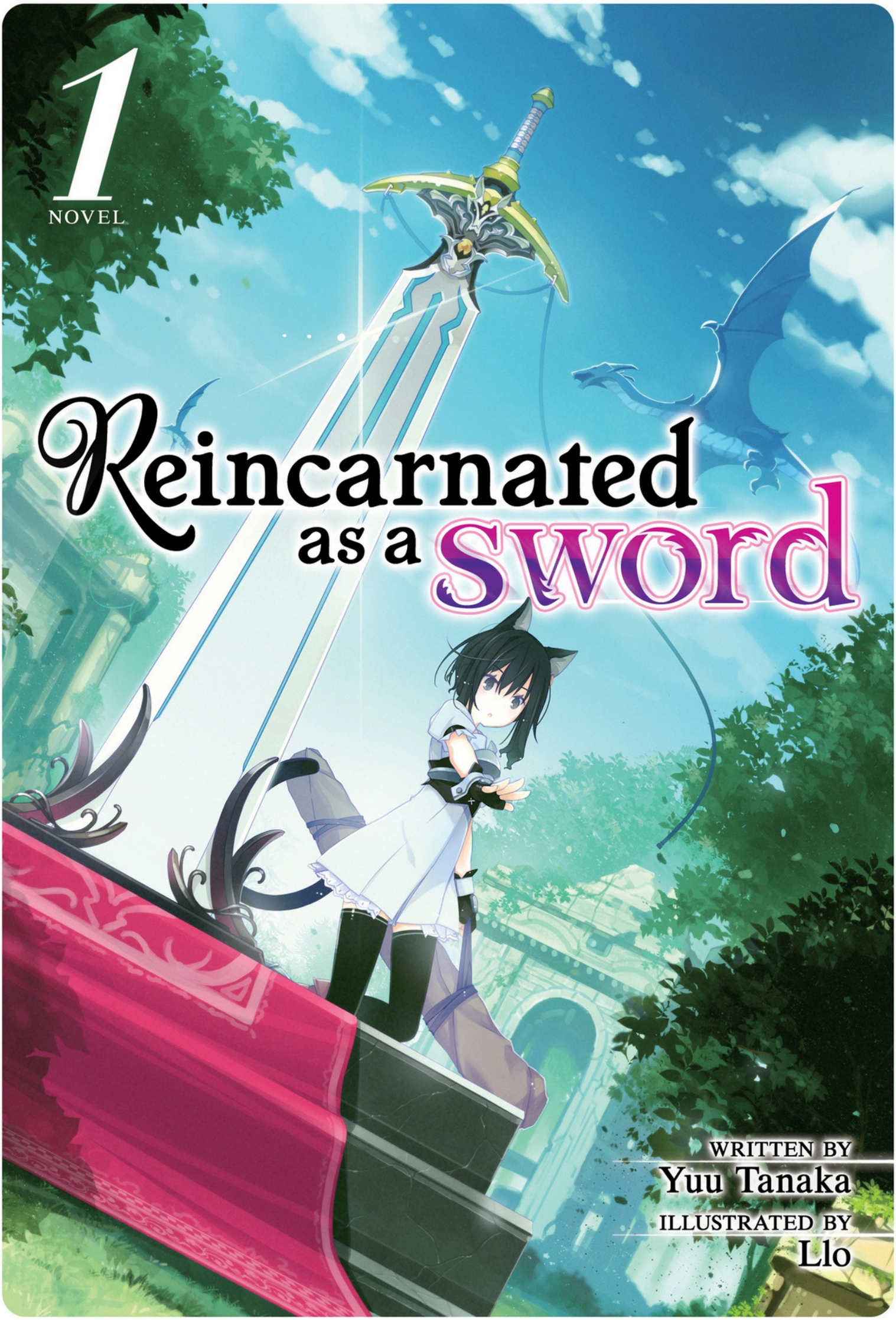
