. I stood in front of it, and a window popped up. This box was a simple inventory that automatically stored the ores produced by the mining machine.

"Hmm!"

Himka slipped past me and ran inside the mine. *Someone's impatient.* He enthusiastically crouched down and wrenched open the treasure box. Then, he took out an ore from inside the box and held it up, his eyes sparkling.

"Whoa, we already got a silver and a wind ore! There's also a bunch of iron ores, and some silica sand. Not a bad turnout for the first day!"

"Hm!"

Himka nodded happily. Now he'd be able to make even more things. If we could stock up on silver ores from this mining machine, then maybe he could even mass-produce silverware.

On a table made by Sakura, I'd place a tablecloth made by Eine, set down silverware made by Himka, place food made by Reflet, and then—we would feast. And of course, all the food ingredients would be produced by Olto, Bear Bear, and Olea. *Yeah, that sounds fun.* We could probably make do with what we currently had, but if we were going to do it, I'd want us to do it right.

"All right! Let's start by making something in the All-Purpose Workshop!"

"Hm!"

I had actually used the random skill scroll I'd obtained with my new title and learned the skill Metal Carving. With this skill, I could take the ingots Himka made and turn them into accessories. My skill was still just at level 1, though, so I had to practice on bronze first. Maybe one day, I'd be able to make my own accessories with great abilities.

With Himka at my side, I headed for the All-Purpose Workshop, which was also in the basement.

“Time for the unveiling of the All-Purpose Workshop, Model 2!”

“Hmmm!”

Himka shook his head, as if saying *not quite*.

“Do you want me to turn it into a smithing workshop?”

“Hm!”

“No? Then, what?”

I’d thought we’d go with the blacksmithing option since we were working with ores, but Himka clearly had a different request. He kept shaking his head.

“What kind of workshop do you want?”

“Hmm.”

If he had a preference, then I’d just have him choose. Himka joined me in examining the workshop’s control panel, then selected an option toward the bottom of the list—the fire elemental workshop. *Never heard of it*. But it was a fire elemental workshop, so it had to be for salamanders, right? I turned to watch as the workshop took on a new appearance. At first, I thought it looked like a smithing workshop, but there were a *lot* of furnaces. It seemed like a combined facility that had workshops related to a salamander’s skill set, from blacksmithing to glassblowing.

I hadn’t realized these types of workshops were available. I took a better look at the list and found there was also an air elemental workshop and a water elemental workshop. It looked like the air elemental workshop could be used for leather, clothing, and weaving, while the water elemental workshop was for cooking and fermentation. There was no earth elemental workshop, though, but that was probably because they didn’t need one. What gnomes needed was a farm, after all.

“All right, Himka, go ahead and craft to your heart’s content. I’ll be over here leveling up my Metal Carving skill.”

“Hm!”

Himka immediately got to work putting ores into the furnace to make ingots. We had obtained a lot of ores recently, so he should be able to make a good number of ingots. Meanwhile, I moved to the side to practice carving metal. I had plenty of bronze ingots, so it wouldn't be a big deal if I failed.

Time to get practicing!

"Hraaah!"

"Hm!"

"S-Sorry. I'll be quiet."

After being scolded by Himka, I continued my work in silence. But I had to say, this was the kind of work that was easy to concentrate on, and I quickly became lost in the task. I actually got way too absorbed as I carved the ingots into different forms.

"When the heck did I run out of ingots?"

While I had been diligently crafting, two hours had passed in the blink of an eye. I stretched my back. My avatar didn't exactly feel any stiffness, but it was something I did out of habit.

"Most of these are failures. The non-failures probably aren't usable either, though."

I picked up one of the necklaces I had laid out on a table. More than half the ingots I had turned into trash. There were of course a few that I *had* made successfully, but...

Name: Bronze Necklace

Rarity: 1 *Quality: 1* ★ Durability: 100

Effect: Defense +0

Weight: 1

This one was a bronze necklace that was slightly misshapen. It had absolutely no effect, and was good for nothing but filling up an equipment slot. I had made

ten of these.

There were three that had Defense +1 and a two-star quality. That was on par with the armor I'd gotten from Lewin at the beginning of the game.

"And I have just one that barely eked out three stars."

I had no use for equipment that only provided Defense +2, so this was also going to be turned back into an ingot. Smithing skills included an art for turning metal craftworks back into ingots. I wouldn't get as many ingots back as I had started with, but this was an indispensable art for leveling up Smithing and Metal Carving. If I had to make each and every ingot, it would take a whole lot of time and money.

"My Metal Carving is level 6 now, so I'll call that good for today. How're things going on your end, Himka?"

"Hm!"

"Whoa, is this silver tableware? And glassware?"

On top of the workbench, Himka had placed handcrafted silver plates, silver knives and forks, and drinking cups made out of thin glass. The cup was high-quality thanks to the quality of the silica sand.

Each crafted item exceeded my expectations. They looked just as good as any product sold in the real world. Although they were plain and simple, I preferred that for everyday use.

"So, are these the ones you put a little more craftsmanship into? They're awesome, people would definitely buy these!"

"Hm!"

The silver cutlery, which were adorned with a bird wing design on the handles, were by all accounts luxury goods. There would probably be people interested in buying the silver plates with the spiral pattern around the rim too.

"All right! Since you worked so hard to make these, let's eat off of them!"

"Hm!"

"I'll do my best to cook something that's worthy of this tableware!"

And yes, I'm using the simpler tableware, of course.

"Hm?"

"I mean, it seems like a waste to use such nice plates..."

Himka picked up one of the silver plates, but we couldn't very well use something we were going to sell. I didn't have the confidence I could cook something that would suit that type of plate in the first place. I couldn't place any old grilled fish or grilled skewers on there. Anything less than a full-course French meal would pale in comparison to the tableware.

"These simpler plates should work just fine."

With that, I changed the workshop into a kitchen and started cooking.

"I have some prehistoric fish fillets, so I'll use those to make meunière."

I added some butter, seasoned with salt and pepper, then added some herbs to accent the flavor. I was even a little creative in the plating of the food. And by that I meant, I garnished it with some mint to give it a little stylish flair to match the silver tableware a little.

"Nice. Not too bad, huh?"

The mint garnish really added a lot. When you think of fancy herbs, you think of mint. Mint equals fancy. Any dish with an added bit of mint on top could never *not* look fancy.

"Maybe some potage for the bowls?"

I made a black potage made out of black potatoes. But why did I get the feeling that a black soup in a silver bowl didn't look very fancy...?

All right, this was getting some mint too. Now it was plenty fancy. *Let's go with that.*

"Next up, the meat dish."

A steak made from dinosaur meat looked really tasty. But don't go thinking I was just going to plop the meat right off the grill onto the plate, okay? I cut the meat up into tiny pieces and then arranged just a few strips on the plate. I'd eaten steak this way in real life before. The steak was so small, I felt scammed

for paying over ten thousand yen for one plate. Rich people must all have small stomachs if they claimed a meal like that filled them up. I, meanwhile, was never going back there to eat again!

Hmm. I'll put mint on this one too.

"Hm?"

"...Well, it's all the same once you eat it."

"Hmm."

Don't give me that look! I knew it was too soon for me to make food for silver tableware! I knew it!

But anyway, I had thought Himka's tableware could sell well, but maybe that was more of a pipe dream than I'd realized. After all, they weren't really usable. Unless someone was a serious foodie, they'd just end up failing the same way I had.

"Hrm, maybe you should stick to using silver for weapons and accessories."

"Hm?"

Chapter Four: Fertilizer and Plant Booster

Yesterday, I had spent a lot of time crafting at the All-Purpose Workshop (Model 2), but I wanted to switch things up today.

“First, let’s go to Lewin’s.”

“Kee-hee!”

“Chirp chirp!”

“Aye!”

With me today were the mischief-loving trio, Lilith, Rick, and Fau. I was used to Rick and Fau’s naughty schemes, and it seemed like Lilith was just like them. She’d scrawled the word “beast” on Rick’s forehead, and cackled every time she looked at it. I guess I shouldn’t be too surprised at behavior like that from a demon. Also, for some reason, Rick didn’t seem to mind it.

“No pranks in public, okay?”

“Kee-hee!”

“Chirp!”

“Aye-aye!”

“You’re so quick to salute, but I’m not sure if you really get it...”

I doubted they would do anything harmful to other players, but I decided to keep a close watch on them regardless.

Lilith was riding on my shoulders, Rick was on top of her head, and Fau was cheerfully flying around us. Lilith seemed like the curious type. Each time she saw something that caught her attention, she slapped my head to guide me in that direction.



“Kee-hee!”

“That general store?”

“Kee-hee-hee!”

“Oh, now you want to go there?”

“Keee-heeee!”

“Oh, come on. I don’t want to go into a women’s clothing store.”

It took almost an hour just to get to Lewin’s shop.

“Hi there,” I greeted him.

“Eh, back already? Didn’t I just make ya some equipment? Or are ya here for that little one?”

“No, Lilith has exclusive equipment. I’m actually here to ask you to embed these.”

“Tamed monster’s orbs? And ya got two of ’em?”

“Yes.”

As a matter of fact, by the end of the day yesterday, Himka and Eine had each given me a Tamed Monster’s Heart. I had the installations I’d purchased to thank for that. I had turned them both into orbs, so I’d come to Lewin to embed them in my equipment.

Tamed monsters’ orbs allowed me to summon any one of my tamed monsters, no matter which monster’s heart it was made from. The recent update reduced the max number of orbs that could be equipped to twelve, but I still didn’t have that many anyway. With these two new orbs, I now had nine.

While Lewin was putting them into my equipment, my monsters and I browsed what he had for sale. Lilith was hovering in midair, peering into a display case that was placed slightly higher up. *Is she interested in weapons?*

“Kee-hee.”

“What’s up? Oh, whoa! What an awesome sword!”

“Kee-hee!”

Lilith was examining a saber displayed horizontally in a case. It went without saying that it had great abilities, but it also had some insanely cool ornamentation.

Both sides of the gold-colored guard were engraved with the face of a dauntless wolf, and the grip was elegantly wrapped with wine-red leather. A red jewel was embedded at the pommel and another at the base of the hilt. The surface of the handguard was also engraved with a design of a valiant lion, which was currently glaring in my direction. The blade also wasn't any ordinary blade. It was curved and gleaming and silver, inscribed with what looked like numerous cuneiform characters. It wasn't just flashy—it exuded antiquity and a sense of adventure.

Both Lilith and I were momentarily captivated by the saber. At some point, Rick and Fau also came over, and the four of us stared intently at it. I couldn't even use swords, but I couldn't help but want it because of how magnificent it looked. I wasn't about to buy it, though—it cost a fortune.

“Don't go thinkin' I'll give it to ya for free just 'cause yer starin' at it so hard.”

“I wasn't expecting you to! I just thought it was a cool sword. Did you make it?”

“Sure did! Not too bad, eh? Interested? It works as decoration too.”

It would certainly look nice hung up on a wall. But I couldn't afford it.

“How can I justify spending 1.2 million on a sword I can't use?”

“Ba ha ha ha, fair enough! I put it on display so customers can look at it, so I don't mind if it doesn't sell. But I always try to nudge guests who look like they can afford it to see if they'll bite.”

“Did you make it to test out your skill or something?”

Maybe this was a way to exhibit his technical skill to customers, by showing he could make something as great as that sword.

“Aye, but not just that. That's a prototype of a sword I'm puttin' up for auction.”

“Ah, I see.”

That was right, players could put items up for auction too. As I hadn't had any plans to do so, I hadn't been thinking about it.

"I used magic silver, so it's light as a feather, making it easy for anyone to equip. It also makes a fine conduit for castin' magic! Its durability's low since I went a little overboard with the decoration, but well, just consider that part of its charm."

"What, you sacrificed ability for appearance?"

"It's fer the auction, ain't it? Appearance is key. Are you not puttin' anything up for sale? I've no doubt if ya put up some unique item, someone would bid on it."

"You think so?"

"Aye. You can even put up items yer monsters have made."

Submitting something for auction, huh? It might be fun to put up a bunch of different things up for sale. My monsters were always making items for everyday use so they could be sold at my unmanned stall. That was why they hadn't asked them to make fancy items made out of high-quality materials. Maybe it'd be a good idea to occasionally let them make whatever they liked using extravagant materials.

"Hmm, yeah... I'll ask my monsters once I'm back home."

If my monsters wanted to put an item up for auction, then I'd have them make something. I'd help with gathering any materials or assist with the crafting process.

"This sounds like it'll be fun! All right, let's go back home! C'mon, Lilith, Fau, and Rick!"

"Kee-hee!"

"Aye!"

"Chirp chirp!"

Now that I thought about it, Himka's tableware would be perfect for the auction. Whether it ended up being sold for a high price or not, it'd definitely sell.

Once I was back home, I researched details about the auction and read that I could enter a maximum of four items for sale. That number changed depending on someone's level, guild ranks, and crafting skill levels. As of now, everyone could put up a minimum of three items, and the current maximum was eight items.

"All right, show of hands! Who wants to make something to put up for auction?"

"Mm-mmm!"

"Hm!"

"Tra-la!"

"Hum!"

"...♪"

When I gathered my monsters together to ask who'd be interested, they all raised their hands.

"I should've figured all my elemental monsters want to participate."

They loved getting hyped up over festivities like these. But there was one problem.

"Hmm, we can only enter four items..."

This was my fault for asking carelessly like this. I should have known that everyone would have wanted to make something for the auction.

"No, wait. If I can level up one of my guild ranks, we can submit one more item."

Out of all of them, it made the most sense to go for leveling up my Farming Guild rank. I had enough contribution points right now, I just needed to level up my skills. My Farming skill was at level 49. If I maxed that out and obtained the skill Farming (Advanced), then I would automatically rank up.

"Sounds like it's time to do some farmwork!"

"Mm-mmm!"

I picked a plot of weeds and needlessly watered and harvested them over and

over. I went to second-wave players' stalls to buy up a ton of cheap medicinal herbs and propagated them. After just an hour, my Farming skill leveled up. I must have been pretty close to leveling up already.

"Looks like even I've started maxing out my initial skills."

First Water Magic, now Farming. And just recently, I had also reached level 50 in Plant Knowledge. That skill leveled up by doing actions like appraising plants, so I'd maxed it out before I even knew it. Plant Knowledge didn't have an Advanced version, so it didn't seem like it would change in any way. Although, if I considered Botany its advanced form, I guess I had already acquired that some time ago.

"Well, right now I'm focused on my Farming skill. Looks like I can learn one derived skill..."

After maxing out Farming, I could now learn Arboriculture or Hydroponics. I decided to go with Arboriculture since I could use it to assist Sakura too. Incidentally, most skills maxed out at level 50. In the beta, they had maxed out at level 40, but that had been updated to 50 in the official release.

"Okay, now I'll use ten more bonus points to get Farming (Advanced)!"

Now, if I went to the Farming Guild, my rank would increase. I gathered my monsters together again and tasked them with making their items for the auction.

"I'm going out for a bit, so the five of you who want to make an item for the auction, get started! Oh, and Olto, you're good with growing a crop, right?"

"Mmm!"

Olto nodded, full of confidence. Then for some reason, he called over Rick, and the two of them started discussing something. I guess he needed Rick's help too. *What's he up to?*

The others scattered at once to pick out their materials and start making prototypes. Except for Reflet, who alone remained in front of me.

"Humm."

"What's up, Reflet?"

“Hum-hum!”

She was trying to tell me something. It looked like she was trying to say she didn't have enough materials. I figured Reflet would want to put a dish up for auction, so she probably needed a lot of ingredients. *Nice*. I was definitely looking forward to her making some super luxurious dish that was outside of her standard repertoire.

“What do you need?”

“Hum!”

“It looks like you're miming fishing... So you want seafood?”

“Humm!”

I was right. Apparently, she wanted a variety of seafood.

“All right then, after the Farming Guild, I'll go fishing!”

I could also go around collecting materials with my monsters who weren't participating in the auction. It looked like Himka and Eine needed some materials too. I took Rick, Bear Bear, Drimo, Fau, Perca, and Lilith along with me. It seemed Olto didn't need Rick's help right at this moment, so he was able to come too.

Five hours later, we took a breather in Red Town.

“All right, we got most of the materials everyone asked for. But man, that was rough.”

“Kee-hee...”

“Speaking of, that was your first time fighting Garuda, wasn't it?”

“Kee-hee.”

We had to fight Garuda four times before we could get a Garuda's egg. We were able to win without much difficulty combatwise, but fighting it several times in a row had left us mentally spent. Lilith also looked pretty exhausted. She'd had a pretty intense aerial battle against the monster.

“Next, we just have to get soba.”

“Growl!”

“Whoa, hold your horses, Bear Bear.”

“Growl?”

“Since we came all the way here, we want to get the *best* soba, don’t we?”

Bear Bear had looked like they were about to make a beeline for the shop we’d bought soba from last time we were here. But this time, I wanted to get my hands on the absolute top-tier soba for Reflet.

“First, let’s look around the shops of Red Town!”

The quality of products often differed even among NPC shops. With any luck, we’d be able to find a shop that sold high-quality soba. First, I decided to take a look at the soba shops, general stores, and grocers that were recommended on the forums. After walking around Red Town for a bit, I ran into a familiar face.

“Oh? Why, it’s...Yuto!”

He had just come out of the Farming Guild, when he spotted me and called out to me.

“Toraus?”

“It’s been a while.”

It was Toraus the botanist, son of Pisco, the lumberyard owner. It was thanks to the quest chain I’d completed for Toraus that I had gotten the Botany skill.

“Fancy seeing you here,” Toraus said, grinning as he walked over to me. Was this a continuation of the quest chain? I’d thought it was over once I’d learned Botany, but apparently there was still more to it.

“I could say the same. What brings you out here?” I asked him.

“My son actually has his own farm in this town. I came to check it out.”

“You have a son?”

“Oh yeah, and he’s a handful. That’s right, you know quite a bit about farming yourself, don’t you? Think you could give my son a few pointers? It seems like he’s been having some trouble with his farm.”

So it's a quest to give his son farming advice? I could only think that this was triggered either because I had increased my Farming Guild rank or because I had acquired Farming (Advanced).

"Sure, I'll do what I can."

"Squeak."

"Chirp!"

Drimo was nodding in agreement and Rick gave a thumbs-up. Did they want to give advice too, or were they just planning on leaving everything to me? Not that I minded giving advice.

"Thank you! I'm glad to hear it! Your help would be appreciated."

"When's a good time? I could go right now."

"Really? Then, I'll show you the way."

Come to think of it, I still hadn't been to Red Town's farms. Recently I'd been expanding the farm on my home base, so I hadn't needed to buy another one elsewhere. The grounds of my Japanese-style house were larger than regular homes, and I could also expand it multiple times. So, as long as I paid for it, I could continue expanding the farm. With my increased rank, I could now own more farms, but I would probably just expand the farm on my home instead.

I also had the option of buying more land for the Town of Beginnings' farm. While the quality of the crops I could grow there was restricted, I could also increase that limit by upgrading it at the guild. At the beginning of the game, I had only been able to grow crops with a maximum five-star quality level, but now I could grow ten-star quality crops. Though I hadn't yet grown anything with ten stars outside of medicinal herbs and other types of herbs.

Unsurprisingly, it was extremely difficult to grow ten-star quality crops even with Olto's help.

Toraus led me to a farm where there was a young boy diligently working on the field. He looked to be about twelve years old. He was crouched down and pulling up weeds around the farm.

"Looks like you're working hard, Capri."

“Dad!”

So his name's Capri, huh? Since he was Toraus's son, I'd been imagining a more of a calm, quiet kid, but he actually seemed pretty spirited. Capri was wearing a straw hat and had a face covered in freckles. His skin was tanned a golden brown. He strongly reminded me of the young fisher I'd met in the village of an earlier event, Roqué. Capri's brown hair was sticking out from under his hat, further adding to his peppy appearance. He looked like a typical mischievous country boy.

“You came to see me?” Capri asked, running over with a smile on his face. That was when he noticed the rest of us standing next to Toraus. He looked at us and tilted his head. “Who're you?”

“Hey, manners! Say hello first!” Toraus scolded him.

“Oh, whoops! I'm Capri! I'm eleven years old! Nice to meet you!”

“I'm Yuto, and these are my tamed monsters.”

“Aye!”

“Honk!”

As I introduced each of their names, my monsters waved their hands in a way that showed off their distinct personalities. Capri looked absolutely charmed by their cuteness. His eyes lit up as he stared at them in wonder.

“Whoa, awesome! Are you a tamer, mister?”

“I am.”

“He's not just a tamer,” Toraus said. “Yuto here's also a skilled farmer. He said he'd give you some farming advice, so I brought him over.”

“What?! Really?! I've got so many things I need help with! Can I ask you about them?”

“Of course. I'll answer whatever I can.”

We went to a corner of the farm so I could hear out what Capri was having trouble with. I took out a circular table and some chairs made by Sakura, and Capri, Toraus, and I sat down. My monsters went to play around the farm, but I

made sure to tell them not to get into any trouble. As we drank fresh herbal tea—something I was able to make thanks to Toraus—I listened to what Capri had to say.

“I just can’t get the quality of my crops any higher. I collected a bunch of data, so I at least figured out that it’s probably my fertilizer that’s not good enough.”

Analyzing data at his age? He really is Toraus’s son. Despite him looking for all the world like a playful kid that disliked studying, maybe he was more of a researcher after all.

I went to examine Capri’s farm, and I found it was full of crops I had never seen before. I was honestly blown away.

“Wh-Where did you get these crops?” I asked Capri.

“My great-grandpa gave them to me!”

I asked for more details, and I learned about how Toraus and Capri’s family all worked in plant-related occupations. I thought back on all the family members I met—Capri was a farmer, Toraus was a botanist, Spade was a florist, Ryver sold spices and herbs, and Pisco ran a lumberyard.

Also, Pisco’s father operated a farm, while his mother was an arborist, and Leon and Virgo, who I’d met at my cherry blossom viewing party, as well as their other relatives, all worked with plants.

“H-Hey, do you think I could have some of those seeds or saplings?”