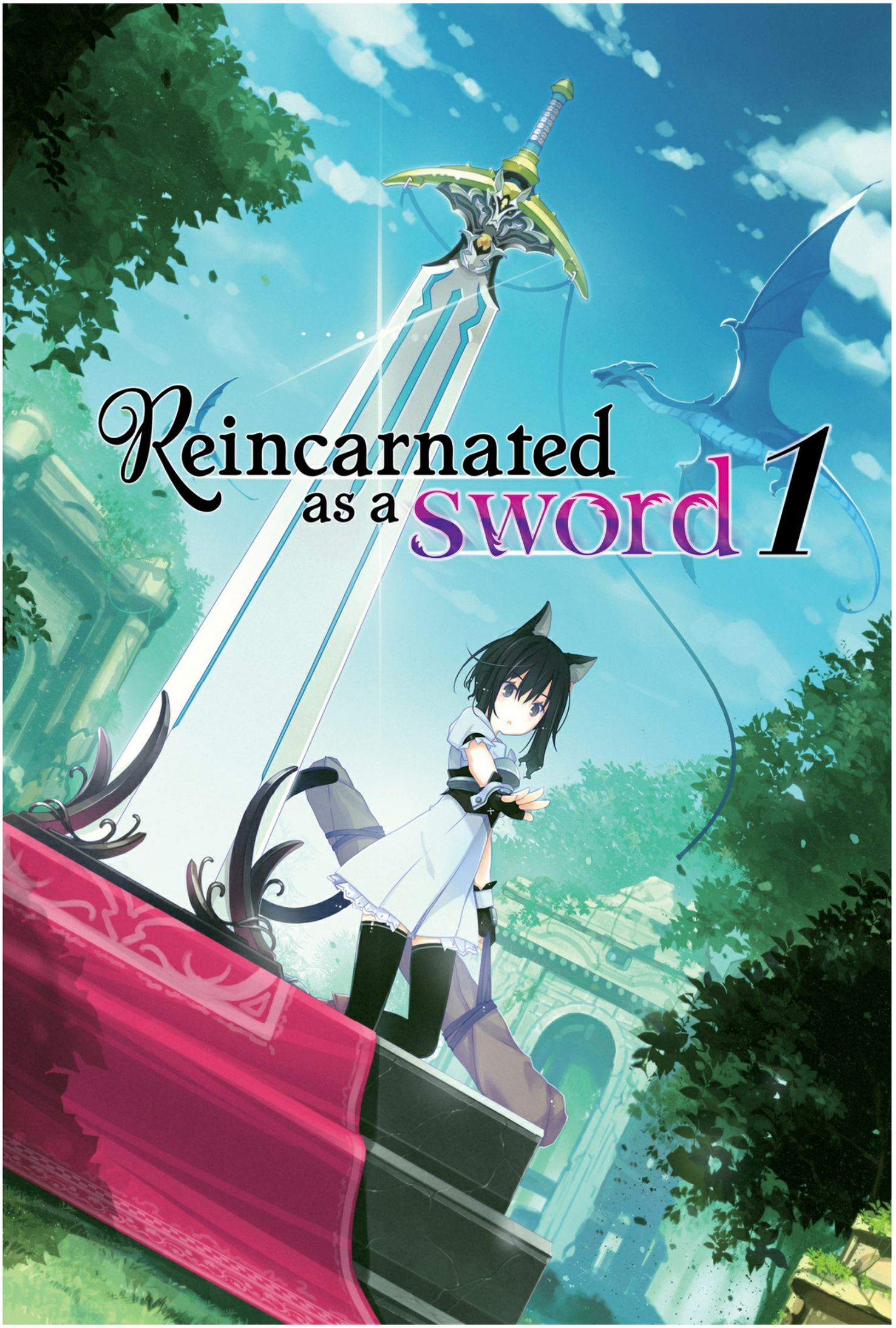