“Hmm, they’re my great-grandpa’s, so I don’t think I should just give them away... Also, my grandpa is suuuper scary. I don’t think you’ll have much luck asking him either.”

“Oh, okay...”

That sounded like I might end up talking to that grandpa character someday if I continued the quest chain. Even I had figured out by this point that all of their relatives had names based on the twelve signs of the zodiac. As of now, I had met seven—Scorpio, Libra, Pisces, Taurus, Capricorn, Leo, and Virgo. That must’ve meant there were a total of twelve NPCs related to this quest chain. I wondered if the grandpa would be the last one I met.

As I was thinking about the quest chain, Capri pointed at something.

“Mister, I can give you some of the saplings from that field over there.”

“Over where...? Huh? Really?”

Capri was pointing at a field of fruit trees. I appraised them and found there were four types of trees growing there—apples, mandarins, pink apples, and navy blue mandarins. The apple and mandarin trees were classified as miscellaneous trees.

“If you accept my request, you can take them for free!”

Oho! Now I'm motivated!

“You got it!” I exclaimed. “I’ll take on whatever you throw at me!”

“Oh, wow,” Capri said, clapping.

Yeah, ask me for whatever you want! Oh, but maybe not anything fighting related. Now that I thought about it, maybe I shouldn’t have said I’d take on *whatever*. But I really wanted apples and mandarins!

With a reward of fruit tree saplings hanging under my nose, my motivation hit max level, and I asked Capri for all the details about what he needed help with.

“So you were saying your crop quality won’t seem to get any higher?”

“Yeah.”

“Usually you want to use fertilizer, or use an item that raises the quality of your field. Otherwise, maybe you could use a different type of water?”

“I don’t think the water’s the problem. I use water produced by a magical tool. And I can’t afford items for improving the soil, they’re too expensive.”

“Then it sounds like fertilizer really is the problem.”

“Yeah. Also, I already know *how* to make the fertilizer that’s probably the best for my crops, I just can’t actually make it myself...”

“Wait, really? You already know how to make it?” I asked, prompting Capri to take out a scroll, which he then unfurled to show me.

“Here’s the recipe. Do you think you could make it, mister?”

“Let me take a look.”

“Aye?”

I looked over the fertilizer recipe Capri handed to me. Written on the scroll was a concocting recipe. I needed to process a few materials and synthesize them.

“I don’t know how to concoct, so I can’t do anything with it. So? Can you make it?”

“Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.”

“Aye-aye.”

I looked over the recipe, as did Fau from on top of my head. Though it might’ve looked as though she was just nodding in imitation of me, she *did* know Alchemy. She could actually understand the recipe. *She does, right?*

“The ingredients are soil, wood, and water. And insect and fish materials too.”

I wouldn’t have a problem gathering these materials. I needed to use the Concentrate art that was learned at Concoct level 40, but I had that already. The recipe also stated that I needed to have either Arboriculture or Hydroponics in order to make the fertilizer. I guess some items could only be crafted if you had certain skills.

“Oh, and this. Can you make this too, mister?”

“This one’s an alchemy recipe?”

“Yep.”

It was a recipe for plant booster. Similarly, this required the art called Liquefy, which was learned at Alchemy level 40. This all led me to believe that the trigger for this quest chain was learning Farming (Advanced), having either Arboriculture or Hydroponics, and level 40 Concoct and Alchemy skills.

It seemed pretty difficult to meet all those conditions, but there was a high chance that any crafting-main farmer would naturally attain all that naturally, since it was common knowledge that Concoct and Alchemy were essential for farmers. *Except I’m not a farmer, I’m a tamer! A tamer, dammit!*

“Mister? Why’re you shaking all of a sudden?”

“Sorry. It’s nothing. Anyway, I should be able to make these.”

It wasn’t an overly difficult process.

“Really? Thank you!”

“Should I bring them here once I’m done?”

“Yup! I spend most of my time here!”

Manufacturing and Delivery Quest

Description: Deliver five bags of special fertilizer with a seven-star quality or higher using Capri’s recipe.

Reward: 500 G, apple sapling, pink apple sapling.

Deadline: None.

Manufacturing and Delivery Quest

Description: Deliver five special plant boosters with a seven-star quality or higher using Capri’s recipe.

Reward: 500 G, mandarin sapling, navy blue mandarin sapling.

Deadline: None.

Not only would I receive some novel tree saplings, but I also got my hands on fertilizer and plant booster recipes. I was getting spoiled with this quest! And that wasn’t all.

“Yuto, thanks for listening to my boy’s predicament,” Toraus said.

“No problem. I’m here to help.”

“No, I mean it. I’ll return the favor in the future.”

He must have meant he’d give me a reward if I completed this request. *Now I’m even more motivated!* It was time to get back to the farm and start

concocting—

“Wait, no. I still need to get soba.”

“You’re looking for soba, Yuto?”

“Yeah, I am. Do you happen to know a good place to get some?”

“Sure do. There’s a shop that sells buckwheat seeds grown by my grandfather. I’ll show you.”

The botanical family pulls through! Evidently they were also in the business of growing buckwheat. Toraus led me to a shop that sold cooked soba, but they also sold soup base and soba noodles on their own. They were high-quality too, so I knew Reflet would be satisfied with this. I bought a bunch, enough for myself to use as well.

“All right, *now* we can head back to the farm.”

I’d finished gathering materials, and I had some spare time while everyone was busy crafting their auction items. In the meantime, I could make the items for Capri.

“An auction *and* a quest chain! Things are getting exciting!”

Once I returned to the farm, ready to dive right into things, Reflet rushed right over to me, grinning ear to ear.

“Hummm!”

“Oh hey, Reflet. You came to welcome me back? Oh, no you didn’t. You just want your ingredients.”

“Humm-humm!”

Reflet tugged on my arm, as if telling me to hurry up and hand over the ingredients.

“Here, for you.”

“Hum!”

“All you have eyes for is food, huh?”

Oh well, I was just glad she was happy. She grabbed the fish and shellfish from

me with both hands and then held them above her head. *Um, your hands are really going to reek.*

I put the other ingredients onto the table, gave Reflet a quick pat on the head, then went back to the farm. Since everyone was occupying the crafting facilities, I decided to just use my own crafting tools to make the quest items. The ingredients for the special fertilizer were soil, wood, water, and materials from insects and fish. The ingredients for the special plant booster were water, a recovery material, a poisonous material, a plant material, and an animal material.

“I’ll start by making fertilizer. For the soil, maybe I can use...mulch?”

I used high-quality mulch, a Sacred Tree branch, and the best-quality water I had. I had given most of my insect and fish materials to Lewin to make my equipment, so I didn’t have a lot left, but I did have some leftover boss materials I could use.

First, though, I wanted to see how things turned out using low-quality ingredients. I mixed together the soil and water, added some crushed-up materials I got from around the Town of Beginnings, then stirred it up even more. Then, instead of using Concoct as I normally would at this point, I used Concentrate. Using this art produced fewer items than Concoct would, but it resulted in a higher quality. Also, using particular items could also result in an entirely different item. In the case of this special fertilizer, it also changed the name of the item.

I tested the process out several times, but when I used Concoct to make the fertilizer, I ended up with something called Multipurpose Fertilizer. When I used Concentrate, however, the name changed to Enchanted Fertilizer.

Name: Enchanted Fertilizer

Rarity: 5 / Quality: 2★

Effect: Increases cultivation efficacy when used on a field. Effect lasts for five days. Promotes special evolution of some crops when used with Enchanted Plant Booster.

Now *that* was an interesting description. Special evolution of some crops? Like what exactly? *I wonder if Olto would know?*

“While I’d like to know exactly what this does, first I need to make the fertilizer I’m actually going to deliver.”

And I still had to make the plant booster after the fertilizer.

My repeated experimentation with making the plant booster yielded more or less the same results as with the fertilizer. When I only used Alchemy, I made Multipurpose Plant Booster, but when I used the Alchemy art Liquefy, it turned into Enchanted Plant Booster.

Name: Enchanted Plant Booster

Rarity: 5 / Quality: 2 ★

Effect: Increases cultivation efficacy when used on a field. Effect lasts for five days. Promotes special evolution of certain crops when used with Enchanted Fertilizer.

It was basically the same as enchanted fertilizer. It seemed that when used together, they produced a special effect. I also stumbled upon something amazing.

Name: Hydrated Plant Booster

Rarity: 6 / Quality: 1★

Effect: Increases cultivation efficacy when used on a field. Effect lasts for five days. Promotes special evolution of some crops when used with Hydrated Fertilizer.

This is what I ended up with when I tried using all materials with a water attribute to make the plant booster. The recipe already called for water, so I

decided to use all materials I'd gotten from water-type monsters. I really hadn't been expecting this, though. After somehow creating a Hydrated Plant Booster, I immediately tried to get to the bottom of what was happening. When I tried out other materials, I was able to make earth-, water-, fire-, and air-type plant boosters.

It seemed I could make them if, among the five ingredients, at least four were items of the same element. Though compared to using five ingredients of the same element, using four resulted in a lower quality.

I was also able to make Sanctified Plant Booster, but not Sanctified Fertilizer—I didn't have enough holy materials. For the Sanctified Plant Booster, I had used holy water, one of the Sacred Tree's young leaves, a Sacred Tree branch, and a guardian beast ingot from the event. Apparently, completing quests in the event village allowed people to obtain guardian beast ingots, so they were pretty widely available in the markets. Ignorant of that fact, I had purchased them when I found them at a stall, thinking they were a precious material. I'd bought them without thinking, but I didn't actually have much use for them, so I'd just been hoarding them this whole time.

I had heard that there were a good amount of second-wave players who were fans of the guardian beasts' equipment. They were easy to get even as a beginner player, so a lot of people used them for equipment until they could upgrade to steel.

I myself was very interested in crops with a holy attribute, so I really wanted to get my hands on materials I could use to make the fertilizer. I might be able to find some in player shops or the auction.

"I've got a lot to do! First I'll perfect the enchanted version of the items, and then I'll move on to each element!"

I was fired up as I threw myself into making fertilizer and plant boosters, then before I knew it, Olto was next to me.

"Mm?"

"Oh, perfect timing. I just finished up here. By the way, take a look at his enchanted fertilizer. Do you know how to use it?"

“Mmm!”

“Oh, you do?! I knew I could count on you! You’re the answer to my farming prayers! You’re the best!”

“Mm-mm!”

I could tell my praise was getting to Olto’s head as he puffed out his chest, but I let it slide this time.

“So, where can we use it?”

“Mm-mmm!”

“Over there? In the medicinal herb patch?”

“Mm!”

Olto trotted over to the field where the medicinal herbs were planted. I was still mass-growing medicinal herbs so that I could make potions to sell to the guild every day. It didn’t bring in that much money, but you know what they say, every little bit counts. This was an important source of income for our household, and a useful tool for me to level up.

“Will it turn the medicinal herbs into something else?”

“Mm.”

“If you say so, then it must be true. Try it over in this corner.”

“Mmm!”

I handed the enchanted fertilizer and plant booster to Olto, and he wasted no time in applying them to a small corner of the patch. Once he was done using both, the corner shone bluish-white for a second. Only a quarter of the field had glowed, so it seemed one set of enchanted fertilizer and plant booster wasn’t enough for an entire field.

“I have four other sets to use, not counting the ones I need to deliver to Capri. Where should we use them? Oh, and I have sets of four different elements too.”

“Mm!”

I had fused the lower-quality elemental-type fertilizer and plant boosters to

increase their quality, and ended up with three sets of four-star quality fertilizer and plant boosters.

“Over here are the fire-starter plants...”

“Mmm.”

“The Inflamed Fertilizer and Plant Booster, huh? Does it strengthen the effect of their attributes or something?”

“Mmm!”

Next, Olto used the Aerated Fertilizer and plant booster on the aeroponic farm, and the hydrated fertilizer and plant booster on the aquatic plants growing in the hydroponic farm. As I had thought, the items were for enhancing certain fields’ specific attributes.

Lastly, Olto threw the earth-type fertilizer and plant booster on the log growing red panther cap. That was a little surprising to me, but apparently it was fine. After he was done there, Olto headed for the orchard.

“I’m assuming you’ll use one set per fruit tree?”

“Mm!”

“Just the green peach trees? Is that okay?”

“Mm.”

That sounded like a yes. He was nodding solemnly, like he was trying to say something like *indeed*. A perfect screenshot! Olto used one enchanted set and each of the four element sets on green peach trees in the orchard. I couldn’t wait to see the different effects they had on each tree.

“Mmm-mm!”

“Huh? What’s the matter?”

Once he was done spreading fertilizer and plant booster on the fruit trees, Olto started pulling on my arm. I guess he wanted to take me somewhere else. I followed Olto through the orchard, then he stopped in his tracks in front of a small tree.

“Trii?”

It was the Olive Treant, Olea's main body. And for some reason, Olea was there waiting in front of it.

"Mmm."

"Chirp...?"

Olto shook Rick awake from his nap at the base of the Olive Treant. Olto shook Rick, who was napping at the base of the Olive Treant, waking him up. The way he was sleeping belly up, you'd never think he was a wild animal.

It seemed like the three of them had planned to meet here—but why?

Olto, Rick, and Olea came up to me and started trying to tell me something.

"Mmm-mm!"

"Trrrr!"

"Chirp chirp!"

"Hmmm?"

They were prattling on excitedly, but it didn't seem like they were asking me to play. I was staring at them in confusion when Rick struck some sort of pose. He thrust both hands out in front of him and stuck his tail straight up.

"Chirp chirp!"

What's he trying to say? I wondered. Then, I realized that his pose looked sort of familiar.

"Umm?"

"Chirp!" Rick trilled shortly, as if saying he was telling me to hurry up and recall something. *I know this. I know this, okay? It's on the tip of my tongue, I swear.*

Finally, I remembered.

"Do you want to perform the Forest Sorcery ritual?"

"Mmm!"

"Chirp chirp!"

"Trrrr!"

That's right, he was asking to use Forest Sorcery.

"Are you going to use it on Olea?"

"Mm." Olto nodded, like he was telling me I hit the nail on the head. Then, to my surprise, he held the enchanted fertilizer and plant booster high above his head.

"You're going to use the enchanted fertilizer and plant booster too?"

"Mm-mm!"

Apparently, he wanted to use the enchanted fertilizer and plant booster set along with Forest Sorcery. *To do what?* Though if they really wanted to, then that was fine with me...

"Are you going to use them on the Olive Treant?"

It wasn't going to make anything weird happen to the tree, was it?

"Mm!"

Once again, Olto started trying to tell me something by miming pushing something with his finger.

"Now what is it?"

"Mm-mmm! Mm-mmm!"

After the finger-pressing motion, he started miming opening a box and cheering. *He's choosing something and then getting an item?*

"Oh, the auction! I get it. You're talking about the crop you're going to submit for the auction? Is it something related to the Olive Treant?"

"Mm!"

Apparently, he could get some type of item by having Rick use Forest Sorcery. Judging by how both Olto and Olea were on board, it probably wouldn't have any harmful effects on the tree.

"You have no problem with this, Olea?"

"Trrrr!"

"Hmm, well as long as you're okay with it, go for it."

“Mm-mmm!”

“Trrrr!”

And so, we got right into using Forest Sorcery.

“Which spell? Do you want to use the Spell of Healing, like we did with the Sacred Tree?”

“Mm-mm.”

“No? Then, Spell of Growth?”

“Mm!”

Spell of Growth it is. Well, if they wanted to make the tree grow, that would make sense.

“All right, let’s do it. Rick, use Forest Sorcery!”

“Chiiirp!”

Rick stuck his tail straight up and thrust his arms out. Then, a double pentagram appeared, centered on the Olive Treant.

“Okay, now I need to select items to offer. I should choose the enchanted fertilizer and the enchanted plant booster, right?”

“Mm!”

I followed Olto’s directions and selected the following items: the enchanted fertilizer and enchanted planter booster, along with the four sets of elemental fertilizer and plant boosters. That filled up the ten slots perfectly.

“Whoa, the spell changed! Just like what happened with Lilith!”

When Lilith joined our team, the Spell of Healing had changed to Demon Summoning. This time, the Spell of Growth changed to Spell of Evolution. *Evolution?* As in, when a monster evolves into an advanced variety? Evolving not by leveling up through battle, but with a spell?

“Hey, Olto... Does evolution mean *that* kind of evolution?”

I could have phrased my question more clearly, but I was so shocked that I couldn’t think of any other way to put it. But Olto seemed to have understood

me just fine—he nodded as if he were saying *indeed* again. That seemed to be his latest kick.

“No way...”

“Mm.”

I never knew monsters could evolve this way. This obviously wasn’t a standard evolution route, so what exactly would it be?

“Olea, this isn’t going to be an ordinary evolution. Is that okay with you?”

“Tiiii!”

Olea raised their arms high and hopped up and down, expressing their delight. It actually seemed like they were telling me they couldn’t wait any longer.

“All right, I’m offering up the fertilizer and plant boosters! Spell of Evolution, activate!”

“Tiiii!”

“Chirp chirp!”

“Mm-mmm!”

I hit “Yes” on the screen, and the magic circle lit up. Simultaneously, the base of the Olive Treant emitted a bright light. It was green, same as the magic circle. The light rose up from the roots, enveloped the trunk, and traveled to the branches and leaves. Once the entire tree was shining, the light grew even brighter and illuminated every corner of the farm.

“It’s happening!”

“Tiiii-tiiii!”

“Chirp chirp!”

“Mmm!”

The four of us shielded our eyes from the flash we knew would come, waiting for the radiant light to settle down. Then, I heard the sound of tree branches rustling.

Next came an announcement.

Ding-dong!

“A special evolution is now available for the Olive Treant. Proceed?”

The light abated when the announcement played, and a window appeared in front of me. So I could continue even without making them evolve?

“Huh? If I choose to evolve the Olive Treant, will it prevent you from getting the crop you want, Olto?”

“Mm? Mm-mm.”

It seemed like that wasn't a problem.

“Then, it's okay if I go ahead with the evolution, right?”

“Mm.”

“Cool, then I'll select yes and— Whoa, there are so many options...”

The Olive Treant wouldn't automatically evolve. Instead, I could choose from a list of options. And there were a *lot*. High Treant, High Olive Treant, Fire Treant, Earth Treant, Aqua Treant, Wind Treant, Fire Olive Treant, Earth—

“There are so many Treant types.”

The Treant series must have been the regular evolution route of the Olive Treant. They all had increased stats but no significant change in skills. It mostly seemed that more ingredients would be obtainable from Ingredient Production, and that they would gain the ability to enhance the attributes of the farmland they managed.

“This Elemental Treant sounds pretty great.”

It was an evolution that would result in Olea possessing all four elements. It wasn't on par with the Treants specializing in just one element, but that would work just fine for a farm like ours where we grew plants of many varieties.

“Increased farm management abilities sounds good, but...this next one's probably the way to go.”

After the Treant series, there was a Tree Nymph option. Yes—a Tree Nymph, just like Sakura. Not only would Olea be the same race, but they'd also be able

to move around completely independently like Sakura. They would even retain their non-Tree Nymph skills, like Farm Management, which I chalked up to the fact that they were still evolving from an Olive Treant. An Olive Tree Nymph, essentially.

This one seemed like a winner. They could continue managing the farm, they'd turn into a cute tree nymph, *and* they would gain combat abilities.

Name: Olea / Race: Tree Nymph / Base Level: Lv. 18

Master: Yuto

HP: 52/52 MP: 8080

Strength: 15 *Endurance*: 18 Agility: 9

Dexterity: 14 *Intelligence*: 15 Sanity: 12

Skills: Propagation, Photosynthesis, Ingredient Production (Olive Treant's Fruit x3, Spirit's Branch, Spirit's Fruit), Farm Management, Scythe Skills, Regeneration, Tree Magic, Endure

Equipment: Tree Nymph's Scythe, Tree Nymph's Garments

Their clones, which were necessary to separate from their main body, and the Noncombatant skill, which prevented their clones from leaving the farm, would be gone. In their place would be Scythe Skills, Regeneration, Tree Magic, and Endurance.

They'd start out with a Tree Nymph's Scythe for a weapon. The fact that they had a weapon sounded like a guarantee they'd be able to participate in battles, right? It also looked like a scythe was their only equippable weapon, but why? Was it just random? Their stats would also be high for their level, and I could still entrust them with the farm as I had been. It was definitely an upgrade, so I didn't see any downsides to this one. The Ingredient Production skill changed somewhat to provide better items, which I had no complaints about.

The Elemental Treant would have better farm management abilities, while

the Tree Nymph would have combat abilities. I couldn't go wrong with either one.

"Hmm. Which one should I pick?"

"Trrrr?"

"Hmm, do you have a preference, Olea?"

"Trrrr."

I honestly was fine with either one, so I decided to take Olea's feelings into account too. I crouched down so they could see the window, and Olea crossed their arms and started making a humming noise. It didn't take long before they pointed at one.

"Tree Nymph?"

"Trrrr!"

"All right! Now you can join us on our adventures too!"

"Trrrrr!"

I selected Tree Nymph, and then a bright light enveloped Olea as they jumped happily up and down. *What are they going to evolve into? I can't wait to see!*

In addition to their clone, the Olive Treant also started emitting light. Then, after a few seconds...

"Trrrr?"

In front of me was a child who looked nothing like Olea.



“Whoa, check you out!”

“Tiiii!”

Olea was now about Olto’s height, or maybe a little shorter.

Their hair was a short bob that was yellowish green with a single tuft of magenta on their bangs. Before, their nose had resembled that of a certain famous puppet, but now it had shortened. Their outfit was a traditional folk poncho on top of a loose-fitting shirt and knee-length shorts. The poncho was white and green with a stylized depiction of an olive tree on the back in magenta, dark brown, and dark green—the colors likely representing the fruit, trunk, and leaves of the tree. On their feet, they wore sandals that seemed like it’d be hard to run in, but I figured they’d manage, thanks to the mysterious powers of the game.

“Where’s your scythe?”

“Tiiiiii!”

“Ooh! Cool!”