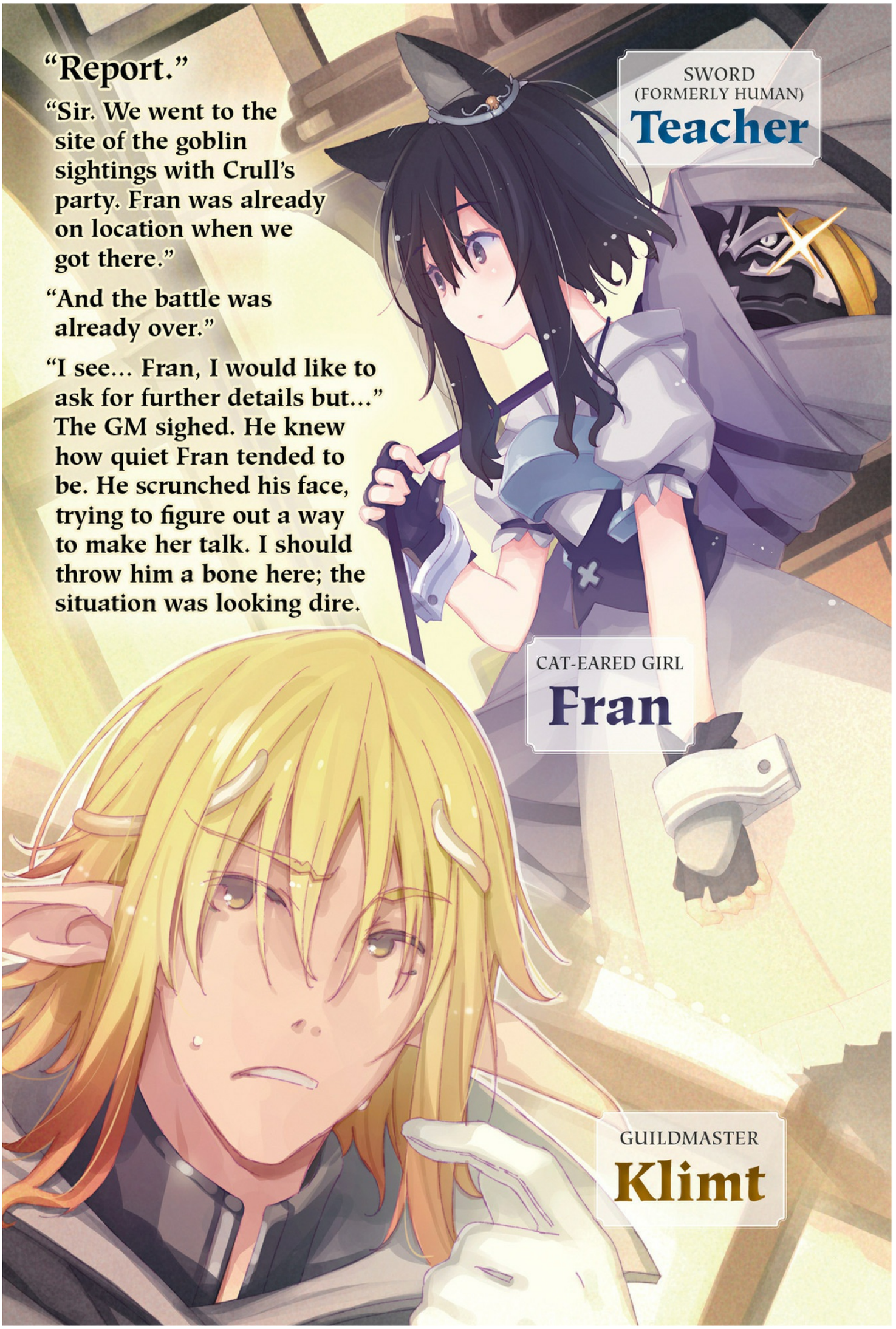

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NOVEL
Reincarnated as a sword
WRITTEN BY
Yuu Tanaka
ILLUSTRATED BY
Llo

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Reincarnated as a sword 1




"Report."
"Sir. We went to the site of the goblin sightings with Crull's party. Fran was already on location when we got there."
"And the battle was already over."
"I see... Fran, I would like to ask for further details but..." The GM sighed. He knew how quiet Fran tended to be. He scrunched his face, trying to figure out a way to make her talk. I should throw him a bone here; the situation was looking dire.
SWORD (FORMERLY HUMAN)
Teacher
CAT-EARED GIRL
Fran
GUILDMASTER
Klimt

Reincarnated as a Sword

1

written by

Yuu Tanaka

illustrated by

Llo



Seven Seas Entertainment

REINCARNATED AS A SWORD VOL. 1

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Illustrations by Llo

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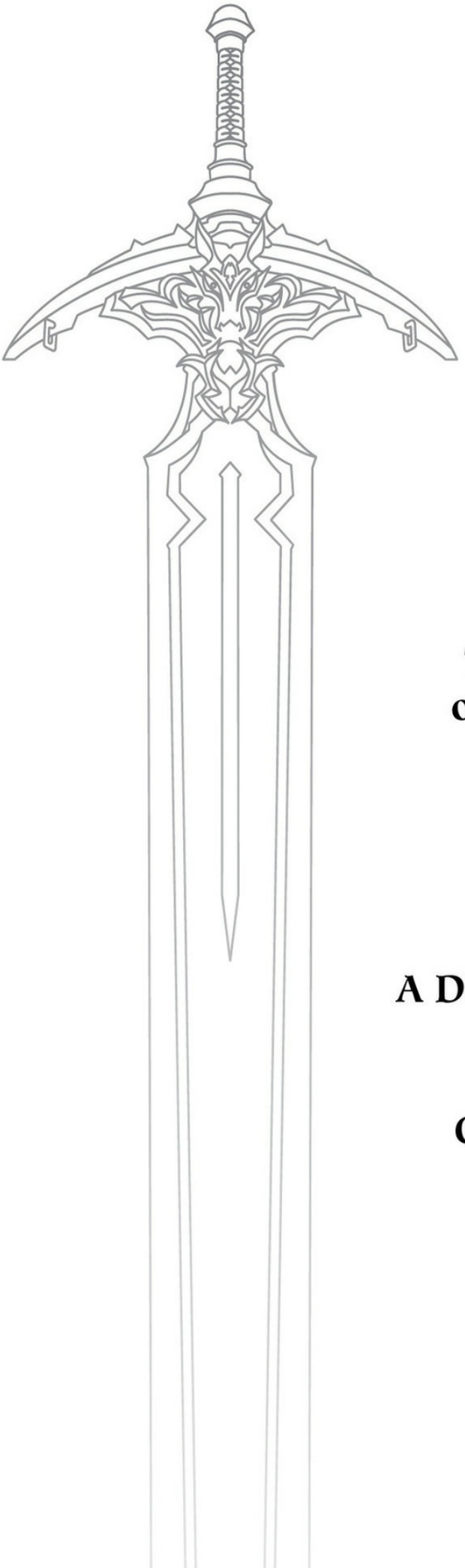
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Prologue

The first thing that came to mind when I opened my eyes was how dark it was. “Hm. Is it night?”

The very next moment though, a bright light shone from my left. It felt inviting, so I turned to it. What greeted me was an incredibly beautiful sight: an infinite vista as far as the eyes could see, with something that looked like a bright halo surrounding the edges. It resembled a sunrise. The ascending light gleamed like a rainbow and I couldn’t help but feel touched by the sight.

Then I wondered what was on the other side.

I turned to my left. There, the moon was setting, a gigantic ring of silver on the horizon. Only a bit of the lunar body remained in sight, but its magnitude wasn’t diminished. It was a breathtaking sight to behold. I’d never seen anything like it in my thirty years of living. I found it odd that I didn’t break down into tears right away.

Hold on. Thirty years? Was I alive? Wait, was I dead? The last thing I remembered was a red convertible approaching me at breakneck speed. The flashy man in the driver’s seat was looking at his smartphone. Yep, he had been playing with his phone while driving, and boy did he look like he was having a great time of it. *Well, I’m not having a great time, asshole!* I screamed to myself while piecing together what had happened. But I was pretty sure I had died then. I must have.

“Hmm, what is going on…?”

“Hey, there. Are you finally awake?”

“Wha?! Who’s there?!”

A voice echoed from the darkness, though I didn’t feel anyone there. Actually, it felt like the voice came from inside my head.

“You’re in for a rough ride. Better strap yourself in.”

“Huh? What?”

“See you around.” Then the voice was silent.

“Uh. Hello?” I called out to the voice, but to no avail. What was that? A hallucination? It sounded very clear to me… I stirred in an effort to get a better view of things, and finally realized something: I couldn’t move my body.

“Hm? What’s this? What’s happened to me?” I thought I was tied up, but it didn’t feel that straightforward. My whole body felt weird. I couldn’t feel my arms and legs, for one thing, and the rest of my body just felt off. “I can’t feel my eyelids, either. Or my eyeballs for that matter… Wait, so how am I seeing things, exactly?” I looked down to check my body. I was a bit worried at first, but it seemed I could move my vision to some degree.

“I… I’m a sword.”

My eyes found a sword, vertically rising from a pedestal. I somehow knew this sword was in fact my own body, impossible as that may be to understand let alone explain. But I understood beyond the shadow of a doubt that the sword was me, and I was the sword. My eye (or what was functionally an eye) was located at the hilt, somewhere between the guard and the blade. How could I see despite having a sword for a body? How mysterious.