Like Sakura, Olea produced their weapon with Tree Magic. A giant sickle appeared with a single wave of their arm. The handle was made out of wood. Actually, maybe it was just a branch being used as a handle? There were tiny twigs poking out all over it, and some small olive leaves growing. The leaves looked metallic, but since the scythe was made with Tree Magic, I had to think they were made out of wood. Also, it was much larger than I was expecting.

“It’s huge!”

“Tiiii!”

It was even bigger than Charm’s grass-cutting sickle. Olea’s was so big, it could definitely be called a reaper scythe. Was Olea going to be able to handle that scythe, as tiny as they were? But it looked like I didn’t need to worry—they swung it around easily.

“But anyway, you’ve sure changed a lot!”

“Tiiii!”

Their voice sounded pretty much the same, though. But there was still one question left unanswered. Was Olea a girl, or a boy? They were very slender, but also, judging gender from their childlike build was difficult. They almost looked like a very boyish pretty girl, but they could also pass for a boy cute enough to be mistaken for a girl. Even their outfit looked suitable for either gender.

I'd sort of been considering them to be a boy until now, but it could also be that they were actually a girl.

"Hmm..."

"Trrrr!"

"Huh? What's this?"

While I was pondering what their gender might be, Olea took out a red object. It looked like some kind of fruit. It resembled a peach, but its bright crimson color suggested otherwise.

Name: Spirit's Fruit

Rarity: 6 / Quality: 5★

Effect: Recovers 10% of hunger status when consumed.
Raises resistance to magic spells for one hour. Five-minute cooldown time.

This is awesome! It raises magic resistance? *And* it has a high rarity!

This was the item obtainable from Ingredient Production after Olea's evolution. The spirit's branch and Olive Treant fruit were also in my inventory—I had obtained all of them the moment they'd evolved. Was that what had happened last time with this skill? In any case, I was happy about it. The items received from Ingredient Production were random, but the fact that I would receive these items even just occasionally made it a very useful skill.

"Chirp chiiirp!"

Rick was going crazy sniffing it.

“Chirp chirp chirp chirp chirp chirp chirp—”

His eyes looked wild. He was clearly interested in the fruit, but he couldn't have it. *There's only one! I'll let you have one after we get a few more!*

“Mmm-mm!”

“Hmm? What's up, Olto?”

“Mm-mmm!”

“Hey! Seriously, what is it?”

Olto insistently tugged on my sleeve, trying to tell me something. While I was trying to figure out what he wanted to say, he snatched the spirit's fruit out of my hand.

“Mmm!” Olto said, proudly holding up the fruit he'd stolen from me.

“Oh! Is that what you want to submit to the auction?”

“Mm!”

That was why he had wanted Rick to use Forest Sorcery in the first place. This was just my guess, but maybe Olto had actually intended to make something else by having Rick use Forest Sorcery on Olea. But then once a new route to make the better spirit's fruit with the fertilizer and plant booster opened up, he'd changed plans.

In any case, how was Olto so talented? This seemed like a difficult event to come across ordinarily. Use Forest Sorcery on the Olive Treant, then use enchanted fertilizer and enchanted plant booster. Plus, I figured Olea's state of growth and the level of the farm had an impact too. Despite all that, he was easily able to discern the right path to take. He really was amazing. Were all gnomes like this?

“Mm?”

“Oh, sorry. Don't worry about it. Let's put this spirit's fruit up for auction. I was the one who told you to do what you wanted in the first place.”

“Mm!”

“Chiiirp...”

It felt like a waste, but that's just the way things went. I'd do it for Olto. Rick, meanwhile, looked disappointed. *I already told you I'm not handing it to you!*

So that was Olto's auction item all set. I wondered how the others' were coming along.

"All right, let's go see how the others are doing."

"Triii!"

"Are you coming with, Olea? Oh yeah, we should show everyone your new, evolved form."

"Triii-triii."

Thus, together with Olea, we went to the house. Everyone was playing in the garden, then gathered together once we arrived. They were all stoked to see Olea's new form, but once they realized they were still the same Olea on the inside, they didn't act any differently toward them.

"Hmmm."

"Triiiii."

"Oh, Himka. You're here?"

Himka was also here, playing with the others.

"So? Did you finish your auction item?"

"Hm!"

Himka smiled happily, so I took that to mean he was probably satisfied with what he'd made. I headed to the workshop with Himka, and he pulled a wooden chest from the item box.

"Huh? You made something out of wood?"

No, that couldn't be. Was his item inside it, then? It looked like a pretty well-made chest. Actually, it was more of a trunk case. It was clear just how well-made it was when he placed it on top of the desk. The exterior was polished to a shine, and it looked good enough to put up for sale.

"Hm."

While I was confused, Himka opened up the case, his expression fully confident.

“Whoa, these are beautiful!”

“Hm.”

Inside the trunk were various objects placed on top of a white cloth. I figured the wooden box and frame had been made by Sakura, and the cloth must have been made by Eine.

Laid out inside was a silverware set made from magic silver and Venetian-style wine glasses. On the right-hand side of the trunk were six spoons, knives, forks, and teaspoons with beautiful flame engravings. The handles were inlaid with low-quality jade, making the utensils look closer to works of art.

They also seemed to have a special effect—their description stated that it had a poison-nulling effect. The silverware could tell if the food it touched was poisonous, and then it would also mitigate that poison’s effects. These didn’t seem like something that would be that usable for players, but it would probably be priced higher than something with no effects whatsoever. But there was also the possibility that it wouldn’t be bid on for that reason.

The six Venetian wine glasses had stunning red and yellow vertical stripes. These didn’t have any special effects, but they also didn’t look like glasses for everyday use. Definitely not the type of glasses to just drink water from.

Anyhow, it was clear that Himka had used the finest materials to craft the finest items.

“This is amazing work, Himka.”

“Hmm-hmm!”

Naturally, the trunk case wasn’t the item Sakura crafted for the auction. She showed hers off next.

“...!”

“Whoa! Th-That thing’s huge. What is it? A table?”

“...♪”

Sakura had brought over a square board with four legs that at first glance looked like a coffee table. Then, I noticed there was something red underneath the table board.

When Sakura placed it on the floor of the workshop, I realized it wasn't just a regular table. First off, the surface of the board had an incredibly detailed engraving of all my monsters chasing each other in the orchard. On the left-hand side was Olto facing upward, Rick on his shoulder, and the others chasing after them. Even Lilith was there, bringing up the rear.

Also, I had thought it was all one piece, but the engraved board was actually removable. Beneath that was another board, the underside of which had an embedded red metal plate that was engraved with a flame emblem. It looked like that part would give off heat.

That's right—this wasn't any ordinary table, but a kotatsu. Himka and Fau must have made the heat-generating plate, and Himka had probably also made the pane of glass protecting the engraved board inlaid in the tabletop.

Sakura also brought out a square heavy blanket and spread it out underneath the tabletop, completing the kotatsu. The blanket must have been Eine's creation. It was a wonderful end product. It wasn't just a regular kotatsu; it was on par with an industrial art piece.

"This looks great, but...will it sell?"

"...!"

Sakura nodded with full faith. But was there really anyone who'd pay a high price for a tabletop with a drawing of my monsters playing tag? I mean, I wanted it, so I planned to ask for them to make me something similar at some point...but that was me. Maybe an engraving of something that had more universal appeal was better for the auction, like of the Lakeside Sequoia, for example. Well actually, Ashihana had sold some carved figurines of my monsters before, so maybe there *was* a demand for something like this?

"By the way, this kotatsu doesn't just get warm, huh? Is that from Fau's Alchemy?"

"...!"

It provided a cold-resistance effect for a fixed time, and like the straw mat Ashihana had, it also created a safety zone. Amazingly, this kotatsu could be used to rest on the playing field.

“A kotatsu on the playing field...?”

Its cold-resistance effect would make it extremely useful in cold places.

“...?”

“Well, let’s do it. Hopefully it sells.”

“...♪”

I honestly had no idea if it would, but I could tell Sakura had worked hard on it.

“Hmm, I have a feeling everyone else’s items are going to be just as good,” I mused aloud. And I was right. A short moment later, Reflet came to get me, and I followed her to where she had set up a sample of what she was going to submit to the auction. She must have wanted me to taste test these.

“Ooh, tempura soba!”

“Hum.”

It looked like your regular, run-of-the-mill soba. There was an assortment of mori soba, tempura soba, dipping sauce, pickled vegetables, and other condiments on a tray. The entire assortment was called the “Tempura-Mori Soba Meal Set.” The tray and bowls must have been made by other monsters, and apparently, the dishes weren’t considered individual meals—the entire thing was considered a single dish.

“Hum.”

Reflet handed me a pair of carefully crafted hexagonal chopsticks. Were these part of the set too? This must’ve been her way of telling me to eat.

“Don’t mind if I do. *Slurrrp...* Mm, it’s good.”

“Hum!”

Reflet had used the soba I’d bought earlier. The noodles were smooth and had a nice aroma. Reflet must have made the soup base, but it was made

exactly how I liked it. The tempura soba looked amazingly extravagant—there were fried prawns, fish, mushrooms, and other assorted vegetables.

Considering the soup stock she used too, she must have used over thirty different ingredients. And it was worth it—the meal was absolutely delicious. I could confidently say it was even better than the soba available at food stalls in real life. Plus, it had a pretty interesting effect. For one hour after eating, it raised all stats during battle. Although, if you died, it punished you with a doubled death penalty. It was high risk, high reward, but maybe a little too much so.

Reflet was going to submit this tempura-mori soba meal set enough for a six-person party, but...I had my doubts about this one as well. It might end up being priced incredibly highly because of all the ingredients she had used. No matter how beneficial the effect, would people really pay top dollar for a single meal? I was sure there was some other support item that would raise your stats for cheaper. I suspected this might not sell either, but oh well. If it didn't, at least I could use it.

Lastly, Eine appeared, holding a giant object.



“That’s huge! It’s gigantic!”

“Tra-la-la.”

“I-Is that a stuffed rabbit toy?”

“Tra-la!”

It was a jumbo rabbit, even bigger than me. Its effect description stated that just holding it would increase the holder’s automatic HP and MP recovery rate. Its larger-than-human size turned what should have been a cute bunny into something ominous and creepy. Its giant glass eyes, which I assumed Himka had made, had a strangely vacant look to them. *What if that thing hugs back?*

Also, its increased recovery rate effect would mainly be used in the playing field or a safety zone. To hug that giant stuffed animal in those spots required a certain amount of courage, in multiple senses.

“Will someone buy that...?”

“Tra-la!”

“You sound confident about that.”

Each item was great, but...weren’t they a little *too* unique?

“Hm!”

“...!”

“Hum!”

“Tra-la!”

They really are confident! I mean, again, it’s true they’re great items! I knew if they didn’t sell, my monsters would get sad—So please sell! Please!

Online Forum [New Discoveries Galore!] A

Discussion Thread for New Discoveries Made in LJO, Part 51

Feel free to report anything you've noticed, however trivial.

Don't make things up.

Don't assume others are lying.

If possible, include a screenshot as proof.

120: Heartman

Hey hey hey hey!

What the hell? Is that for real?! That's crazy!

I had to do a double-take.

121: Hiruma

So you saw? It's 100% for real.

BTW, I did a triple take.

It's human nature to do a double or triple take when they see something outrageous LOL

122: Heartman

It's too unbelievable. People are gonna freak out again.

123: Hiruma

People all over are already trying to get information.

124: Fuka

It's been a while since we had something crazy happen

here. What is it?

125: Formaggio

I saw a bunch of people running toward the teleportation gate, but that's all I know...

Did someone trigger a raid boss fight somewhere?

126: Hendrickson

It's way bigger than a raid boss!

127: Fuka

Seriously? Wh-What in the world happened...?

128: Hiruma

No, it's definitely not as big as a raid boss fight.

But there is a certain group of people who will go crazy over this.

129: Heartman

They say that a certain someone probably pulled a certain stunt again.

130: Formaggio

"Probably"?

131: Hiruma

It's definite that he did something, but there's no confirmed information yet.

I guess right now, it's a presumed stunt?

132: Fuka

So, what did Silver-Haired do this time?

133: Hendrickson

There's an unknown kid on Silver-Haired's farm.

We can assume it's a new monster.

134: Formaggio

He *just* caused an uproar after he tamed that little demon...

He never disappoints!

135: Heartman

Also, it's not just any new monster that he tamed.

136: Hiruma

According to the Defenders, someone witnessed a mysterious flash of light coming from Silver-Haired's orchard.

Immediately after, what they presumed to be the Olive Treant suddenly grew in size.

Then, that child monster appeared.

137: Fuka

Huh? So, you mean...?

138: Hendrickson

It's possible that an Olive Treant can evolve into a Tree Nymph.

139: Formaggio

WHAAAT?! ...is how I imagine people will react.

A confirmed method to tame the ever-elusive tree nymphs? Yup, that'd cause an uproar.

140: Fuka

I see! Now I get what all the commotion is for.

Silver Haired never changes~

141: Hendrickson

The area around Silver-Haired's farm is now as crowded as a comic con.

I'm sure the news has already spread.

142: Hiruma

The Defenders are already stationed by Silver-Haired's farm, so they can get info in real time and spread it fast.

143: Heartman

Not just the Defenders, but farmers, tamers, and crafting clans are staking it out too.

144: Formaggio

You serious?

145: Heartman

People like reading the observation notes these groups are recording.

There are even some heroes reporting something every hour.

146: Formaggio

Something similar to this has happened before, right?

Wasn't there a time when the Olive Treant observation notes were really popular?

147: Hiruma

Yeah, it's pretty much like.

It's like the observation notes taken of other monsters.

148: Hendrickson

Well, we don't know how the observation notes of the Olive Treant will change from here on.

149: Formaggio

Right. If it's evolved into a tree nymph, it can probably leave the farm now.

150: Hendrickson

Exactly. I'm sure tamers everywhere are freaking out.

151: Hamakaze

Hey! You'll never believe what just happened!

152: Fuka

Are you talking about Silver-Haired's new monster?

I think I'm going to go check it out soon. Want to go together?

153: Hamakaze

Oh, you are? I still haven't seen it up close, so I'd love to— Wait, that's not what I'm talking about!

I mean yeah, that too, but not that!

154: Hiruma

Is it about Silver-Haired?

155: Hamakaze

Duh!

156: Heartman

So much power in such a short word! It's one thing after another with him, huh?

He's moving full throttle.

157: Hendrickson

You're going too fast, Silver-Haired!

158: Formaggio

He doesn't even know how fast he's going himself...

I get the sense he thinks he's actively trying to take things easy.

159: Fuka

Back on topic—what else did he do?

160: Hamakaze

The Zashiki-Warashi's Diary! You won't believe it!

It's pandemonium!

161: Heartman

P-Pandemonium? Strong words.

What the heck was in it?

162: Fuka

I'm too scared to watch.

163: Hiruma

All right, I'm watching it now...

Yeah, it's crazy. I only needed to watch the first ten seconds to see that.

164: Hendrickson

Yeah, that's definitely crazy.

That's all I can say about it! That's how crazy it is!

165: Hamakaze

See what I mean? I never expect any less from my rival!

166: Heartman

Your rival?

167: Hiruma

Isn't your rival supposed to be someone who you're on the same level with?

168: Hamakaze

It's fine! As long as I think we're rivals, we are!

169: Hiruma

Th-That's our Hamakaze. I admire your tenacity!

170: Fuka

Anyway, what's in the video?

171: Heartman

How should I explain...

It looked like Silver-Haired's monsters were doing a showcase? They all came out and showed off an item to the camera.

First was the gnome.

172: Hiruma

What is that, btw? A fruit?

173: Hamakaze

I asked some of my farmer friends, but they've never seen it before either!

It must be some mystery fruit Silver-Haired grew on his farm.

174: Formaggio

That's going to make certain circles lose their minds.

175: Heartman

Depending on its effects, it won't just be certain circles, but everyone.

176: Hiruma

Then, after the gnome was the salamander's turn.

He opened up a wooden chest he was carrying, and inside was silverware.

177: Hendrickson

If you look close you can tell it's *super* fancy.

If it's the salamander's handiwork, I just know his devoted fans are going to want it.

178: Heartman

Depending on its abilities, yadda yadda yadda, you know the rest.

Like me! I want it!

179: Fuka

Okay, I swallowed my fear and watched it.

I want that tableware too!

180: Formaggio

Same here. But it's clearly not going to be cheap.

And someone like me has no chance to request a crafted item from Silver-Haired either.

I guess my only hope is to wait for them to be sold at his unmanned stall?

181: Hiruma

He might as well skip putting them up at his stall and submit them for the auction, then—

Wait. Hold on.

182: Heartman

Hey. That... That might be it!

183: Hendrickson

Y-You think he's going to submit those to the auction?

Was that an advertisement, then?

184: Formaggio

Th-Then the water nymph's soba that showed up in the video, that's also going to be...?

185: Hamakaze

The sylph's giant bunny doll?!

186: Fuka

Even the kotatsu? The kotatsu that looks like it'll let you experience all sorts of pure bliss?!

187: Heartman

No way!

This is going to start a war!

188: Hiruma

I've never been more happy that this game doesn't have PK.

189: Hendrickson

Is it even going to be affordable enough for one person to buy?

The fan clans are definitely going to act on this!

190: Fuka

Fan clans?

191: Hiruma

Fans of Silver-Haired's monsters meet up occasionally, and at some point, someone suggested they all just make a clan. They're smallish to medium-sized clans.

Of course, they have no affiliation with Silver-Haired himself.

And unlike the Defenders, they're an organized group.

192: Heartman

Each of his monsters has their own fans.

The gnome and penguin search parties are well known, for instance.

193: Hamakaze

I've also heard rumors that there's already a fan club for the little demon.

194: Formaggio

I heard that too.

I remember hearing there's one for Mamori too.

Honestly, I wouldn't mind joining. Actually, I'd really like to.

195: Hiruma

There's no fan clan for Silver-Haired himself, though.

196: Hendrickson

Isn't that what the Defenders are?

Also, his monsters are a part of him anyway.

197: Hamakaze

In any case, if those items really do get put up for auction, it'll be really hard for just one person to make a successful bid.

198: Fuka

I have a feeling the auction is going to get wild.

199: Hiruma

I just hope it doesn't get so wild that it turns into a riot.

200: Hamakaze

It's amazing how a single video could send a wave through so many players...

My rival continues to impress me!

201: Heartman

Wouldn't it be nice if he thought of you the same way someday?

202: Hiruma

Does Silver-Haired even know who you are, Hamakaze?

Imagine if he didn't even know your name. That'd be so pathetic, I'd cry.

203: Hamakaze

O-Of course he knows my name!

I introduced myself to him...

And he called me by my name before!

204: Hendrickson

Keep your chin up.

205: Formaggio

Yeah, I'm rooting for you.

206: Fuka

I hope he learns your name someday.

207: Hamakaze

I-It's fine! We already know each other!

We're rivals! I think...

208: Heartman

At any rate, it looks like Mamori's taking first place in the video rankings again this week.

209: Hiruma

And if those items do get put up for auction, it's pretty much guaranteed to turn into a hellscape.

[Three Cheers for Olto!] Thread for the Fan Clans of Silver-Haired's Tamed Monster Olto, Part 51

No slander.

Refrain from instigating fights with other fans and clans.

Absolutely no directly contacting Silver-Haired or Olto!

Use of videos and pictures without permission is strictly forbidden.

177: Yoohoo

That fruit Olto was holding!

I have no idea what that was!

178: Ljungberg

Yeah, our entire clan tried to research it, but nothing came up.

If I had to compare it to an IRL fruit, I'd say it looked like a nectarine.

179: Yorki

Wh-What's that?

It sounds like something that makes you live longer!

180: Ljungberg

It's like a peach, but with a slightly different color and shape.

Olto's fruit looks kind of like that. My clanmates found it looking through a reference book.

181: Yorki

They're definitely not at my local fruit stand.

182: Yoohoo

We had someone check out a fruit stand in a department store marketplace, but they must not have recognized it.

183: Ljungberg

I guess not many Japanese people are familiar with the fruit.

184: Yorki

Anyway, what we know for sure is that it was a super rare fruit!

185: Yoohoo

A rare fruit that Olto had a hand in growing!

I so want it!

186: Yorki

We won't lose out!

187: Ljungberg

We've already started raising funds.

188: Yoohoo

We've got rivals all over!

My clan is always buying up Silver-Haired's food, so we're perpetually broke...

189: Yorki

Don't sweat it.

190: Yoohoo

Oh, I know you don't mean that!

You're just happy there's less competition!

191: Yorki

Well it's the truth! What do you expect?!

That fruit belongs to us, the Gnome Cultivation Party!

192: Ljungberg

Our clan, the Gnome Playtime Party, is gathering funds from our clan members and other clans we're affiliated with.

193: Yorki

Nooo! You've got too many people on your side!

Dammit! We need to catch up!

194: Yoohoo

Don't forget about us, the Cutie Patootie Olto Party!

We're gonna bring home the gold! Just you wait!

195: Ljungberg

Our clan is even prepared to sell off our assets.

196: Yoohoo

Huh? Like all of them?

Even the Ashihana-made Olto figurine that the Olto Playtime Party just acquired?

197: Ljungberg

That depends.

198: Yoohoo

I want it!

199: Yorki

Yeah, me too— Wait, no I don't! That was a close one!

I almost fell for your scheme!

200: Yoohoo

Ack! Me too!

You were plotting to sell it for an exorbitant amount to drain our funds, weren't you?!

What a dirty trick!

201: Ljungberg

That wasn't my intention, but thanks for the idea.

How about it? We have many fine wares to sell.

202: Yoohoo

Gaaah! Stop it with the sales pitch! The devil on my shoulder is gonna start talking!

Oh wait, the angel on my other shoulder is telling me to buy it too!

203: Yorki

Veteran fan clans and their sneaky tactics.

204: Ljungberg

Mwa ha ha ha ha ha!

For that fruit, there's nothing we won't do, no matter how evil!

205: Yoohoo

Y-You're diabolical! Have you no fear of the devs?!

206: Yorki

Aren't you afraid of getting reported?!

207: Ljungberg

Wait no, we're not planning on doing anything *that* bad.
That just sort of came out in the moment.

208: Yoohoo

You're just saying that! You really are going to do something cruel!

You schemer! Conspirator! Salamander lover!

209: Ljungberg

Is calling someone a salamander lover considered an insult to gnome fans?

210: Yorki

You'll make the salamander fans mad.

211: Yoohoo

Ah! No, I didn't mean it that way! It was just a figure of speech!

212: Ljungberg

Anyway, if you want to help us raise money, just say the word.

213: Yoohoo

Never in a million years!

214: Yorki

That fruit is going to be ours!

215: Yoohoo

It'd be hilarious if after all this talk, someone not even in this discussion ends up buying it.

216: Ljungberg

Well, I highly doubt one person will be able to outbid a whole clan.

217: Yorki

True.

218: Yoohoo

Yeah, I guess not.

For now, I'll just pray to Silver-Haired that we'll be able to buy Olto's fruit.

All-Star Silver.

219: Ljungberg

That's what you say when you pray? Well, all right.

All-Star Silver.

220: Yorki

Olto, Silver-Haired, devs, I beg you, please provide us with that fruit!

All-Star Silver!

Chapter Five: The Auction!

As soon as I'd finished checking out everyone's items, I registered them for the auction. It wasn't an overly complicated process. I just opened up the auction page and selected the items I wanted to put up for sale. Since I had increased my guild rank, I could enter five items: Olto's spirit's fruit, Himka's tableware set, Sakura's kotatsu, Reflet's tempura-mori soba meal set, and Eine's giant stuffed rabbit.

There was a space for me to write a description, so I just filled it in with something brief. Something simple, like "A tableware set made by Himka, a salamander. Has special effects." I let it automatically set the starting price, since I honestly wasn't sure what a reasonable price would be. But if these items could sell for a high price, then maybe I'd be able to upgrade my crafting facilities even more. I had my fingers crossed that these items would catch the attention of some rich players.

After I was done with that, I headed for Capri's farm to deliver the enchanted fertilizer and enchanted plant booster.

"All right, here you are."

"Thanks, mister! I just know these'll make my crops grow better!" Capri said with delight as he took the items I made. Then, he immediately used them on his farm. Just like we had done, he used them on his fruit trees. I wondered if this was how I was originally meant to learn how to use the fertilizer and plant booster.

It didn't take long for my suspicions to be confirmed. Once Capri returned, he told me I should use the fertilizer and plant booster on a fruit tree or a crop of the same attribute.

"Also, I heard that certain crops can get a special evolution if you use it on them."

"Like what?"

“I’ve only heard rumors, so I’m not sure. But since it has to do with evolution, maybe you can ask a tamer? Want me to introduce you to one?”

“You sure?”

“Yeah! He’s a relative, by the way. He only tames plant-type monsters.”

The quest chain continues! Was the trigger having Taming skills? I was very interested to meet an NPC tamer.

“I’ll try to get in contact with him. I’ll let you know if he’s available to meet you.”

“Right, thanks.”

“But I think you might already be past needing to meet him, mister,” Capri said, looking at Olea standing next to me.

“Trrrr?”

“Did that kid evolve from a treant?”

“Yeah, but they evolved into a tree nymph because I used Forest Sorcery to get a special evolution. Can they be evolved into a tree nymph normally too?”

“Hmm, I don’t know all the details, but I think treants can evolve into tree nymphs even without using sorcery. I guess you should still ask Sagitta, he’d know!”

The NPC tamer’s name was Sagitta, apparently. That must be Sagittarius—the archer. I was excited to pick his brain about all sorts of things.

“Kay, here’s your reward.”

“Ooh, thanks.”

“Trrrr!”

While I was happy about the quest chain continuing, I was also just as excited for the rewards. A navy blue mandarin, a regular mandarin, a pink apple, and a regular apple—four saplings in total. *Woo-hoo, I got apples and mandarins!*

It was time to head back to the farm and have Olto plant them. *Actually, before that, should I stop by the Quick-Eared Cats?* I needed to sell information about the quest chain to earn some money for the auction. I was pretty light on

cash at the moment, since I had impulsively spent ten million on the all-purpose workshop. I wanted at least a little more money right now.

“Dad said he wanted to thank you too someday, so you can look forward to that.”

“Got it. Well, see you.”

“Tiii-triii.”

“Yup, see ya!”

After saying bye to the energetic Capri, I headed to the Quick-Eared Cats.

“I wonder how much I can sell this for?”

“Tiii?”

Olea hopped up and down excitedly. This was their first time outside of the farm, so everything was fun for them. Seeing them like that, I couldn’t help but get excited too!

“Come on! Let’s race to the Cats!”

“Tiii-triii!”

Olea’s fast!

“Hey, wait for me!”

“Tiii-triii-triii!”

I ran after Olea, trying not to lose sight of them, and soon arrived at the Quick-Eared Cats. I didn’t think Olea would love running *that* much.

“Hey there.”

I stepped into the Cats’ new establishment and ran into another customer who was already inside. She was a pretty girl with silver hair tied up in a ponytail. Even though she had changed up her hairstyle, I still recognized her. She was famous for making all sorts of interesting discoveries.

“Oh hey, Hamakaze. Good to see you again.”

“S-Silver-Haired...!”

She sounded awestruck to an exaggerated degree. Maybe I had startled her

by calling out to her from behind? In any case, I really wasn't expecting what Hamakaze said next.

"Thank you!"

"Huh?"

As soon as Hamakaze thanked me, she held out her hand. I grasped it reflexively, and she gave me an enthusiastic handshake. She seemed very excitable. *Why?*

"W-We know each other, right? We're rivals, right? Right?"

"Oh, um...sure?"

Rivals in what, exactly? We were friends, so it was at least true that we knew each other.

"Alyssa? What's up with Hamakaze?"

"Ha ha, where to begin? Come on, Hamakaze. You're making Yuto uncomfortable."

"Ahhh! I'm sorry!"

"Oh, no, I'm fine..."

"I'm leaving! Thank you again!"

"S-Sure."

Hamakaze bowed her head then flew out like a storm. Seriously, what was that about? I'd thought she was trying to buy some information from Alyssa...

"Did I interrupt some business?"

"No, you didn't. I was just giving her some advice. You were able to use the entrance, weren't you?"

In the interest of information control, the shop was only accessible for negotiation by one party at a time. The fact that I could even enter meant that they weren't in the middle of talking business.

"Advice about what? Nothing to do with me, right? It's not like we know each other that well."

“Aha ha ha ha. Don’t worry. It’s settled now.”

“Hmm, well, okay.”

If it was a matter related to Hamakaze’s personal information, then it was against the rules of etiquette to ask further, so I put it out of my mind. Alyssa said it was resolved now, anyway. Besides, I had come here to sell information.

“So, are you interested in buying some info?”

“Hm. Just give me a moment.”

“Huh? Oh, sure.”

Alyssa’s face suddenly turned serious and she straightened her posture. Then, she looked down at my side.

“First, are you selling information about this kid?”

“Yeah, among other things.”

“O-Other things. I see. All right.”

“Yes, other things,” I repeated. A lot had happened up to the point Olea evolved, so I had an extensive list of information to sell.

Alyssa pulled out a chair from her inventory, then sat down on it. *Huh? She’s not going to offer us a seat?*

“Sorry. I know it’s not exactly considerate, but do you mind if I sit?”

“N-Not at all. That’s fine...”

“I have a feeling I won’t be able to stay standing.”

“Hmm? Did you say something?”

“Nope, nothing. All right then, let’s hear it.”

Alyssa propped both elbows on the counter and folded her hands in front of her face. The pose was directly reminiscent of a certain commander of an organization that operated humanoid decisive battle weapons. Her expression was gravely serious. Had she started role-playing a new character?

“I’ll start by talking about this one, then.”

“Trrrr!”

I patted Olea's head, and they enthusiastically raised a hand in greeting. They were acting adorable and peppy, but Alyssa didn't even crack a smile. It didn't seem like she was mad, but she was heavily zeroing her gaze on Olea. Was she getting really into her character?

"Alyssa?"

"Trrrr?"

"S-Sorry. Th-They're just really cute."

Ah, that's what this is about. Now that Olea had evolved, they were cute in a whole new way. It was only understandable.

"And their name..."

"Heh. So you noticed? That's right, this is my Olive Treant, Olea, newly evolved!"

"Trrrr!"

"I knew it! I thought so! This is a bomb on par with gnomes...!"

Alyssa started mumbling under her breath, but that wasn't new behavior for her. I was starting to think Alyssa just had a habit of organizing information by muttering it to herself.

"Can I keep going?"

"O-Of course."

"It's not a regular evolution, so first I'll explain the circumstances leading up to it."

"P-Please do. We've gotten some information about it, but it hasn't been confirmed naturally."

"You have?"

"There have been eyewitness reports of Olea on the forums. Things are already blowing up there."

So, people were writing about Olea on the forums. But that was hardly surprising.

“Ah right, because they’re a tree nymph.”

I had heard that tree nymphs, which were super rare, were popular among tamers.

“You hear that, Olea? You’re a super popular adorable tree nymph!”

“Tiiii,” Olea said bashfully, like they were saying “Aw shucks, little ol’ me?” *So cute! I’m taking a screenshot!*



“S-So they really are a tree nymph.”

“Yeah.”

What I wanted to know was where that information originated from in the first place, and how it had already spread so much. From the customers at my unmanned stand? Actually, the area around my farm was also starting to bustle with more people recently, so it wasn't that strange that someone had seen something.

Also, Olea was super adorable as a tree nymph, so they must have attracted attention. Even just the fact that they were a rare monster would make them coveted by many. It made sense that the tamer boards would be blowing up. I was scared to find out what they were writing, but as long as I didn't look, it wouldn't affect me. Moreover, the fact that people were getting excited over this meant that this information would be worth a lot. It was looking promising that I would be able to earn some money for the auction.

“It all started with the quest chain.”

“Huh?!”

“Something wrong?”

“N-No. I just wasn't expecting the quest chain to be a part of this.”

“Oh yeah, I get it.”

Even I had thought that the quest chain had ended when I'd learned Botany.

“So at Red Town—” I continued, giving Alyssa a rundown of everything that had happened. I explained how I had run into Toraus while exploring Red Town and how that led to me accepting a request from Capri, which then led to me making enchanted fertilizer and plant booster. I also explained how, while I was making that, I had discovered new fertilizer and plant booster recipes, then used them in combination with Rick's Forest Sorcery to evolve Olea.

“I almost picked Elemental Treant, but the tree nymph sounded really appealing. Olea preferred that one too.”

Once I was finished explaining, Alyssa showed no reaction. She just listened in that same commander pose from earlier. To be fair, she usually stayed quiet

while she was listening to me tell her information, so she was probably just concentrating on what I was saying. I kept going, giving her more information.

“Here’s Olea’s data, and here’s a screenshot of the evolution routes. Pretty cool, right?”

“...”

Alyssa was still silent. Maybe she was trying to fully embody the commander.

“Also, as you can see, I got pink apple and navy blue mandarin saplings, which grant some effects. And here are the apple and mandarin saplings. They’re miscellaneous trees, so I don’t think they have any effects, but they’d make a pretty good snack, don’t you think?”

“...”

Huh? Was this not surprising to her at all? Wait, was this already-known information?

“Oh, and I want to tell Tsugarun about the apples too, so sorry in advance about that. I’ll make sure to tell him not to leak the info, though.”

“...”

I finished telling her about all the information I had obtained from the quest chain. Oh, and when I explained the spirit’s fruit, I naturally segued into talking about the items my monsters had made for the auction. That was useless information, but I hoped she’d let it slide. I just got carried away while I was talking.

I was also feeling a little self-conscious that Alyssa wasn’t saying a single word, so I’d ended up rambling a little. Be that as it may, once I’d talked about everything, I realized it was extremely meaty content. *I can expect a good payout from this, right?*

“So, it sounds like I’m going to be able to meet with Sagitta, an NPC tamer, in a short while, so once I get more information from him, I’ll come back.”

“...”

“Alyssa?”

Hello? Really, no reaction at all? She was starting to take this role-playing a little too far.

“...”

“Um, Earth to Alyssa?”

“...”

“What, are you frozen? Did you get forcibly logged out, and your avatar just got left behind? Really?”

Had something happened to her real body? She wasn't moving at all. And she wasn't breathing? Oh right, this was a game, so not breathing was normal. *Crap, I don't know what to do!* In a panic, I reached out to touch Alyssa's shoulder. It was then that it happened.

“Alyssa—”

“WAAAAAAAAAAH!”

“Ahhhhhh!”

“I wasn't expecting this at aaall!”

There it is again!

She dropped her commander pose and screeched out of nowhere! I was so startled that I fell backward and let out a pathetic screech of my own! Even Alyssa fell backward, chair and all! What was with all this chaos?!

“Whoa, Alyssa! Are you okay?!”

“No, I'm not okay!” Alyssa shouted, thrashing her arms and legs in the air from the spot she'd fallen over. *She seems fine.* Man, that really caught me off guard.

“I did my research, I raised the funds, I thought I was fully prepared! I was so ready to tell him all calm and cool that it was no problem, that it was all according to script!”

Alyssa had started out shouting, but then her voice got quieter and quieter until she was muttering something to herself that I couldn't quite catch.

“Even the verification team, the farmers alliance, the tamer clans invested

money in anticipation of him dropping another bomb, but it's still not enough! Tack on the 3.5 million we still owe him and... Graaah!"

"Umm?"

"But with information like this, we can get backing from even bigger groups! We should get it back instantly anyway, so it won't take long to pay back our loan! We need to do whatever it takes to make money before the auction!"

Is she okay? Alyssa's eyes looked a little vacant. Even if I knew she was role-playing each time, her acting looked so realistic that I couldn't help but get worried.

"Alyssa?"

"Hee. Hee hee hee. How embarrassing. Sorry about that."

"Oh, it's fine. As long as you're okay."

She rebooted, thankfully. I was sensing some intensity, though. She wasn't mad, was she?

"So, about payment. I won't be able to pay you the full sum at once."

"Ah, I figured."

Even I was aware of how great this information was. I'd already been expecting her to pay me in installments. She proposed a similar system of payment that we'd done before, where she'd pay me ten percent of their sales from this information. I was shocked to hear that the minimum guaranteed sum would be ten million.

"Wha?"

"Like I said, the minimum guaranteed sum is ten million. Oh, and I'll pay you the 3.5 million we still owe you ASAP."

"Uh, sorry but, ten million?"

"At the minimum. You'll definitely get much more than that."

"Seriously?"

"Seriously. Information about the quest chain, fertilizer and plant booster, mandarins and apples, the treant's evolution, how to use Forest Sorcery, and

even the items you're putting up for sale at the auction... Yup. This is a headache for sure, but it's no problem. No problem at all."

"I-I'll leave it all to you. I don't mind what you do, I'm happy just being paid."

"Definitely leave it to us. Hee hee hee. We'll see this through to the end."

"G-Good luck."

"Yeah! I got this!"

Alyssa's fired up! With that enthusiasm, I was confident she'd be able to sell this information to many people. If she came through with the money before the auction, that'd be perfect.

Jeez, ten million... Players had more money these days, so I guess that raised the price of information by a lot too.

"Wahoooooooo! That's what I call a great deal!"

Management's POV Right Before the Auction

"*Siiigh...* Can some super genius programmer suddenly appear someday and take over all my work for me...?"

"What are you mumbling about over there? Trying to dump all your work on someone else? No amount of escapism is going to make your work go down."

"You're so harsh, Chief. This work is never-ending."

"Who's this super genius programmer you keep talking about anyway?"

"Just something I read in a VR novel yesterday. It was about a genius who created and operated a whole VR game by themselves. I wish they'd take over my job too."

"I only read high fantasy, history, and mystery novels. What's fun about reading a book about a VR game when you're a VR developer?"

"It's very interesting. I recommend it."

"How can a lone programmer handle developing and managing on their own in the first place? So they handle the entire business side of things, and respond

to customer complaints? Impossible. Though, I suppose that's why they're called a genius? Sounds more like a superhuman to me, but it would be nice to have someone like that around. Wait, no it wouldn't. Then the rest of us would be sacked!"

"Don't come to that conclusion on your own, please. Besides, the genius doesn't deal with customer complaints. They just ignore them all. In fact, there aren't any complaints, because the genius's game is perfect."

"As long as people are playing, there will be complaints. Some people play games just to complain about them. That's the only thing they find enjoyment in. Terribly sad creatures, they are."

"Please don't take this so seriously. It's just a fictional story."

"Sure, sure. So? What other stories do you read? Read any books that teach you a thing or two?"

"No, I just read as a form of relaxation, I don't think about things that hard... And the technological capabilities are different from our world anyway."

"Ah, I see. So it's a futuristic setting."

"That's right. They're all about worlds where one person can make a VR game, after all. Most of them have highly advanced technology, like being able to manipulate emotions, and having all NPCs equipped with sophisticated AI. They're set in the near future."

"Manipulating emotions sounds like it could be used for nefarious purposes. But as technology develops, that might be a problem we have to confront ourselves one day... Very profound."

"Personally, I'm more interested in all NPCs having highly sophisticated AI. I wish we could do that."

"We're blocked by budget on that one."

"Oh, cruel world!"

"What are the stories about?"

"That depends on the book... One that I found interesting was about a game that had poor balance at first, and then the story describes the process of fixing

it.”

“So balance issues are a problem even in the future, eh? I know it’s just a work of fiction, but I can really sympathize with that.”

“Well yes, it’s not as if the person who wrote it is an evolved human.”

“Compared to when I was a kid, these days seem pretty futuristic, but the one thing that doesn’t change is people complaining. In the end, creators and consumers alike are human beings... Before long, maybe even LJO will get reviews like ‘Do these damn devs even know what the world balance means?! I’m giving one star because it’s the lowest I can go, but I wish I could leave a negative star review! It’s not worth playing! Give me back my time and money!’ God, I hope not.”

“That was oddly specific.”

“I’ve been a developer for a while. I’ve been through a lot.”

“P-Please don’t glare at me like that!”

“Ah, sorry. I was just thinking of my old boss.”

“Were they difficult to work for?”

“They weren’t a bad person, but...they went a little overboard sometimes. They’d mess with the balance on the whim, and then we’d get a flood of complaints because of that. Rather than wanting to fix the balance, it was more like they enjoyed getting themselves worked up. They had made a hit game, and the next one ended up getting terrible reviews. They didn’t learn their lesson, but I’m actually a little jealous of that. Maybe that type of person could be called a genius.”

“Wow... They must have been hard to be around. Please don’t ever change, Chief.”

“I’d like to be that way if I could, but I can’t. I’m just an ordinary man whose stomach starts hurting the second he hears a complaint.”

“That’s fine! Besides, LJO has surprisingly low negative feedback, doesn’t it?”

“Yeah. We do get some, but not as much as other games. That’s probably thanks to our stringent policy against PK, stealing, and harassment. On the

other hand, we get complaints about the game being too easy and suspicions that some of the standout players are cheating.”

“That’s true, we do get the occasional complaint about Silver-Haired and the top players, saying they’re receiving favorable treatment and need to be nerfed.”

“In their cases, that’s due to player skill and just plain luck. It can also be attributed to their unconventional actions, which isn’t exactly something we can control.”

“No amount of fine-tuning of the balance will do anything about that.”

“I wish I could just tell them to interact with NPCs more, explore as many areas as they can, and learn any unusual skills.”

“At least for now, we do plan to increase the number of titles, so it will become easier to get both general and unique titles...”

“But that means Silver-Haired will keep accelerating...”

“Besides that, there are also some who claim his gnome is unfairly capable.”

“How is that a complaint? I suppose in Silver-Haired’s case, his gnome has the highest favorability score by a mile. His action restrictions have been largely eased now, right?”

“Right. Even among the NPCs, they should possess knowledge equivalent to a mid-level farmer. It would be no exaggeration to say that at the way he’s progressing, he’ll be on the same level as the top NPC farmers. Furthermore, Silver-Haired’s tree nymph also has a high favorability score.”

“In exchange, though, their combat AI hasn’t improved much at all compared to other tamers’.”

“We never expected a tamer to be so partial to crafting when the game first launched... Add together a tamer’s monster’s AI development, an inclination for crafting, and a very high favorability score, and you get a monster on the level of advanced crafters.”

“It’s clear he’s hooked on that playing style...”

“But I do understand the other players’ feelings to a degree. Silver-Haired

never changes.”

“Right, that. I can’t believe he already found the way to evolve a treant into a tree nymph so early into the game... We might as well expect players to start clambering for sorcery-related things, huh?”

“Many players are already on the move looking for that. The sorcerer job class hasn’t been unlocked yet, so at this stage, the only possibility is finding an NPC sorcerer.”

“Besides that, I guess they can go for the talismans in the auction? We planned to have some sorcery circles up for auction this time around, right?”

“Yes. Those will surely see a sharp rise in price.”

“We’ll have another commotion to deal with...”

“And more complaints.”

“Should we just go ahead and *actually* give Silver-Haired preferential treatment and cause a little chaos? He’d be unstoppable with official cheating!”

“Ha ha ha, that *would* be pretty interesting.”

“...”

“...”

“...*Sigh*. Back to work?”

“...Hmm, yeah.”

“We’re not geniuses or anything, so all we can do is give it our all working overnight.”

“Please don’t cry, Chief.”

“I guess we won’t be going home today... Just when my daughter was finally starting to talk to me again thanks to Silver-Haired!”

“Silver-Haired was also partially responsible for you not being able to go home. Weren’t you the one who decided we should accelerate implementing the system that makes certain auction items featured items based on how much attention they get from NPCs?”

“Look, that was necessary to prevent mass chaos! I didn’t think Silver-Haired would submit items to the auction at the last second!”

“Well, the players who can’t enter the auction hall will probably riot.”

“Feature items can be bid on from any auction hall, which will hopefully bring down the number of complaints a little.”

“It won’t.”

“I suppose you’re right. There will be people who get mad just because they didn’t make a winning bid...”

“H-Hey now, getting down about it won’t fix anything... L-Let’s just finish up getting everything in order! Okay?”