“I died…and was reincarnated as a sword?”

What absurd light novel was this? I’d pinch my cheek to make sure this wasn’t a dream, but I lacked the ability to do so. “I think I have something like…skin?” I could tell part of my blade was stuck into the pedestal beneath me. I didn’t exactly have skin, but I could feel my blade buried in the pedestal.

“Is this really another world?”

It wasn’t Earth, that was for sure; there were too many moons for it to be. I looked up at the sky and saw six moons: red, blue, green, yellow, purple, and pink, all adorning the night sky with their dim glow.

Chapter 1:

The Lonely Sword of the Great Plains I took in my surroundings which looked nothing like my Earth. *If this were an alternate universe light novel, I would have some sort of cheat skill,* I thought. Although, considering I had been reincarnated as a sword, I wondered if I could use *any* skills. Maybe being turned into a sword was itself my cheat skill, though I highly doubted it. It could just be wishful thinking and I might not even have any overpowered skills to begin with. *A staple of cheat skills would be Identify… Oh, hello.* It turned out I could look at my own stats. How convenient.

Name: Unknown

Owner: None

Race: Intelligent Weapon

Attack: 132 MP: 200/200 Durability: 100/100

Evolution: [Rank 1]

Skills: Identify 6; Self-Repair; Telekinesis; Telepathy; Status+; Recovery Rate+; Skill Sharing; Mage I seemed pretty strong. Looked like I could check out each individual skill, too.

Identify 6: Displays information of surrounding objects.

Self-Repair: Automatically restores weapon durability unless completely destroyed.

Telekinesis: Use magic to affect surrounding physical objects.

Telepathy: Use magic to speak directly into the minds of others.

Status+: Slightly increase all user stats.

Recovery Rate+: Slightly increase user's health and magic recovery rate.

Skill Sharing: Grants Owner access to all skills.

Mage: Ability to feel the flow of magic. The mark of a mage.

I guessed the number following the skill name was its level. I thought I was somewhat strong, considering I came out the box with a Level 6 in Identify. Then again, the cap could be 9,999 for all I knew, so it might be too early to celebrate. But I was no ordinary weapon at the very least. There were so many terms and skills I didn't understand, but there was an air of power about them. The abilities seemed fitting for a rare weapon, or a unique weapon at that.

Yet my name remained "Unknown." Was it because my Identify skill wasn't high enough, or because it had been left blank in the first place? It'd be weird if my sword self-retained my former name—wait, my former name? What was it again? Huh… I couldn't remember for the life of me. Weird.

Uhhh…I really can't remember. Despite having retained full memory of everything else. Thirty years old. Male. Office worker. Lived alone. Hobbies: anime, manga, VRMMO, novels (of the light variety). People told me I had a positive outlook on life. Liked curry; didn't have any foods I particularly disliked. No girlfriend; I had never been in a relationship, now that I thought about it. *Well, that's kinda sad…* That said, the rest of my memories remained intact, so I was sure my name would come back to me eventually. I did reincarnate into a sword after all, so I was bound to have some discrepancies in my memory here and there. There was nothing I could do about my memories at the moment, so I decided to leave it alone for now.

Moving onto my appearance: The blade, forged from an unknown metal, glowed white with three blue lines running down it. I may be flattering myself, but the blade did look beautiful. I seemed to have been forged into the form of a longsword.

My sword guard was of a subdued golden color, and a carving of a gallant wolf decorated it, along with blue twine. The string was a lattice of blue and white braided into one. Not to toot my own horn, but I didn't look like a mass-produced sword, so I thought I was probably one of great worth. Though, I couldn't tell how strong I was, going by my attack value of 132. There was the possibility I was little more than a heavily decorated, ornamental sword, but the

odds of that being true were low since I came equipped with skills. It'd be awful if it did happen to be true, though. I might as well toss myself into a furnace and kill myself at that point. But I was still a beautiful-looking sword. In an RPG, this would be the sword that made its appearance well into the game; as mysterious as it was elegant.

Doesn't change the fact that I'm a sword though, I sighed to myself.

I wouldn't have called myself handsome in my previous life. That being said, I wasn't butt-ugly, either. I was just your average, run-of-the-mill nerd, I guess, which was why I had no particular longing for my old body. I had no objections to being born into a different one. In fact, I would've requested it if I'd had the option to.