“Yeah, you’re right...”

“Oh...but...”

“Wh-What? What is it?”

“We’re making it so an NPC is going to obtain one of the featured items, right?”

“Yeah. The NPCs will be bidding at adjustable prices, but they’re guaranteed to make a successful bid on one item. It should be based on the internal data of the item’s magic power, the NPC’s degree of attention, and its relation to the divine spirit.”

“Isn’t there someone who has gotten so much attention from NPCs that it’s almost laughable?”

“Ah! Oh no! It’s going to be Silver-Haired!”

“Yes. It’s definite that one of Silver-Haired’s auction items is going to be taken by the NPC.”

“Th-There’ll be riots...”

“L-Let’s think of a solution, shall we?”

“...I knew it! Another all-nighter! Gaaah!”



Right after I logged in, I quickly finished up some farmwork, went back home, and opened up my status window from under my kotatsu.

“Auction day! Let’s do this!”

“Ya!”

Mamori was sitting on my lap, inspecting the window with great interest as I checked out the auction page. It was exciting enough just to see all the different items listed for sale, so I could understand why Mamori found this fun too.

“I’m selling items too this time, so I’ll be busy.”

“Ya-ya.”

Mamori gave me a thumbs-up, looking smug. What was that about? Was that her way of wishing me luck?

“Let me know if there’s anything you want. I’ll bid on it.”

“Ya?”

“Oh, but nothing too expensive, okay?”

“Ya!”

That said, I did have a lot of funds at my disposal. Thanks to all the running around trying to earn money I had done the day before, I now had over twenty million on hand. I was not expecting to make out with so much. Eighteen million of that had come from Alyssa. She really must have worked hard to make that happen, but was she okay? Her eyes had looked lifeless. The Quick-Eared Cats were a big clan, though, so they should be fine.

Additionally, I earned another three million myself, bringing the total to twenty-one million. That three million seemed like nothing in comparison to eighteen million, but I still thought it was pretty impressive that I’d raised three million on my own.

I put my nose to the grindstone fulfilling requests and restocking items at my unmanned stand. Even though I set the prices at my unmanned stand high, the items still sold surprisingly well—a testament to how much more money everyone had these days, I had to guess. Actually, things had sold out even faster than usual yesterday. *I wonder why? More rich people around?*

But if everyone was rich these days, that meant I had some formidable rivals to compete with at the auction today. I needed to psych myself up.

I had already checked the items I wanted. Since the auction was held at the same time across several servers, if an item that I wanted overlapped in timing with another, I had no choice but to choose between them. Incidentally, I had created a timetable where I wrote down all the times the items I wanted were going up for auction. Planning this out was also part of the fun. I probably wouldn't follow this plan exactly, but I still wanted to visit as many auction halls as I could.

"But first, I'll check the online auction."

"Ya!"

The auction that took place at auction halls started from 1 p.m., but the online auction, which lasted the whole day, had already started. Players could bid on items in the online auction from anywhere in the game, so I wanted to check out the noteworthy items before going to the regular auction.

"Heh heh. There are even more items up for auction than last time."

"Ya?"

"Look how many potions there are. There are a lot of low-quality ones too."

"Ya-ya."

I figured a lot of people were putting items they had made to level up their skills for sale because they had no other use for them. Some of these items were also probably made by second-wave players who were still low-level crafters.

When I sorted the display to show all the potions, I saw there were over eight thousand of them. If it weren't for the sort function, it'd be a huge pain in the neck just to find what I was looking for. What I wanted were ingredients, crops, and monster eggs. The online auction was filled with cheaper goods, though, so I wasn't expecting to find any high-quality monster eggs here.

For crops, I was ideally looking for something that was unknown, was made by a player, and could be propagated. Again, I had low expectations for finding

something like that in the online auction. All the good stuff was going to be at the in-person auction. Still, plenty of players were checking the online auction in hopes of finding some good bargains, just as I was. But I mean, who *wasn't* a fan of this sort of treasure hunt? Items submitted the day of were directed to the online auction, so there was a real possibility some treasure was just waiting to be found.

I spent the next two hours looking through items and placing bids. There were a few unexpected things that caught my interest, like some landscape paintings someone had made for practice. They were cheap anyway, and if I won them, I could put them up in my house.

“All right, guess I should get going.”

The auction hall system changed slightly with each auction. The devs took player feedback into account to make some small updates. This time around, players weren't able to bring their mascots or tamed monsters around with them in an attempt to increase the processing speed of the servers.

Special auction items called “featured items” had also been added. Nothing about that had been included in the pre-update announcement, but...I guess it was just a surprise from the devs.

Items that had fulfilled certain special conditions were considered featured products, and they would be bid on in a special auction after all the other auctions were over. The featured items could be bid on from anywhere, just like with the all-day online auction. Then, the top three hundred players who bet the highest would then be invited to the special auction. Also, players could only participate in auctions for items they had previously bid on. Though a stream of the inside of the hall would be broadcast outside, so anyone would be able to watch.

Shockingly, every single item I had submitted for the auction was made a featured item. I got the message from the devs that morning, which had left me in a daze for a while. What exactly were those special conditions?

If it was the quality or rarity of the items, there had to be other items on the same level as mine, and items made by monsters weren't all that rare nowadays. I really didn't get it. The message from the devs didn't give any

details about the conditions either.

Moreover, the benefits and drawbacks were unclear. After all, this was the first time featured items were implemented, so both the sellers and the bidders were going in blind on this.

“Well, even in the worst case that we don’t sell anything, it’s not like our items will vanish, so I don’t mind. What I want to focus on right now is the regular auction. I’ll leave the rest to you.”

“Ya-ya.”

“Tri-triii.”

I tasked Mamori and Olea to be the tiny supervisors on the home front while I teleported to one of the auction halls. I heard some sort of clacking sound behind me—was that Mamori striking flint? How old school! As a Zashiki-Warashi should be!

While the auction was going on, players could freely teleport to the auction halls from their status windows. That was, as long as the auction hall they wanted to go to wasn’t full.

“Yup. Auction Hall No. 13. That’s the one.”

It looked like most were full, but I managed to get into one of them. As I was looking around to see if I saw any familiar faces, the auction started.

“The auction will now begin!”

This auctioneer’s voice sounded more smooth and even compared to the first auction I attended. Also, this time, they did away with the show of carrying out the auction items. Instead, a picture and the data of the product was displayed on a window in front of me. This must have been to simplify things as a whole to reduce the strain on the server. As long as I could bid on things without issue, I had no complaints.

“What I want is that fourth item.”

The first item I bid on was a monster playset. This was made by a famous crafting clan, and it came with a slide, jungle gym, monkey bars, seesaw, and a swing set. Each piece was also being sold separately, and there were others put

up for sale by other clans, but I wanted this one the most. It looked cute with its primary colors, and it looked sturdily made.

I was especially interested in that swing set. The size automatically adjusted to whoever was using it, so it was usable by anyone big or small. That way, both Fau and Bear Bear could use it. I wanted to install it in my garden and let my monsters play on it.

“The bidding starts at 500,000 G!”

All right, time to bid! As the price started to gradually rise, I bumped things up to 2,000,000 G. This was kind of bad manners, but I wanted to show that I wasn’t willing to back down. After I made my bid, there was a short bidding war with a few other players, but in the end, I won the item at 2,600,000 G.

“Phew. That’s one thing done.”

Woo-hoo! What a score! I could already imagine my monsters’ delight.

“This is a promising start!”

Time to keep up this momentum for the next item. The playset wasn’t the only item I wanted to bid on in this hall. There was another home object I had my eye on.

“Hmm?”

Am I being stared at? I looked around, and the players who’d been looking in my direction quickly averted their eyes. They really *were* staring at me.

“Umm...?”

To be fair, I knew I wasn’t exactly an unknown character. It wasn’t too out of the ordinary that I’d get some stares, considering I had a unique title. But was I really getting *this* much attention even without my monsters with me? No, it couldn’t be.

That was when it hit me. People must have realized that I had made that expensive, successful bid just now. I hadn’t done it consciously, but I must have made an obvious reaction. It wasn’t that they had realized I was that Silver-Haired Pioneer guy, but the one who had placed the winning bid. That was why they had been staring at me.

Come to think of it, wasn't there an option I could've enabled to hide my face? Once again, I had forgotten. Though I guess it wasn't a huge deal; it wasn't like being stared at was a problem.

After a five-minute wait, the next item I'd come here for went up for auction.

"Now, onto the next item! A Large Canal! The bidding starts at 200,000 G!"

Displayed on my window was a canal that could be installed on a home base or farm. This item was being sold by an NPC. The canal that could be constructed on your base in any way you wanted, and could be up to two hundred meters long. You could pick from a variety of styles, and there were some fancy options like a Roman aqueduct or a brickwork style.

It was for my monsters and mascots that I had my eye on this item. My aquatic mascots, like the sea otters and the great white shark, could already move between the water installations on my home base. They even showed up in the disconnected locations, like ponds. However, the ponds and other water features were mostly located along the edges of my property, making it difficult for them to play with everyone else. If I added canals along the pathways around my house and my farm, then even the sea otters and the shark could have more playmates.

Incidentally, the mother sea otter's name was Bianca, since she was white, and the baby sea otter had a lot of brown areas, so I named them Cocoa. The great white shark's name was Jawson.

The natural food chain didn't come into play even when they were swimming in the same aquarium. In fact, they seemed like friends. *Good thing this is a game!*

"All right, time to place my bid."

Several people had already bid on the item, but this time I decided to sit back and watch for a bit, then I raised the bid by 100,000 to a total of 900,000. If I bid at a high price every time, people would start to get ticked off at me.

However, no one bid after me. I thought there'd be a little more competition... It was like everyone besides me had just bid on the off chance they'd get it. Or maybe they could sense my determination? Either way, I was

happy I had won it at a low price.

“All right, I got what I wanted here. On to the next place.”

I used my window to teleport to the next auction hall. Miraculously, I had arrived right when the bidding started on the item I wanted. If I had arrived any later, I would’ve missed it.

“The bidding starts at 100,000 G!”

The item was an Olive Treant Sapling, and it was a unique specimen at that. But this time, instead of evolving it into a tree nymph, I wanted to evolve it into another treant so it could manage the farm. As a unique specimen, it would have even better management abilities than Olea.

As I was getting my hopes up, the price for the Olive Treant Sapling surged at an unbelievable speed.

Three million G...? Just when I thought it couldn’t go past 2,500,000 G, the price shot up in an instant. And people were still bidding on it.

Although it’d take some time, it wasn’t something that was impossible for me to get with my own efforts, and I couldn’t exactly keep up with the competition beyond this point.

In the last auction, a rare monster egg had gone for 500,000 G, so I thought this sapling wouldn’t go much over one million... Apparently, players had even *more* money than I had been expecting.

Ultimately, a man who looked like the farmer won the item at 3,900,000 G. Funnily enough, several other people were celebrating his win too. Were they his friends? Maybe a party of farmers had joined up to win that item. Treants were useful, so it made sense why any farmer would want one.

“Oh well. Time to move on.”

The item I wanted in the next auction hall was something spectacular. It was called the Fire Sorcery Circle. As the name implied, it allowed the user to perform fire sorcery, which was an astonishing feat.

This clearly had to be the fire version of Forest Sorcery. It was a onetime-use item, but it seemed interesting. If I used it right, maybe I could get another

special evolution or a useful item.

Unfortunately, things didn't go the way I planned this time either. Someone bid on the item for a staggering 3,000,000 G. As interesting as the item sounded, three million seemed pretty steep for a consumable item that I didn't even know how to use... I had no choice but to give up yet again.

The next sorcery-related items I wanted all ended up skyrocketing in price too, making it impossible for me to place a winning bid on any of them.

"Grrr. Why's sorcery so popular?!"

Why was this happening...?!

"Gah! I-Is this *my* fault?"

The information I sold the Cats about using Forest Sorcery to evolve Olea—had the prices for sorcery-related items soared because the Cats had spread that information? That must have been why the Olive Treant Sapling got such a high bid too! *Ahhh! It's all my fault!*

But if I hadn't sold that information, I would have really been short on money... Besides, if other players used a bunch of sorcery items, that would lead to more interesting information becoming available. I decided to look forward to that. *So, I have no regrets!*

Furthermore, even though I hadn't obtained any sorcery-related items, there was still something on my radar. And that was background music for my home base.

LJO generally had no background music. It wasn't exactly silent, but it was more like the natural sounds were the background music. Players could set up their own background music that they alone could hear, but most people didn't set up any music outside of their home bases, since it could interfere with alertness and detection.

Instead, there were plenty of options for background music for homes. There were even over one hundred different free options, from RPG-like sounds to sound effects. Included among those was also music that was a bit out of season, like New Year's and Christmas music.

On top of that, there was music you could buy with real-world money, and music sold by a handful of musician players, bringing the total number of songs to over one thousand.

What I wanted was a collection called *Assorted Traditional Dance Music*, which included radio calisthenic music, Bon Odori music, and other types of festival music. My monsters and mascots loved dancing. They even did radio calisthenics every single morning. I was sure they'd be happy to have this type of music.

The radio calisthenic music was also sold separately, but this pack included music that didn't seem to be regularly available, which was why I wanted it.

"There are still three other items before that, though."

A lot of music-related items were also being put on sale at this auction hall, but from this point on, they would be focusing on sound generators for background music and vocal performances. I wasn't competing against everyone here, was I? I wasn't sure what I'd do if I came out a loser again...

While I was waiting, my heart beating in anticipation, the auction hall erupted into noise. Apparently, bidding had started on an item that many players wanted. It wasn't something I wanted, so I hadn't been listening to the announcement.

"What is it? A special collaboration album?"

Amazingly, a real-world singer rising to stardom was releasing a new album in the real world in four days, and that very same album was being sold in advance within the game.

"Uhhh, what was their name again?"

Yeesh. Not being able to immediately recall the name of a singer popular among high schoolers was the sign of a middle-aged man! *B-But I-I'm not middle-aged, so it'll come to me soon!*

"Th-That's right. It's Tetsuko, right?"

The name reminded me of trains, but of course that had nothing to do with her; she was a pop singer whose music had some metal influences. Her fans

must have gathered in this hall to get that item. But still, their fervor was astounding. Actually, not just their fervor—the price of the item was also reaching absurdly high.

The bidding had started at 100,000, and in no time at all, it was over 4,000,000. Players were probably prohibited from duplicating the album, and it surely came with a restriction that only allowed the purchaser to listen to it, but still...

For a fan, I supposed it was worth it to sink any amount of money to listen to the album first, even if it was coming out in just four days. I myself had once spent a good chunk of my part-time job earnings on a band I was obsessed with when I was a student, so I understood their feelings.

“I think I’ve heard this song in a commercial.”

Ultimately, someone won the record for 4,400,000 G, and little by little, most of the crowd vanished. They were probably moving on to find the other copies being put up for auction in the other halls. There were supposedly ten other records being sold. *Good luck, fans.*

The auction continued as other players filtered in. Then, the item I had been waiting for took the stage. The bidding started at 50,000 G. There were a few sporadic bids, but the price didn’t increase that much. The songs themselves weren’t exactly remarkable, and it could only be listened to on a home base, so it must not have been very desirable.

I ended up easily getting it for 150,000.

“All right, the next thing I want is a collection of sheet music with twenty songs for lute.”

It was a collection of sheet music being sold by a Bard player. The songs didn’t provide any special effects—it was just purely sheet music of songs they had composed in the game.

What use did they have, you might ask? Well, Fau would like it—that was pretty much it. With this sheet music, she could learn some new songs. Apparently, giving monsters that knew musical performance skills music-related items would increase their favorability score. Also, Fau expanding her repertoire

would make things a lot more livelier. That alone made it worth it. It was important to keep every day full of enrichment.

“This ended up not being expensive, predictably.”

The fact that it was for the lute specifically probably cut down the number of people who would want it. Only two other people had participated in bidding on it. They bid on it a few times, but in the end, I won it at 200,000 G.

“With that, I’ve won four items...”

I wasn’t sure if getting four out of the twelve was a lot or not. But I still had a lot of funds left over. Maybe it was time for me to get a little bolder?

But despite my determination, I wasn’t able to win any other item I was aiming for.

“A Sacred Tree, sorcery-related items, and passing time paint were all a bust... All I got was an unknown seed from an NPC farmer.”

It was a truly unknown seed—I didn’t even know what it was crossbred with. It was so much of a gamble that even farmers had hesitated bidding on it. No one had jumped in to compete with me with much enthusiasm.

Also, I had sort of let my boldness get the better of me and I bid high over the asking price—I bought the unknown seed for 200,000 G. I would know if I had overpaid after I grew it.

At some point, some items that seemed related to yokai were put up for auction. I was kind of interested, but I ended up not bidding on them. I’d caught sight of Hamakaze sitting just a little further ahead of me triumphantly placing her bid. It wasn’t exactly a bad thing to do, but I felt awkward about bidding on an item that someone I knew wanted. Besides, I could always contact Hamakaze if I wanted to ask her about what she thought of the item.

“All right, I’m getting the next item for sure. No matter how much it goes for.”

I hadn’t been able to win most of the items I had wanted, so I decided this time I would pull out all the stops.

I started by bidding on a curious item called Tamed Monster’s Awakening. It was categorized as a jewel, but I had no idea how to use it. The cryptic

description just stated that it would awaken a tamed monster's power.

My guess was that it powered up the tamed monster of a command-type job class, but... This turned out to be a much more popular item than I'd expected it to be. Summoners and Necromancers must have also put in bids on it, not just Tamers. I even saw Chris and Sakkyun here. *But I wouldn't let them have this!*

"Sold! For 5,350,000 G!"

Phew. I had a feeling I'd gone a little overboard, but I was satisfied. I still had more than 10,000,000 G on hand anyway. I was excited to see what this item could do.

"All right, now what should I do...? Should I bid on more items, or bid on a featured product?"

There were a total of twenty featured products. Half of those were being sold by NPCs, and there were a lot of interesting items. The problem was the prices were sure to soar. I wasn't sure if I'd be able to make a winning bid, even with all the money I had.

My options were between trying for multiple items in the regular and online auctions, or focusing my efforts on one featured product. Plenty of other players must've been grappling with the same dilemma.

"Okay, I've decided. I'll go for the featured product."

I was interested in one of the items—an amazing-looking incubator put up for sale by an NPC. I placed a starting bid of 5,000,000 G on the incubator. Then, I went home. If I stayed at the auction hall, I knew I'd probably waste my money buying something there. Besides, I needed to check on the online auction before the special auction.

As soon as I slipped under the kotatsu, Mamori came running over. She tried to jump right onto my lap, but a pair of obstacles were blocking her way.

"Kee-hee!"

"Trrrr-trrrr!"

"Ya-ya!"

Those obstacles were Lilith and Olea. Apparently they also wanted to sit on

my lap—they were pulling Mamori on either side. I had three cuties fighting to sit on my lap. *Look at me, Mr. Popular.*

“Hey now, don’t fight. Why don’t you just take turns?”

“Ya!”

“Kee-hee.”

“Tiiii.”

It was Mamori’s turn first, apparently. The other two stood on either side of me and looked at the window.

“Wow, the prices have gone up a lot.”

“Ya-ya.”

I checked on the items I had bid on. Most of them had increased dramatically in price. It seemed like everyone really did have their eyes on items with names related to eggs or sorcery. Meanwhile, the items that hadn’t increased in price that much were the paintings. The landscape paintings were still at 20,000 G, and the ink wash paintings were at 10,000 G.

Also, interestingly enough, I found a calligraphy scroll, with letters written in incredibly dynamic letters. So much so that it was illegible.

“What’s this say? It looks pretty impressive, so I wouldn’t mind having it...”

“Kee-hee!”

“You like it, Lilith?”

“Kee-hee.”

This item seemed to have struck a chord with Lilith. Her eyes were twinkling as she gazed at the calligraphy.

“Kee-hee! Kee-hee-hee!”

“All right, I get it. I’ll bid on it. You can stop shaking my shoulders now.”

“Kee-hee-hee!”

If she wanted it that badly, then I had no choice but to bid on it. But seriously, what was written on this thing?

I read its description, and strangely enough, it said “Ain’t Afraid of No Sunlight.” Was the person who made this a fan of Drimo? Nah, there was probably another Drimole around. An Earth Dragon egg was sold at the first auction, as I recalled, so I wouldn’t be surprised if that had hatched too.

Well, even if they weren’t a Drimo fan, it was obvious the creator liked Drimoles. It would look great displayed in an alcove.

The same creator made other calligraphy scrolls, like Animal Trail, Long Live the Spirit, and Back from the Dead Game.

“Hmm, these are all good.”

“Tiiii!”

“Is that your pick, Olea?”

“Tiiii-tiiii!”

Long Live the Spirit, eh? Did they point it out because they understood what it said? Mamori also started pushing for the one that had apparently caught her interest, the Back from the Dead Game.

“Poko.”

“Oh, hey Kettle. Thanks.”

“Poko!”

Kettle, our household’s tea server, offered me some Japanese tea. Kettle stayed by my side, looking over my shoulder at the screen.

“Anything catch your interest?”

“Poko.”

“The Animal Trail...?”

It looked like everyone really did understand what the calligraphy said. That made me a little worried about Mamori’s tastes.

“All right, I guess I’ll bid on all of them.”

“Ya-ya!”

“Poko!”

Mamori and Kettle mainly stayed at home, so I wanted to decorate the place with the things they liked. As I continued to scroll down the screen, another interesting item popped up.

“Is this bamboo for nagashi somen?”

“Trrrr?”

“This right here. You pour in water and the somen flows down it.”

“Kee-hee?”

Occasionally my monsters and mascots displayed some mystifying knowledge, but it seemed they didn’t know what nagashi somen was.

Would everyone have fun using this? Honestly, this was probably something we could make ourselves, but I wanted to express my respect to the creator for having the idea to make this. I needed to pay for it as a way to give back. Then I could copy it.

“I’m bidding on this too.”

“Trrrr-trrrr!”

“Kee-hee!”

After I was done with that, Lilith and Olea got their turns to sit on my lap while Kettle brewed a fresh pot of tea and I bid on several more items.

I bid on a handkerchief with a tanuki design, which Kettle had liked, and an accessory with a skull motif that Lilith wanted. I also bid on pruning shears Olea begged for, a brazier Himka wanted, a deer scare that Reflet had pointed at with sparkling eyes, and a pinwheel toy that Eine was interested in.

I’d feel bad not buying anything for my other monsters, so I went ahead and bought their favorite foods. They weren’t that expensive, so it wasn’t a big deal.

“Two landscape paintings, two ink wash paintings, four calligraphy scrolls, a nagashi somen set, an assortment of knickknacks and ten home goods, some materials from Zone Ten, and food for my monsters. That’s quite a haul.”

It cost me a total of 1,500,000 G.

Wait, now that I stopped to think, that was kind of expensive! Since my

finances had increased overnight, my money sense was all messed up. Apparently I was the type to squander my money the second I got hold of a lot of it.

“Ya-ya!”

“Tri-triii!”

“Kee-hee! Kee-hee!”

“Poko pom!”

My monsters and mascots literally started dancing for joy. What I had paid was a small sum if this was how happy they were about it. At this point, the regular auction concluded. Now all that was left was the special auction for the featured products.

“Nice, I got the invitation.”

It’d be pretty sad if I didn’t make it in the top bidders, but that ended up not being an issue.

From here, the bidding would start from the highest bid.

What was I going to do if someone suddenly bid tens of millions of gold? It was a mystery to me just how wealthy people were at the top.

“All right, I’m heading out.”

“Kee-hee!”

“Triii-triii!”

“Poko!”

I tapped the teleport button on the screen, and my body was enveloped in light.

“Ya-ya!”

Oh, there she goes again striking flint. I have a good feeling about things!

Once the light settled down, I found myself in what looked like an auditorium.

“Is this where the special auction is taking place...?”

The venue was constructed similarly to a college lecture hall, with the seats

overlooking a podium in a fan shape and rising in elevation the farther back they went. The decor was ritzy, almost palatial, and there was a giant, glittering chandelier hanging from the ceiling surrounded by European-style fantasy paintings. There were pillars ornamented with gold and silver and a plush, dark-red carpet. The background music, a rare treat in this game, was an orchestral piece.

Most of the players around me appeared as pitch-black silhouettes, like the criminals in a detective anime. Come to think of it, I'd had my face exposed this entire time. *Should I conceal myself now? Actually, nah. I might as well not bother at this point.* It wasn't like keeping my face uncovered gave me any disadvantage anyway.

Something else that got my attention were the NPCs assembled in a special seating area in front of the stage. Surrounded by butler and maids was an NPC in a resplendent outfit. They looked almost like a noble, though I was fairly certain that there was no confirmed information about there being nobility or royalty in this game. The most distinguished NPCs were probably the village chiefs. Was this supposed to be the unveiling of a new class of NPC?

The presence of the noble gave me some pause. They weren't going to participate in the auction, were they? I really didn't feel confident that I could beat an aristocrat when it came to wealth...

As other players also started observing the NPCs, a man appeared onstage. He was wearing a mask that covered only his eyes, and a jester's outfit.

"Greetings, ladies and gentlemen! Thank you for your patience! Welcome to the special auction, where we will be selling only featured items! Without any further ado, let us begin!"

The NPCs started clapping, so the players joined in too. I guess they also functioned as an applause cue. While everyone still looked on, bewildered by the situation, the first item was brought out. It was a powerful sword being sold by an NPC. It was called the Demon Buster, and it had high magic attack power.

Name: Demon Buster

Rarity: 7 Quality: 10 ★ Durability: 720

Effect: Attack +275, Magic +153, pierces through physical immunity, moderate reduction of recoil when using special attack, moderate special efficacy against demons.

Weight: 12

Wasn't seven the highest rarity we had seen so far? Plus, the sword had a ten-star quality, and its abilities were amazing. Negating physical immunities would allow a player to deal damage to ghosts and similar monsters. That alone was powerful enough, but the sword even mitigated one of the main drawbacks of using a special attack, *and* it was especially effective against demons. Demons often made an appearance during events, so we could expect there to be more in the future.

Of course, only a handful of people had acquired a special attack right now, so the number of people who could use this sword was limited. I could see someone getting the sword in anticipation of learning a special attack, though. The conditions for gaining one would circulate eventually, so everyone would have a special attack at some point anyway.

"The bidding starts at 3,200,000 G!"

Featured items are damn expensive! Despite the already hefty sum, the price started rising straightaway. Four million, five million, six million—then finally, when the price went over seven million, it happened.

"9,100,000."

"Oh my, I heard 9,100,000! The next bid will break 10,000,000 G!" the masked auctioneer exclaimed as a commotion swept through the auditorium. But the clamor was to be expected, when believe it or not, it turned out that the one who had bid 9,100,000 G was none other than one of the NPCs. The bid had come from the butler-esque person who was sitting next to the central noble, so he must have been that noble's representative. Since they hadn't bid until that moment, no one had been paying much attention to the group.

No one bid after the butler. Either out of shock, or because they didn't know how deep the NPCs' pockets went, everyone just waited to see what would happen next. Additionally, every subsequent bid had to be raised by at least ten

percent of the prior—like the auctioneer had stated, the next bid had to be at least 10,010,000 G.

“Sold, for 9,100,000 G!”

Were *all* of the featured items set up to be bought by the noble? If that was the case, I wished I had just participated in the regular auction!

The commotion still hadn’t settled down when the second item was carried out. It was a player-made item. And no, it wasn’t mine. It was actually one of Mattsun’s creations, surprisingly enough. It was a pack of super high-quality cigarettes. Not only was the flavor refined, but their effects were also tremendously good. Smoking one of those cigarettes put you in an automatic revival state for a certain amount of time. As you might expect from its name, it was an effect that let you automatically revive when you died. Unlike a revive potion, which was unusable as a solo player, this effect allowed a lone player to avoid having to respawn. It was an insanely good item, but...they were cigarettes.

I didn’t smoke, so I had to pass on them. It seemed like Sawyer was working on developing an auto-revival item anyway, so maybe I could buy that from him. The players who did like to smoke, or who wanted an automatic revival item more than anything in the world, were looking at the item with fire in their eyes.

“This item is called ‘Ten-Pack Pinemark Revival Cigarettes’! The bidding starts at 2,000,000 G!”

Someone had apparently bid 200,000 per cigarette. That was crazy expensive, so I could only imagine that the people bidding must have been smokers or admirers of Mattsun.

Then, the NPCs made their move again.

“We bid 4,550,000.”

They suddenly bumped things up to 4,550,000 G. Now the next bid had to be over 5,000,000 G. No one else bid, so it sold for that amount.

“Sold, for 4,550,000 G!”

Hmm, it looks like the nobles are taking an active part. This was going to make placing a winning bid fairly difficult.

Next up was the third item, another NPC item.

“Next up, the Four Seasons Staff! The bidding starts at 1,200,000 G!”

Name: Four Seasons Staff

Rarity: 7 *Quality: 10* ★ Durability: 780

Effects: Attack +105, Magic +264, minor reduction in magic consumption, moderate increased automatic MP recovery, moderate reduction in recoil when using hidden arts.

Requirements: Intelligence 75

Weight: 7

It was a strong staff, all right. I hadn't checked it out in detail since I couldn't even equip it. *It has a requirement of 75 Intelligence...* Even among the top players, only those who had dumped all their points into their stats would be able to equip it. Matching with its “Four Seasons” name, it was a long, wooden staff painted pink, green, brown, and white. It also had the effect of reducing recoil when using a hidden art.

A hidden art? Is that like a special attack? I'd peeked at the forums, but there wasn't much information about it. The only thing I found was people who had checked out this staff ahead of time hypothesizing that a hidden art was the magic version of a special attack.

I wondered if maybe Holland had obtained a special attack too early, and its existence was actually planned to be first hinted at at this very auction. That would mean Holland had surpassed the devs' expectations. *What a guy.*

But anyway, a hidden art, huh? Could learning one even give someone like me an advantage? I definitely wanted to learn one, if that was the case. There were rumors that special attacks were obtainable in Zone Ten, but I still hadn't made

it that far. Also, Zone Ten was apparently several times larger than other areas, so it still had a lot of unexplored areas. There were likely many secrets waiting to be found there. Once the auction was over, I kind of wanted to try tackling it.

Anyway, back to the Four Season Staff—a player had won it with an astounding bid of 8,000,000 G. Like me, he wasn't hiding his face. When I took a better look, I saw it was Holland's friend, Huey. He was waving his hand at the crowd as they cheered. Maybe he was trying to boost his status as a top player by making himself known. I wish I could show off as smoothly as that without coming across as a jerk.

The fact that Huey was able to shell out eight million on that staff made me wonder if he already knew a hidden art. Or maybe he knew the way to learn one? I'd have to ask him if I ever got the chance.

Anyway, the NPCs were now behaving differently. This time, they had only bid 7,200,000 G. I overheard some other players speculating about how the NPCs might be a way to regulate a minimum buyout price. That would make sense. The NPC items might have been fine without it, but if player items were sold at too low a price, then people might stop participating.

The next item up for auction was another player creation. And yeah, it was mine this time. *It's time for Himka's tableware!*

"This is the next item up for auction! The item is called 'Himka's Tableware Set'! The bidding starts at 3,500,000!"

"Whaaaaa?!"

Did he just say 3.5 million? No way, seriously? I knew it could neutralize poison, but still, it was just a pretty tableware set. It served no use in battle or for crafting. It was just a nice way to decorate a dining table. Don't get me wrong, I'd been hoping it would sell for a decent price since Himka went through great effort to make it, but...three and a half million for tableware? How could that be? That was even higher than the starting bid for Mattsun's cigarettes.

As I was thinking that, the price quickly shot up right before my very eyes. It was unbelievable how fast it was rising.

“Here, 3.9 million!”

“I heard 3.9 million! Do I hear any other offers?”

“I bid 4.4 million!”

“I’ll bid 5.1 million!”

“We bid 5.65 million over here!”

“Dammit! Fine then—”

Things continued to escalate for the next two minutes. In that short bidding time, the hall was filled with a loud clamor punctuated by the occasional shriek. Then finally, the bidding came to a conclusion.

“This item has sold for 19,700,000 G!”

“WHOOOAAA!”

The noise that erupted in the hall was louder than anything that came before it, probably because that was the highest price anything had sold at all day. Even I had joined in on the shouting. *I better praise Himka when I get home. I’ll buy as much of whatever material he wants!*

“Jeez, my heart is racing...”

If I had been using a vital signs monitor, it would have definitely been beeping a warning at me right now. *Man, who knew it’d sell for that much!* Maybe it had some utility value that I just hadn’t realized.

Oh, come to think of it, the nobility hadn’t placed a bid that time. Did the price go up too fast and they didn’t get the chance to bid? Or maybe it was more likely that the starting bid was already above the minimum buyout price?

“Whoops, the next item’s already started.”

I’d been flustered by all the confusion and excitement that the next auction started before I realized. A bow submitted by an NPC was carried out.

Name: Adept Bow

Rarity: 7 Quality: 10★ Durability: 700

Effect: Attack +181, Magic +69, moderate reduction in consumption when using school techniques, quiver (30 arrows), mild increase in nocking speed.

Weight: 14

This one also had a curious effect.

“A school technique?”

Another new word. I peeked on the forums again, but it didn't seem to be well-known. Although, I did read about how there were NPCs in Zone Ten who were using techniques that looked different from regular skills. Some players had requested they be taken on as apprentices, but they were rejected.

However, the NPCs hinted at the possibility of becoming a pupil of their school, which the forums went crazy over. There were a lot of players who wanted to apply to become pupils as soon as possible. I was sure they would discover how to do that.

Ultimately, the Adept Bow was bought by one of the anonymous players for 5,900,000 G. It was really starting to seem like the nobles' role was in fact to regulate the minimum price. They had placed a bid of 5,200,000 on the bow.

I had some mixed feelings about that noble. As a bidder, I wish they'd give me a break, but as an exhibitor, I was really grateful for their presence. They were probably there as a way to prevent players from working together to rig the auction and to stabilize the winning bid amount. On a related note, that incubator I had my eye on... Was the noble going to bid on that? What was the minimum price going to be?

The special auction continued. By this point, we had gone through sixteen items. The noble had snatched up the first two items, but the remaining fourteen had been bought by players. All of the items I submitted had already been sold. Himka's tableware set selling for 19,700,000 G had come as enough of a shock, but the other four items also sold highly. Reflet's tempura-mori soba set sold for 12,000,000 G, Eine's giant stuffed rabbit sold for 18,400,000 G, Olto's spirit's fruit sold for 20,300,000 G, and Sakura's kotatsu sold for a staggering 22,600,000 G.

Hold on, how was this possible? Honestly, never in my wildest dreams would I have expected the kotatsu or the spirit's fruit to sell for over twenty million. They only had a rarity of six! Who in the world would think that was worth more than the weapons sold by NPCs that had a rarity of seven? It seemed even more players than I had been anticipating had had the thought that growing the spirit's fruit would produce a tree nymph. But that wasn't even a definite outcome... But oh well, I was grateful that it had resulted in raising its price. *Just don't complain to me when things don't go as planned, please.*

The player who had won the kotatsu looked familiar to me. I couldn't remember their name, but they were often in front of my farm, shopping at my unmanned stand. They frequently waved at Sakura, so I had figured they must be a Sakura fan...

But even though the kotatsu had a useful effect, that didn't seem enough to buy it for over twenty million gold. Was that a fan psychology thing? In that case, maybe I had been underestimating my monsters' popularity. Evidently, they had some intensely passionate fans far outside of what I had assumed. *My monsters really are the best!* I'd have to give them all a treat later.

Next, finally, the incubator I had been waiting for took the stage.

"Next up for auction is the Awakening Incubator! The bidding starts at 5,000,000 G!"

Ooh. Apparently I had placed the highest initial bid. I had around 10,300,000 G to spend, but would that be enough? I really wasn't expecting it to go over ten million, so I hadn't given it much thought. If only the money I earned from my featured items was given to me right away, then I'd have a surefire chance of winning, but it was clearly specified that we'd receive our earnings after the auction ended. There wasn't anything I could do about it.

Someone placed a bid of 5,500,000 G, so I placed a counterbid of 6,100,000 G. After that, no other players bid. It seemed like the other players going after the incubator had already reached their financial limits. Could I actually win it?

Despite my hopeful thought, the noble wasn't going to let me win that easily.

"I heard 7,300,000 G! Anyone else?"

This was about what I expected. The next thing to look out for was how the other players would react. There might have been someone waiting to bid at the very final moment. That was when I decided to go all in.

“I bid 10,300,000!”

Bidding such a large sum should discourage other players from bidding, I figured. But I wasn’t totally confident of that, seeing how much my own items had sold for...

“I heard 10,300,000! Come on now, is there anyone else who will place a bid?”

A hush fell over the auditorium. Everyone held their breaths, watching and waiting. After a terrifyingly long twenty seconds, the auctioneer raised his voice and said, “The Awakening Incubator has sold for 10,300,000 G!”

“Whoaaa...”

A low murmur rumbled through the auditorium. Some people were wiping sweat from their brows. *Why?* There was also applause. The only other time people applauded was for Huey... Oh, was it because my face was visible? But then again, no one had clapped for the person who had bought Sakura’s kotatsu. Well whatever, I’d just appreciate their congratulations.

I was basically broke now, but I’d be getting 93,000,000 G once the auction was over, so I’d be fine. In fact, I’d be able to upgrade my home even more with that amount. I could also buy some things I needed to reach Zone Ten, and I could even be a little more unrestrained in my use of slightly more expensive items.

People had come up with a plan for crafting classes to get past the bosses in Zones Eight and Nine, a plan which included using a large number of explosives. With 93,000,000 G, that strategy would be no problem for me. It was essentially beating the boss by throwing money at it.

“Next up for auction is this! An English-style home with a garden! The bidding starts at 4,000,000 G!”

Oh right, this thing. I had originally been undecided between the incubator and this. English gardens were amazing, and the white walls of the house also

looked gorgeous. It truly looked like the type of mansion that would be the home of nobility.

Also, just like how I was able to unlock mascots like Dango and Nuts when I chose a Japanese-style home, having that type of home would probably unlock some new mascots as well. That possibility had been very appealing. However, I already had a Japanese-style home, and I was pretty attached to it, so I'd decided to pass up on it this time and take my chances on the incubator instead.

Bids came pouring in for the home. It would have been cheaper just to buy a home regularly, but these players must have had their reasons. Besides, a special home like this also had its own sort of charm!

Eventually, Kokuten won it for 8,000,000 G. I was surprised to see someone I knew. I'd have to ask him to let me come by sometime.

After that, a synthesized magic stone for summoners was sold, which was the final item. But apparently, that wasn't the end.

"Thus concludes the special auction! Thank you all for your participation! Lastly, we'll have a word from our sponsor, Mr. Collector!"

Sponsor? There was a sponsor? I had been wondering why I couldn't open my status window—it was to make sure we witnessed this event. Everyone sat back down in their seats and looked toward the stage as an NPC wearing fancy clothes walked up onto it.

He seemed to be a fashionable man in his forties, wearing a black-and-gold outfit with a cloak and red accessories. Light glinted brightly off his monocle. His blond hair was smoothed back, and he glowered at the audience with a piercing gaze. The sight of the attractive, older man was enough to elicit squeals from some of the female players. His clothes were even fancier than the noble who'd been making those top dollar bids. Was he an even higher-ranking noble?

"My name is Collector. I am a member of the family Guardias, the ones who rule over this continent."

Whoa, he has a great voice! And it was one I had heard before. This NPC was voiced by a voice actor who had been famous since I was a kid. I wouldn't be

surprised if this character became wildly popular among some players. I didn't dislike him so far either.

Plus, he had just dropped a very crucial piece of information, hadn't he? There hadn't been any word about the existence of a royal family yet, and actually nothing about the existence of a nation had been confirmed yet either. Everyone had been assuming that each town was completely independent, but it seemed that wasn't the case. And although the NPC didn't name himself as royalty, it sounded like some sort of sovereign did exist.

"I will be establishing collector shops that purchase valuable items, rare articles, curios, crafted goods, and other items in four cities: Red City, Blue City, Yellow City, and Green City."

The four cities Collector mentioned were large municipalities in Zone Ten. He was establishing collector shops there? Would it be more profitable to sell there than in regular shops? Though it did sound like they wouldn't be buying any regular old goods. As I was thinking about the items I might be able to sell there, Collector continued explaining. Put simply, you could take items that weren't able to be bought and sold regularly, items that were valuable but which shops bought at a low price, and other similar items to this establishment, where they would be purchased at a reasonable price.

"Furthermore, with each item you sell, you will also receive points in addition to money. Those points can be exchanged for special items."

Other players could exchange points for items that were purchased by the collector shop. To my surprise, the Demon Buster and Mattsun's cigarettes, which had been bought by the noble, would be included in the lineup of exchangeable items. It sounded like a fun shop.

"But first I need to actually make it to Zone Ten."

The first step was going home and making a plan. I teleported back home, thinking about what I needed to do next, and immediately after arriving, I received a message. Two of them, in fact.

One was a notice sent to all players. I opened up that regular message, which just repeated the same explanation about how the collector shop worked. All the details about how to use it were written out in an easy-to-understand way.

At the end of the message, there was something written about how buying and selling from those shops would draw the attention of NPCs... *Attention, huh?* What did that mean exactly? Oh well, I was sure it'd become clear once I used the shop.

I still had one other thing that required my attention.

"An important message? Sounds kinda scary."

I hesitantly opened the message. It started by congratulating me on the items I had submitted for the auction and expressing appreciation for my efforts. It sounded like I wasn't being scolded or anything bad like that. In fact, as I continued reading the message, it sounded like it was a request from the devs.

They were asking for consent to let NPCs manufacture and sell the items that players had put up for auction. It seemed like several other people were sent the same message I was. What they were referring to wasn't having NPCs put the items up for sale in regular general stores, but instead to carry them as bonus items in the collector shop that was just announced.

It wouldn't be exactly the same item, however, but a lower-quality item with downgraded abilities, appearance, and materials. In my case, they wanted to use the tempura soba, tableware, stuffed rabbit, and kotatsu. For various reasons, including the fact that it wasn't a typically manufactured item, the spirit's fruit wasn't eligible.

I checked the attached description of the items' abilities—they really were a downgrade. For example, Reflet's tempura-mori soba set that I had submitted to the auction increased all stats during battle for one hour after eating. In exchange, it came with a doubled death penalty. But what the devs wanted to use was not the set, but just tempura soba, and also with fewer varieties of tempura. The flavor might not be as good either. It would also only slightly increase all stats during combat for fifteen minutes, and there would still be a doubled death penalty. Comparatively, it was much lower quality.

Himka's tableware set would be reduced to just a fork, spoon, and knife. Their decorations would also be plainer, and the poison-neutralizing property would be weaker. Eine's stuffed rabbit would be smaller in size, and it would also have reduced effects. Sakura's kotatsu wouldn't have an engraved tabletop, and

would just look like a regular kotatsu. There was also a limit on the number of times it could be used.

“Hmm, it looks like I can refuse, but I guess it’s fine?”

This way, even the people who bought the items wouldn’t get upset. The auction items they bought would retain their premium quality, plus they were actually made by my monsters.

Moreover, there were several items that I wanted too. Most of all was Mattsun’s reviving cigarettes. Their effects would be reduced, but being able to auto-revive sounded very appealing. It’d be great to have until Sawyer completed his own automatic revival potion, and maybe they would be distinct enough that I could use them in different ways. Besides that, there were also other featured items that seemed fun, like a fishing pole and a surfboard. I’d be happy to be able to get a hold of something like those.

“Plus, they’ll give me money.”

Furthermore, just because NPCs would be selling these downgraded versions of my items, that didn’t mean I was restricted from selling them. I wasn’t planning on mass-producing and selling them anyway, so there I didn’t see any downsides. I would receive 2,500,000 G for the tempura soba, 1,000,000 G for the tableware set, 2,000,000 G for the stuffed rabbit, and 3,000,000 G for the kotatsu. A total of 8,500,000 G.

Whoa, with the addition of this contract fee, I would have over 100,000,000 G! *Nice!* There was no way I could refuse at this point.

Online Forum [New Items Galore!] The Ultimate Thread for Discussing Items, Part 41

Wanted: Info on all items, excluding weapons and armor.

Can also be a vague report on an item you saw or heard about.

Special or uncommon usage hacks are always, ALWAYS welcome.

107: Kamiya Hizuki

Silver-Haired...

Surprise, surprise. Him again.

108: Kinokuniya

He got 93 mil for five items.

He's got to have more personal money than anyone.

109: GreenGreen

Clans probably have that much. Like the Quick-Eared Cats.

110: K2

Anyway, that was one heck of a competition.

Guys were shouting over each other left and right.

111: CommanDER

Pretty sure there were girls there too.

But you're right. The bidding wars got intense.

112: Kamiya Hizuki

Did you hear the losing players' screams? They sounded

completely unhinged.

Did the fan clans end up winning everything?

113: GreenGreen

Not everything, I don't think.

114: K2

The tableware set was won by an alliance between the Culinary Institute and a salamander fan clan.

115: CommanDER

Alliance?

You're saying different clans worked together?

116: GreenGreen

As long as they come to an agreement about what happens with the item after they win, I don't think it's unthinkable.

117: K2

The store that the Culinary Institute manages directly put up a notice.

They'll serve you a meal with the salamander's tableware, limited to five parties a day.

118: CommanDER

20,000 G per person...?

That's a bit steep, no?

119: Kamiya Hizuki

I think they'll be successful.

Salamander fans will go for it even at that price.

Plus, the Culinary Institute's latest dish sounds appealing.

120: Kinokuniya

In that case, do you think we'll get a chance to use the other items too?

121: Kamiya Hizuki

It doesn't look like the clans that won the other items are doing the same thing.

122: Kinokuniya

Dang it! I wanted to try the tree nymph's kotatsu!

123: K2

That one was bought by an alliance between the tree nymph fans and several frontliner parties.

I'm thinking they'll probably take turns using it?

124: CommanDER

A portable safety zone sounds really handy~

125: Kinokuniya

Okay, then where did the water nymph's soba end up?!

It's not fair! Let me eat it too!

126: Kamiya Hizuki

I happen to know that. The guys from the We Want a Water Nymph group got it.

127: GreenGreen

I-I don't even know how to respond to that name...

128: Kamiya Hizuki

It's a group of miserable dudes who saw Silver-Haired's water nymph and tried to get their own unique undine, but then failed to do so no matter how many times they challenged the Water Elementals' trial.

129: Kinokuniya

I hear that sort of thing a lot.

Someone purposely gets Taming or Command skills, only to never encounter a unique monster...

Though it's not often I hear about that happening to people who are on the level of being able to form a clan.

Talk about terrible luck!

130: GreenGreen

It's like the exact opposite of Silver-Haired. Might as well call them Anti-Silver.

131: CommanDER

Stop it! Those poor guys! I could cry!

132: Kamiya Hizuki

They're all gaming addicts who normally stick to the front line.

They might be unlucky, but they're definitely competent.

They really showed off the financial power of top players at the auction.

133: GreenGreen

They're front liners, but they go back to the Town of

Beginnings every day?

134: Kamiya Hizuki

Yup. The round trip teleportation fees alone are tremendous enough, but they prioritize efficiently earning money for that.

As a result, they have a lot of money saved up.

135: GreenGreen

So they used that to buy the soba!

Oh man, I'm really starting to cry now...

136: K2

Salute those men!

137: Kinokuniya

I'm sorry for saying it wasn't fair! Those guys deserve Reflet's soba more than anyone!

138: CommanDER

Th-They went through so much...

What kept them motivated?

139: K2

They're fans!

140: Kinokuniya

Yeah, they're fans!

141: CommanDER

Very persuasive...!

142: Kamiya Hizuki

Everyone plays the game in their own way.

143: K2

So what happened to the sylph's rabbit?

144: GreenGreen

It was bought by a large alliance of the Doll Maniacs, the Toy Shop, the Costume Club, and fan clans.

They take turns using it, and usually it's put on display to be revered.

145: CommanDER

L-Like a sacred object?

I joked about that happening before the auction, but I can't believe they're actually doing that...

146: Kamiya Hizuki

Maybe it's a way to bring in customers? Having that stuffed toy on display is sure to bring people in.

147: K2

Ah, I see. An overlapping of hobbies and profit.

Those first three groups have stores, after all.

148: Kinokuniya

You know, a lot of clans in LJ0 have some very quirky names. Especially the first one on that list...

149: K2

The name might be quirky, but the shop's actually pretty normal.

The Doll Maniacs is a clan of puppeteers. They mainly sell toys that can be manipulated, like puppets and marionettes.

150: GreenGreen

The Toy Shop is self-explanatory. They sell handmade toys, and they're classified as home objects.

The Costume Club sells costumes that can be worn as equipment. The abilities are kind of hit or miss though, and they prevent you from wearing other equipment, so I hear they're not very popular.

151: Kamiya Hizuki

The sylph's giant stuffed toy is like a ray of hope shining down on the world of toys, which doesn't get a lot of attention. They were probably pretty desperate to have it.

152: CommanDER

So now we know where the tableware, soba, kotatsu, and stuffed toy went.

I guess all that's remaining is the spirit's fruit?

153: GreenGreen

No clue. Now that you bring it up, there's no information on it.

154: K2

The other auction winners are bragging on the forums and in videos, but nothing about the spirit's fruit has popped up anywhere.

155: Kinokuniya

Could it be some secret organization...?

156: CommanDER

No, this sounds more like something a cultish religious organization would do.

157: Kamiya Hizuki

Like the Tree Nymph Worship Group?

158: GreenGreen

That's a cult! A downright cult!

159: K2

Well, what we know is no one knows where that fruit went.

160: CommanDER

I mean, isn't it reasonable for them to hide, to avoid people's envy? The other groups are showing off *too* much.

161: Kinokuniya

Yeah, that's true.

Unless they're a clan with a lot of people, getting exposed could be risky.

162: Kamiya Hizuki

Then maybe it's either an individual person or a small party?

163: GreenGreen

There's no way it can be just one person. It sold for over 20,000,000 G.

164: K2

If they were an individual, then there's no doubt they're a top player.

165: Kamiya Hizuki

They were hiding their identity, so if they stay in hiding, it'll be hard to track them down.

166: CommanDER

No one's got enough nerve to keep their face exposed like Silver-Haired.

167: K2

Actually, this time there were quite a few people not hiding their faces. I wonder if that was Silver-Haired's influence.

168: GreenGreen

Oh yeah, like Huey and Kokuten.

There were actually a lot of people in the special auction showing their faces too.

Maybe that was a way to advertise their clans.

169: Kamiya Hizuki

So like using themselves as a billboard?

But for the items that we *do* know the whereabouts of, we'll probably hear impressions of and other information about them from somewhere.

And even if they were hiding their face, it'll be found out that they have it anyway.

170: CommanDER

That'd be great. Not everyone always makes their

information public like Silver-Haired.

171: GreenGreen

But Silver-Haired bought the incubator, right?

It'll be a while until we'll hear his impressions or get confirmation about its abilities.

But yeah, eventually he'll share his info to the Quick-Eared Cats.

172: Kinokuniya

We can always trust in Silver-Haired.

173: K2

He's Silver-Haired, after all.

We can assume he'll do something unexpected with that incubator too.

174: CommanDER

The man never disappoints.

175: Kamiya Hizuki

I feel like we always end up at the same conclusion when we talk about Silver-Haired LOL

176: GreenGreen

Oh yeah, the auction data was released along with that notice from the devs.

177: Kinokuniya

Right, it mentions the highest bid and stuff like that.

178: CommanDER

No one's names are listed, huh? Understandable.

179: Kamiya Hizuki

Is there any point in hiding who submitted the most featured items? Everyone knows that's Silver-Haired.

180: K2

Whoa, they're going to release an event movie after this. Is it like a preview for the next event?

181: Kinokuniya

We don't usually see previews in this game! Actually, isn't this the first?

182: CommanDER

Haven't there been a few? But it is still a rare thing.

183: Kamiya Hizuki

LJO's basically just started, so they're probably trying out a bunch of stuff.

184: K2

I wonder what the movie will be like!

185: GreenGreen

Yeah, I'm curious too, but I'm more interested in the data right now.

Check out the number of times an NPC placed a winning bid.

186: Kamiya Hizuki

It says three.

187: K2

You're right.

In the special auction, there was the sword, the cigarettes, and...

What else?

188: CommanDER

I don't know.

189: GreenGreen

Me neither.

Did the noble get something else?

190: Kinokuniya

It's not like it has to be the noble.

A lot of NPCs submitted items to sell, so it wouldn't be weird if other NPCs were participating in the bidding too.

191: Kamiya Hizuki

Maybe it was...the spirit's fruit?

192: K2

I don't think that makes much sense.

I don't see the point of having other NPCs participate if the noble was already there.

193: GreenGreen

But isn't it also weird for them to participate in the regular auction and only win one item?

194: CommanDER

Yeah. If NPCs were participating in the regular auction too, then they would have bought hundreds of items.

195: Kinokuniya

So it had to be during the special auction, right?

There was another NPC other than the noble in the crowd with their face hidden!

196: K2

And then they won something?

197: Kamiya Hizuki

I knew it, it has to be the spirit's fruit.

It's not hard to believe an NPC would want something Silver-Haired submitted.

That's Silver-Haired's power!

198: CommanDER

Hmm, weird. I'm starting to think so too LOL

199: GreenGreen

What do you expect? It's Silver-Haired.

200: K2

A Silver-Haired phenomenon...?

I can believe it.

201: Kinokuniya

What did I say, we can always trust in him!

But it's really not surprising at this point. This is

Silver-Haired, after all.

202: Kamiya Hizuki

Once again we all reach the same conclusion XD

[The Master Celebrity] Silver-Haired, Amazing as Always, Part 32

A discussion thread for the most famous of famous players.

We don't want to be deleted from the forums, so no dissing allowed.

Screenshots posted without consent are not permitted.

This thread will be deleted if we're asked to do so.

766: Takashima

So, Silver-Haired definitely has over a hundred million gold now.

767: Cho

Yeah, 93 mil plus the licensing fee.

768: Tomato Mato

Licensing fee?

769: Cho

The collector's shop is going to start stocking cheaper versions of the items that were sold at the special auction.

Mattsun made a video about it.

770: Tomato Mato

Oh! Like her cigarettes?

I can't deny those have an awesome effect, but well, they're cigarettes...

771: Takashima

Apparently they're going to be available as lollipops too, not just cigarettes. Probably so underaged people can use them too.

772: Tomato Mato

That's great!

773: Tetsu

So once someone gives their consent to let the devs implement the cheaper version of their items in the collector's shop, they're paid a licensing fee.

774: Cho

And we can assume that Silver-Haired received the same offer for his items, so he would also be paid a licensing fee.

775: Tomato Mato

Right. There's no way Silver-Haired would decline that.

776: Takashima

Exactly.

Silver-Haired, the one-hundred millionaire...

777: Tundra

He hit the jackpot!

778: Tetsu

Isn't there a title for having over 100 mil?

779: Tundra

There is!

It's called "Million Dollar."

I also heard that if you spend ten million at the auction, you get the title "Throwing Away the Day's Earnings by Night."

780: Tomato Mato

Over 100 million...

Is there someone besides Silver-Haired with that title?

781: Cho

The Quick-Eared Cats submaster was the one who discovered it.

She must have consolidated all the clan's funds to herself so she could use it at the auction.

Silver-Haired is probably the only individual person who has it, though.

782: Tetsu

The Quick-Eared Cats' source of money came from Silver-Haired's information, so in a way, that's his achievement too.

783: Takashima

Yeah, that clan is impacted the most by Silver-Haired.

784: Tomato Mato

So it was Silver-Haired in the end anyway!

[What's New?] A Discussion Thread for Stuff That's Been Newly Added to the Official Version, Part 19

Don't try to pass off unverified information as facts.

State the source of your information as clearly as possible.

Be courteous to one another.

244: Sakkyun

There's been more new reports about quest chains recently.

245: Shiro

I heard. There are a lot that even we won't be able to clear.

246: Sukegawa

Like that plant quest chain that Silver-Haired's on!

247: Cerulean

The ones Holland and Huey found also look impossible. It's just a bunch of brutal combat...

248: Soldato

Uh yeah, it's a quest chain that two top players died doing multiple times before being able to progress.

That's definitely out of most people's leagues.

249: Sukegawa

The longer the quest chain, the more certain specific

skills become necessary.

But the rewards are worth the effort.

250: Cerulean

The mage quest chain in the Town of Beginnings has only been completed up to the fourth quest.

I've only gotten up to the third quest.

251: Soldato

People are saying that the quest chains related to the number 12 are the hardest ones.

Both start at the Town of Beginnings:

- The 12 Olympian gods quest that you accept from Hermes the mage.

- And the 12 zodiac signs quest that starts from Spade the florist.

Those are the two found so far.

252: Sakkyun

On the other hand, the quest chains that Holland and Huey found that you learn skills from are apparently the shortest. They both ended after three quests.

253: Sukegawa

They might be short, but don't you have to beat a super strong boss for every quest?

254: Shiro

I bet Sakkyun could do it.

255: Sakkyun

I couldn't get past the third quest of the hidden art quest chain. It's pretty dang hard.

Holland and Huey did a good job clearing that bullet hell.

256: Soldato

I heard they stocked up on a bunch of recovery items to get through it.

257: Sakkyun

I don't think there's anyone that can sweep that boss except for KTK.

258: Sasaki Koji

Hey, I'm a second-wave player interested in quest chains. I was thinking I could get through one of the shorter ones, but is it hopeless?

259: Sukegawa

Let me break things down for you.

Holland reported finding a quest chain to learn a special attack.

Huey found a quest chain for learning a hidden art.

Both of those are hard even for first-wave top players to clear.

260: Sasaki Koji

Ah, so too hard for me. I'm still in Zone Five.

261: Soldato

You can't trigger a skill-learning quest chain until Zone Ten anyway.

So that's out of the question until you get there first.

262: Sasaki Koji

I see...

Are there any quest chains I can start in the beginning areas?

263: Shiro

Sure, there are.

They aren't difficult to start, but I don't think there are any quest chains you can easily clear.

264: Sakkyun

A quest chain that anyone can do is probably the one in Zone Five.

265: Sukegawa

The one where you need to be level 5 with the Adventurers' Guild, but it's basically just an errand quest, right?

I think it's probably meant to be like a quest chain tutorial.

Clearing it only gives you a small amount of money.

266: Cerulean

If you want to take the normal route, you'd complete that Adventurers' Guild quest chain first to get a feel for them.

267: Sakkyun

And non-normal route would be to accept the hardest zodiac signs quest chain and bang it out lol

The florist's quest at the start is easy, so why not try that?

268: Sasaki Koji

I can't copy Silver-Haired.

269: Sukegawa

So even second-wave players know about Silver-Haired's greatness, huh?

270: Shiro

Yeah, because he's made a bunch of huge discoveries related to that quest chain.

Even the information he sold to the Cats about his new tree nymph was related to that.

271: Cerulean

The farmers' thread, tamers' thread, and shippers' thread are going wild over that.

272: Soldato

The farmers and tamers, I can understand.

The fertilizer, a treant turning into a tree nymph—it's all next level stuff.

But the shipping threads?

273: Cerulean

There are several factions: one that claims the new tree nymph is a boy, one that hopes they're a girl, one that's fine with them being genderless, and one that doesn't care either way because they're cute. I-I think they could be a feminine boy... It's chaos over there, with all the

different groups.

274: Sakkyun

They're as depraved as ever...

275: Sasaki Koji

I didn't realize there were threads like that too.

Maybe I'll go check it out?

276: Soldato

Let me give you a piece of advice: You're better off not.

277: Sukegawa

Don't do it!

Even just taking a casual peek will burn you!

The people on those threads are fundamentally different beings than us—it's a den of outcasts!

278: Shiro

You have to do a Sanity check!

Not just once, but for every single line you read!

Which means you'll eventually run out of Sanity!

And once you do, you become a new member of that thread!

279: Sasaki Koji

Oh, okay. I won't look, then.

280: Cerulean

Awww why not? It'd be fun~

281: Sakkyun

Don't try to win over this young, second-wave player!
They still have a bright future!

[I Wanna Pet All the Monsters!] Tamed Monster Appreciation Thread for Non-Tamers and Non-Summoners, Part 12

Are you a nonmainstream command-class player or a non-command-class player who wants to express their admiration of monsters? Do monsters make you lose your breath and mind? Then this is the thread for you!

We're looking for any information on the usability of Tame or Summon skills by other classes.

Feel free to just talk about cute monsters.

This includes mascots too.

Please obtain permission before posting screenshots of other players' monsters.

701: Raspu

Things got way too expensive at the auction!

702: LordApple

The farming-related items, like saplings, were insane.

They were either double the price of last time or got an extra zero tacked onto them.

703: Ruach

The sorcery items too, thanks to the information Silver-Haired shared.

704: Requiem

Yeah, but it wasn't just items related to Silver-Haired

that got expensive.

705: Longneck

Everyone went all-out to earn money for the auction, after all.

And the people who couldn't buy the item they wanted probably used their money on something else.

706: Raspu

An explosive increase in participants thanks to Silver-Haired → naturally, people put all their effort into maximizing their funds → too much competition means too many people can't buy things → people feel like they want to buy *something* since they took the time to participate, so they buy something else → resulting in an overall increase in competition and winning bid amounts.

707: LordApple

Okay but, it wasn't Silver-Haired's fault that *everything* got expensive. Maybe like, ten percent at most?

Even ten percent of the several tens of thousands of participants is still a huge impact, though.

708: Raspu

The last event had a huge impact too.

A lot of the submitted auction items were made using materials from the event. Dinosaur equipment is crazy powerful.

709: Ruach

So when the crafting classes prosper, everyone does?

710: LordApple

You got it.

Plus, players who upgraded to equipment made with event materials put a lot of their old equipment up for sale.

711: Requiem

It seemed like the NPC items were also more expensive.

712: Longneck

But in the end, it was Silver-Haired's video that sparked it all.

713: Ruach

The number of views on Mamori's advertisement video was downright absurd.

714: LordApple

Yeah, a lot of clans got to work securing funds once they saw that.

And that excitement spread to everyone else.

715: Raspu

There was a lot of money moving around, even outside of the special auction.

I wasn't able to get the item I wanted in the end. It probably went to someone who lost a different auction.

716: Requiem

I was trying to get a sorcery tool, but nope! The price shot up instantly, I didn't even know how to react.

But I get it, considering Silver-Haired's demon and tree nymph.

717: Longneck

Yokai-related stuff was also really hard to get. Curios too.

That's probably on account of it being easier to get yokai in your home base.

718: Ruach

Seeing the streams of Silver-Haired's house will definitely make people want to get their own. That tanuki is super cute.

719: LordApple

And needless to say, the farming-related stuff. It wasn't just the saplings. Fertilizer and farming tools got super expensive too.

Once the new information about the tree nymph spread around, people got moving trying to figure out how to make that happen.

720: Ruach

Eggs and other tamer items are way more expensive than before too, but...

It seemed like items for other command-class job classes also shot up?

721: Raspu

Right, because people have realized they can dote on *all types of* monsters, not just tamed monsters.

Summoner-related items got a lot of bids too. I'm thinking there are a lot of people who aren't summoners but have Summoning skills.

722: Longneck

The price of food items was also unbelievably high.

Lots of people tried to play up the fact that the items were made with their “cute monsters,” like they were trying to emulate Silver-Haired.

723: LordApple

People used that technique for a bunch of other crafted items too. Like items made with woodworking or smithing.

They’d be like “this was made by an elemental monster” or something.

724: Raspu

Not bad!

If you can’t afford something made by Silver-Haired’s water nymph, you can make do with a home-cooked meal made by a different water nymph!

That’s an option!

725: Requiem

Man, thinking about it, Silver-Haired really did have a huge impact.

726: Ruach

The absurd Silver-Haired phenomenon...

727: Longneck

And you think he only had an influence of ten percent?

728: LordApple

Huh? So was I wrong? Is ten percent too low...?

729: Raspu

You underestimated him!

730: Ruach

He's going to be mad at you.

731: LordApple

As if Silver-Haired's reading this thread.

732: Requiem

Yeah, you're right about that.

But the Defenders might come to defend him! What will *they* think when they read this thread?

733: Ruach

That's right!

They'll come for all of us in this thread!

734: Longneck

Th-That's terrifying.

735: LordApple

I think you're jumping to conclusions.

736: Raspu

You don't understand how scary the Defenders are! They're watching over everything!

737: Ruach

They really are!

They're everywhere!

738: Longneck

They really will come after us!

739: LordApple

Just what sort of an organization are these people?!

740: Raspu

We may have to actually get ourselves in trouble.

If we've already been punished for something, the Defenders might overlook us!

741: LordApple

T-Trouble?

742: Raspu

Go to Silver-Haired's place to get whatever information you can!

743: LordApple

I can't!

That'll get me in even more trouble!

744: Raspu

You're a farmer and tamer like Silver-Haired, so it might be okay?

745: LordApple

Like hell it will!

746: Ruach

If people find out you caused trouble for Silver-Haired because of this thread, then...

747: Longneck

The Defenders *will* show up.

748: LordApple

So we need to be punished!

749: Requiem

Go to Silver-Haired's place!

750: Raspu

Look who thinks it's a good idea now! You were just saying we shouldn't!

751: Ruach

Well yeah, if you do cause trouble for Silver-Haired, then you really will get reported.

The Defenders are always watching us...probably.

752: Longneck

What are we, in a horror game?

753: Requiem

Hmm. I thought the Defenders were just an urban legend, but they might be closer than we think.

754: Raspu

You're kind of freaking me out.

755: LordApple

Me too.

756: Ruach

L-Let's stop talking about this. Why don't we discuss the new tamed monster?

757: Requiem

Silver-Haired's demon. She's cute.

I wonder if there's a way to get closer to her?

758: Longneck

I'm sorry! I'm sorry!

Defenders! I'm innocent!

759: Requiem

Come on, it was a joke.

760: Ruach

No one's laughing, jerk.

761: LordApple

Don't make self-destructive jokes!

762: Raspu

You should get punished at least once.

763: Longneck

Defenders! Got one for you!

764: Requiem

Quit it! Seriously, I'm sorry!



When I arrived home following the end of the auction, I was met with wave after wave of dramatic developments.

I checked the items I had won, replied to the devs' message, spaced out staring at the 93,000,000 G I now had, and took an additional shock when I ended up obtaining a couple titles. Way too many things happened in that short thirty-minute span.

Unbelievably, I had obtained *three* titles: Throwing Away the Day's Earnings by Night, Million Dollar, and Millionaire.

Title: Throwing Away the Day's Earnings by Night

Effect: Receive 10,000 G and two bonus points.

This was the next level of the title I had received previously, Spending the Day's Earnings by Night. The rewards were also the same. I had acquired it by spending more than 10,000,000 G at the auction, which was similar to the requirement for getting the previous title.

Title: Million Dollar

Effect: None. A title awarded to those who used every means available to scrape together 100,000,000 G.

This one looked like an honorary title that just indicated someone had 100 million G. I wasn't exactly sure how it was different from the next title, Millionaire... I didn't see the point of there being both titles.

Title: Millionaire

Effect: Receive two bonus points, increased favorability from certain NPCs. A title awarded to truly wealthy individuals who earned 100,000,000 G by their own ability.

I had another title that was similar to this one too: Summer Beach Memories, which I'd obtained from the event. That one had said I'd have increased favorability from event NPCs, but this one wasn't specific. Maybe it meant rich

NPCs? Or maybe even thief NPCs? This title wasn't going to trigger any weird events, was it?

I'd thought that getting Million Dollar automatically meant obtaining Millionaire, but that wasn't actually the case. Alyssa explained it all to me when I went to sell the information about Millionaire. Million Dollar could also be obtained by transferring money within a clan, but Millionaire could only be achieved by individuals.

Being registered with a clan impacted many things, it seemed. Also, even if you transferred money within a clan, because of the transfer limit, it took several days to pass the money on to the next person, so getting up to a hundred million wasn't exactly an easy thing to do.

Oh, and I wasn't paid any money for my information about Millionaire. Instead, I received some amazing information!

"Wow, I can't believe the requirements for learning a special attack and hidden art have already been discovered."

Alyssa told me that they could be learned by completing quest chains specific to those skills. However, they were extremely difficult, so she promised to contact me once she found out the strategy for clearing them. I was excited at the prospect of learning those skills someday.

"My goal for now is to get to Zone Ten. But before that, I need to renovate my home!"

"Mm-mm?"

"Chirp?"

When I stepped into the garden, Olto and Rick came running over to me. They obviously wanted to play with me, but I steeled myself and declined. I wanted to set up the playground equipment for them first anyway.

"I'm about to give the garden a huge upgrade by installing the playset I got at the auction! Give me a hand with it."

"Mmm!"

"Chirp chirp!"

Now, where should I start?

“If I put it too close to other things, it’ll look chaotic, but it’ll feel a little lonely if it’s too far away from everything else...”

The three of us walked around the garden as I thought about where to place each part of the playground.

“The jungle gym can go here, and the monkey bars can go there. Actually, maybe the slide should go there?”

“Mm-mm!”

“Chirp!”

“Oh, you two agree?”

Eventually, with Olto and Rick’s approval, I took out each part of the playground equipment. All I had to do was place down the piece of parchment containing each part of the set, activate it, and then the equipment would appear.

In no time at all, my garden had transformed into a park. With a blanket of grass underneath, it looked like one of those fancy parks you see in wealthy neighborhoods. The equipment itself was painted brightly in yellow, red, and green, giving it a very modern appearance. It was completely different from the rural park I had played in as a kid, which was just some rusty playground equipment on top of bare earth! I always came home covered in dirt after playing there.

“Trrrr!”

“Sneeh!”

“Ya-ya!”

My monsters and mascots came crowding in, but no one made a move to play on the equipment. Instead, they lined up behind me.

“What’s wrong? You’re all free to play on it, you know.”

“Hum!”

“Hm!”

“Huh? What’s going on?”

“Honk honk!”

Strangely enough, everyone started pushing me forward. Apparently, they were letting me go first. I didn’t really feel like playing on it, but I couldn’t bring myself to refuse their kind gesture. *I guess I might as well try out something.*

“Hmm, I guess the best choice is probably the swing that changes size.”

As I sat down on the swing, the size automatically changed to allow me to fit perfectly—a very handy feature.

“Nice, it feels really sturdy.”

It didn’t creak at all when I sat on it. I was confident it wouldn’t break even if my monsters were a little rough with it. Though I wasn’t sure whether a playset in a game could even break in the first place.

“Squeak.”

“Growl.”

“Oh, are you two going to give me a push?”

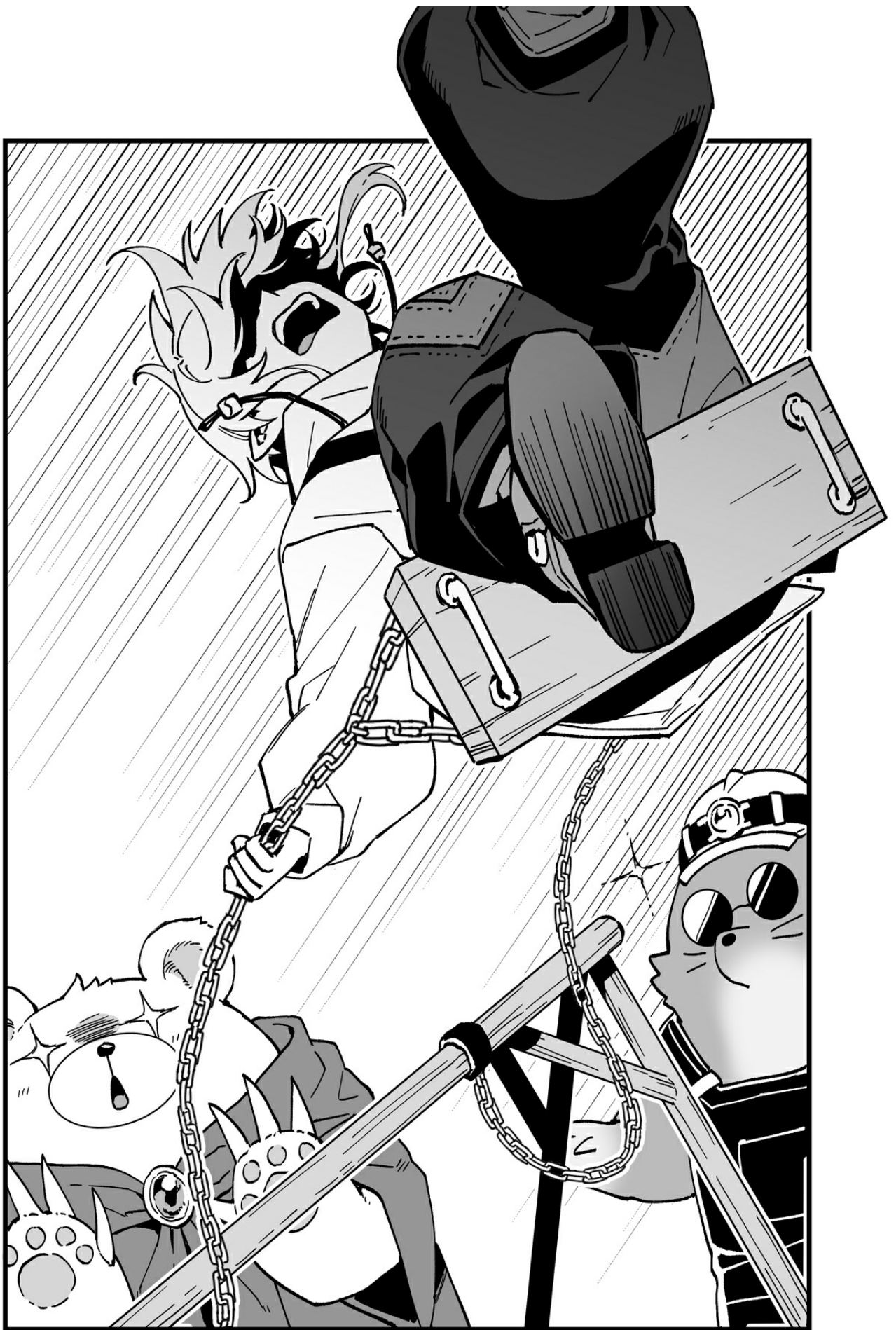
Drimo and Bear Bear, the powerful duo, gave me a push on the swing. It was fine at first, but it gradually became no laughing matter.

“Hey, hold on! It’s too fast! I’m swinging too high! You guys are pushing too hard!”

“Squeeeeak!”

“Grooowl!”

“Gaaaaaaah!”



H-How far are they going to push me? I'm already swinging 180 degrees!

I was swinging back and forth so much that one second I was looking at the sky, and the next I had swung backward and was staring at the ground. But Drimo and Bear Bear wouldn't stop.

"Aye-aye!"

"Kee-hee-hee!"

"Tra-la-la!"

Drimo and Bear Bear were being egged on by the cheers of my monsters around the swing, which made things even more fun for them. They kept pushing me like it was the most entertaining thing in the world. When I swung backward, they dodged me with perfect timing and then quickly stepped back into place to give me another push on the upswing.

This is bad! Never mind 180 degrees, I was swinging to over 270 degrees now. I was swinging in a V!

"I-I'm gonnaaa—!"

"..."

In the corner of my eye, I saw Sakura looking at me worriedly. *You're the only one concerned for my safety!*

Then, my body soared above the top of the swing, and I swung back down, completing a full rotation at a terrifying speed.

"I'm scaaaared!"

And they were still going!

"I think I'm good noooow!"

"Squeak squeeeeak!"

"Growl grooowl!"

They didn't look like they were going to stop anytime soon!

Three minutes later.

"Jeez, that was rough..."

“...?”

“I’m all right,” I assured Sakura, who had been watching over me worriedly the entire time I was on the swing. If this were real life, I probably would’ve needed to take a long break, but this was a game. I felt virtually no sense of physical fatigue.

Next, I took out a new sheet of parchment. The playground wasn’t the only thing I had to set up.

“Now it’s time for the canal!”

“...♪”

I activated the parchment, but it didn’t have the same effect as the playground equipment. With the latter, a semitransparent version of the equipment appeared that I could then move around to preview the placement. But the canal was super long, and I could also change its appearance and the material it was made out of, which would take a lot of effort on my own. That was probably why, instead of a semitransparent canal appearing out of the piece of parchment, it was an NPC—a dwarf carrying a large hammer.

“Thanks fer purchasin’ our canal. Bwa ha ha ha ha ha!”

His professionalism left something to be desired, but I guess that was just how dwarves were. It seemed like he was going to help me install the canal.

“Seein’ as I was called here, I’m assumin’ yeh want to install the canal?”

“Yeah. Will you help me?”

“Sure will. Leave it t’me! The name’s Deig.”

“I’m Yuto. I appreciate your help.”

His being a dwarf made me feel confident in his ability to help. Deig and I headed for the crystal clear pond, which was the starting point of the canal.

“I’d like to extend the canal out from here and have it snake around that playset over there...”

“Mm-hmm, mm-hmm...”

“Then, I want it to connect over there...”

“I see, I see...”

I explained my plans to Deig as we walked the intended path of the canal.

“And finally, I’d like it to connect to my house’s farm.”

“Got it.”

I kept my explanation pretty brief, but Deig seemed to understand nonetheless.

“Do you think it’ll be long enough?” I asked.

“Oh, it will be. Want me to go ahead and set up the temporary installation?”

“Temporary installation?”

“It’s just a test to see how it’ll look. Yeh can change up the temp installation however much yeh like, so you don’t hafta stress over it.”

“Okay, let’s try that out.”

“Yeh got it!”

Deig gave a light swing of his hammer, and just like that, the long canal appeared on my property. It was less like crafting and more like magic. Would players be able to do that someday too?

There were still ten meters of canal left over to work with, so we changed up its course a little as we perfected the temporary installation.

“I’d like to move on to the minor adjustments now. What’re yeh thinkin’ for depth and material? Yeh can also choose the design and color.”

“I think this is a good height.”

If the canal was about the depth of my waist, then everyone would be able to play comfortably in the water. What I wasn’t sure about was the materials and the design.

“What else is there besides brick?”

“Lots o’ variations of stone, and we can even make it wooden.”

“Hmm...”

I was mulling things over as I looked through the catalog when Sakura

reached out and pointed at something on the screen.

“Huh? This one?”

“...♪”

Sakura was pointing at a canal made of light green tile. It was a retro Showa-era design of small tiles laid out on top of what looked like white mortar. It was what was used in the baths you’d see in older bathhouses.

“Oh yeah, this would really fit the vibe of my Japanese-style house too.”

I had been thinking a wooden canal would suit my Japanese home, but this tiled version might look a little more stylish. Besides, a design picked by Sakura was probably much better than one picked by someone with no design sense like me.

“I’ll go with this, please.”

“All right, you got it!”

And with that, the canal was completed. Once again, it looked like it was summoned into existence with magic!

Deig bowed to me, then vanished. The entire set up process took a lot less time than I’d expected. I thought it’d take several more hours.

“Chirrup!”

“Hum!”

And it took even less time for my monsters to notice the canal! The sea otters and Reflet immediately appeared inside it.

“Honk hooonk!”

“Oh, and Perca— Hold on, aren’t you swimming a little too fast?”

“Hooonk!”

Perca came swimming over at a tremendous speed, splashing a huge amount of water around as he did. Actually, it was less like he was swimming and more like he was gliding on the surface of the water on his belly. From a distance, he’d looked like a small jet ski.

“Perca! You’re gonna hit them!”

“Honk honk hooonk!”

H-He fleew! Perca soared over the sea otters, landed on the other side of them, and disappeared down the canal. I would need to give him a warning later. He was an accident waiting to happen. Though at least I doubted he might do anything that would impact the appearance of the canal, since he never caused damage in the towns.

“Well, I’m glad you all are having fun.”

“Ch-Chirrup!”

“Chirrup!”

The sea otter pair lifted up their tiny hands and waved cutely at me, affirming that they were in fact having fun. *So adorable.* Unable to resist the temptation of their fluffy bellies, I reached out and petted them. As I was alternating petting each one, I realized that there was a subtle difference in the texture of their furs. Bianca’s fur was a little coarser and longer.

In the middle of petting, I remembered that there was still another auction item I had to install. I said goodbye to Bianca and Cocoa, then went inside into the living room of my house.

“Okay, now it’s time to put up these scrolls!”

“Ya!”

“Oh, do you want to help, Mamori?”

“Ya.”

I shouldn’t be surprised that a Zashiki-Warashi was interested in matters of the home. I went ahead and took out all the calligraphy scrolls and paintings I had bought at the auction and laid them out on the tatami floor. I had two landscape paintings, so I was thinking of putting one up in my bedroom and one in the barn. As I recalled, I should be able to decorate the barn with items that had no effects. As for the ink wash paintings and the calligraphy scrolls, I figured perhaps I could rotate displaying each of them in the alcove on a daily basis.

“Hey, do you mind if I take down the Zashiki-Warashi scroll that’s up now and

switch up what's hanging here day to day?"

"Ya!"

She seemed fine with it. I decided to go ahead and try putting up one of the new scrolls.

"Now, which one...?"

"Ya!"

"That's right, this was your favorite one, wasn't it?"

I put up the scroll Mamori had asked for, the Back from the Dead Game scroll.

"Mm, not bad."

"Ya-ya."

Mamori and I gazed in satisfaction at the scroll on the wall.

Epilogue

Inside a dark, dark room, made of all rock, a large man sat on a stone throne. In front of him was a small man prostrating himself on his hands and knees.

The two men were conversing in hushed tones.

Dust had collected in the four corners of the room, and there were cobwebs in the corners of the ceiling. Dark-red splatters stained the floor, conjuring to mind nothing good. An offensive stench filled the room, so intense that anyone else wouldn't have been able to stand it for a minute. The two men in the room, however, seemed unbothered by the smell.

The sole source of light was a small candle in the corner of the room. Each time its flame flickered, the men's shadows warped in an unsightly way, making it look as though two demons were having an audience.

"So? Have you found a suitable object? You infiltrated the auction, did you not?"

"Yes! The otherworldly travelers sold various intriguing items. I managed to obtain a particularly splendid one."

"Oho? Did you now?"

"Yes! For you, my lord."

The small man produced a red fruit. Once the large man saw it, surprise and excitement showed clear on his face.

"Oh! What powerful magic!"

If an otherworldly traveler—a player were to see this fruit, they would instantly recognize it for what it was.

"This is a spirit's fruit, a fruit harvested from a sacred tree."

Yes, it was one of the featured items from the auction. The small man had placed the winning bid.

“And that is not all. Many people’s attention—or in other words, their hope, has been directed toward this fruit. If we can take that hope and turn it into a core—”

“Magnificent. Now I can make myself even more powerful! I will feed off this hope and produce despair! Then I will gain the power to destroy the seal!”

“Indeed! What’s more, it seems the power of the divine spirit is hidden in this fruit...”

“Yes, I can feel a faint sense of the spirit’s power! A job well done, for a small man such as yourself. Once I am resurrected with my full power, I will make you my minion!”

“D-Does that mean you intend to make me one such as yourself, my lord?”

“Indeed. Depending on the work you do, I will promote you to an even higher rank.”

“Thank you, my lord!”

“Devote yourself to me!”

“Yes, my lord!”

“Heh heh heh... Aha ha ha ha ha ha! Pathetic humans! Behold, the day of my revival is near! I will destroy your peace! Mwa ha ha ha ha ha ha!”

The man’s shadow swayed again as he laughed raucously. His shadow sprouted giant horns and wings, turning into a form that was far from human.

“We must perform the resurrection ritual at once. Make the preparations.”

“Yes, my lord!”

Afterword

Thank you for purchasing the latest volume of *A Late-Start Tamer's Laid-Back Life!*

I'm never good at writing afterwords! I always whine about not wanting to write one, but this time I'll manage!

You see, I realized something! I always have a hard time writing an afterword, but now I figured out an easy way to fill in the lines!

And that's by bringing in a special guest!

"Mm?"

It's one of Yuto's tamed monsters, Olto the Gnome! That's right! I'm breaking the rules by bringing in a character from the story!

I know it's small and dark and a little sad, but welcome to the Afterword Room from Hell!

"Mm-mmm?"

Mwa ha ha ha ha! This is a room where we're forced to write an afterword, and we can't leave until we do! You're stuck here until you help me finish writing— "Mm-mm!"

Ack! Hey! Don't attack me! Your punches don't hurt, but still!

"Mm-mm-mmm!"

Hey, don't use your hoe! If you swing it around like that, you'll hit the wall!

Whaaat?! You just smashed a giant hole in the wall!

"Mm-mmm!"

Olto! Wait! Don't leave me here!

Hold on a second, now's my chance to escape! Woo-hoo! Freedoom!

All right, that was the end of the sketch comedy portion. I'm a fan of these

sorts of comedic afterwords though, so I'm satisfied now.

If you have any complaints—please, keep them to yourself.

Now I'd like to express my thanks.

To my editors, W-san and I-san, thank you for being patient with me. I know I can be picky.

Nardack-sama, Lilith is even cuter than I could have imagined! As always, you did an amazing job!

To my friends and family, to everyone involved in the publication of this work, and to all you readers—it's thanks to your support that I'm able to continue writing. Thank you all very much.



* Mamori *

(Zashiki-Warashi)



* Nuts *

(Mame Shiba)



* Dango *

(Calico Cat)



* Rinne *

(Obake)

Floof (Fluffaball)

Taro (Mini Happa)


Ochiyo (Tefu-Tefu)

Bianca (Sea Otter)

Cocoda (Sea Otter)

etc...

* Mascots *



* Kettle *

No Image

* Sunekosuri *

No Image

* Hanami Vandal *

* Yokai *

CHARACTERS

A Late-Start Tamer's Laid-Back Life



* Rick *



* Sakura *



* Olto *



* Reflet *



* Fau *



* Bear Bear *



* Drimo *



* Himka *



* Eine *



* Olea *



* Lilith *



* Perca *

* Monsters *



* Rick *

* Himka *

* Lilith *

* Olea *

* Sakura *

* Olto *

* Yuto *

A Fun Kimono Party with Everyone!



* Fau *

* Bear Bear *

* Drimo *

* Reflet *

* Perca *

* Eine *

* Mamori *

The magic of yukata in the perfect outfit!



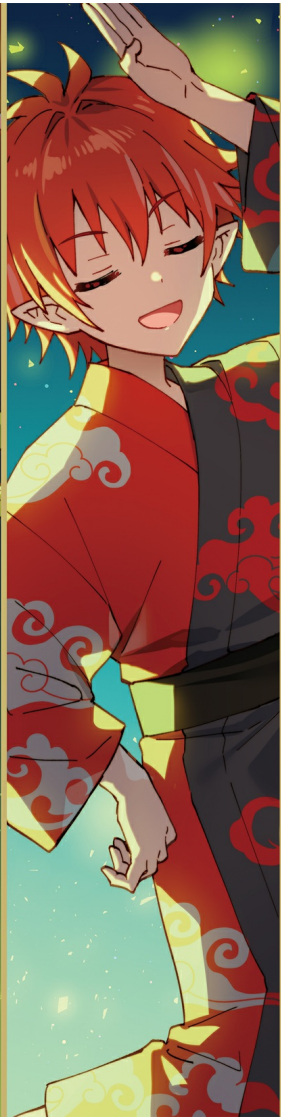




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A Late-Start Tamer's Laid-Back Life: Volume 11

by Yuu Tanaka

Translated by A.M. Cola Edited by Diana Taylor

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