A sword, though. Really? I couldn't eat, couldn't play video games, and man, there went my chances of graduating from virginity. Th-then again, this meant I was going to be a wizard for sure! This was the cross I had to bear for the rest of my life.

I paused.

This was depressing. If I had hands and feet, I would've prostrated myself right here and now. Wait, was that what that Mage skill meant? It was the only skill that seemed different from the rest… Damn it, this was no laughing matter!

I didn't know how long I sulked. It could've been five minutes, it could've been an hour. The more I sank into my dumbfounded silence, the more stupid I felt for being upset. *Well, I'm a sword now. No use worrying about that kind of stuff.* I couldn't run from reality if I tried. Besides, if I hadn't been reincarnated, I would've died in the accident. The more I thought about it, the more fortunate I felt. I was supposed to die, but here I was, still conscious. Yeah, not everyone got to become a sword after all, so I should enjoy it while it lasted. When I put it that way, it wasn't so bad. This was my unexpected second lease on life. I may as well aim to live the best possible sword life I could.

What constituted the best of the sword life, though? Well, I needed someone to wield me, that was for sure. Maybe a hero? But being the sword of a hero wasn't without its difficulties. I would have to fight a demon lord, and I might break in the process, which would mean a legendary blacksmith (a dwarf)

would have to fix me. And a hero usually meant someone with a passionate sense of dumb justice and a trim, but muscular frame; probably good looking. Basically, someone who was the complete opposite of me. Honestly, I didn't think we could get along if we tried. If it came down to it, I'd much rather have a girl wield me. It'd be best if she were cute, but I'd be able to live with her if she wasn't completely ugly. That was already worlds better than being paired with a meathead hero. It'd also be great if she had an amazing sword arm. She'd become a legendary hero wielding me to mow down her enemies. I'd go down in history as her beloved sword and they'd tell of our exploits in every textbook in the land… I mean, if I was going to dream, I may as well dream big. But first, I needed to figure out a way to leave these plains. I couldn't hear the mysterious voice anymore, so I needed to think this through.

I began by taking stock of my surroundings. It seemed I was standing in the middle of some ancient ruins. There was no roof over my head, and the pedestal I was stuck in was placed in the middle of the ruins as if I were a prize. Surrounding the pedestal were small shrines which made it seem like an object of worship. The place was covered in moss and looked neglected—why, there was even a tree sprouting through a crack in the roof of one of the small shrines. It underscored the passage of time, and how no man had walked through these fields in ages.

Was I some sort of legendary weapon, granted to those worthy enough to find me? It didn't look like I was in any sort of dungeon though. I couldn't see behind me since I was planted on the pedestal, but before me were grasslands and shrubbery as far as the eye could see, with not a single tall tree in sight. Squinting, I could barely make out some moving shapes in the distance. Were they animals? *It doesn't look human, that's for sure.* And it didn't seem like I could move on my own. Hang on a minute… I had Telekinesis on my list of skills. Maybe I could move using that.

I grunted and began concentrating on casting Telekinesis. I felt myself getting lighter and my blade slowly sliding out of the pedestal. Focusing on the sensation, I imagined a sword floating in the air. *Wow, I'm flying!* I could move in any direction I put my mind to. Parted from the pedestal, I began flitting through the air. *I CAN FLY!* I wasn't very fast, but I was satisfied with it for the

moment since I could move of my own volition. I circled the pedestal, confirming my suspicion that I was surrounded by ruins. The place was about thirty meters in diameter and seemed to have originally been constructed of brown bricks. Years of neglect and exposure to the elements had left it darkened with moss.

Who made this place? I have a sinking feeling it's the same person who made me… Judging by how old the place looked, I must've been left here for a long time. A sword didn't just come into the world wailing like a baby does; someone must have forged me. Ruling out the possibility of my body being warped into a sword by the accident that is. My creator would be my top candidate for the first person to use me, but if he was already dead, there went that possibility. That said, there was no moss or grime on my pedestal or the piece of cloth decorating it. It was like I'd been left there just the other day. Did that mean my creator was still out there somewhere?

Hmm? An odd sensation rushed through my body as I took in my surroundings. *What's this…?* I felt…tired. A feeling of weakness overwhelmed my blade.

Then I started falling.

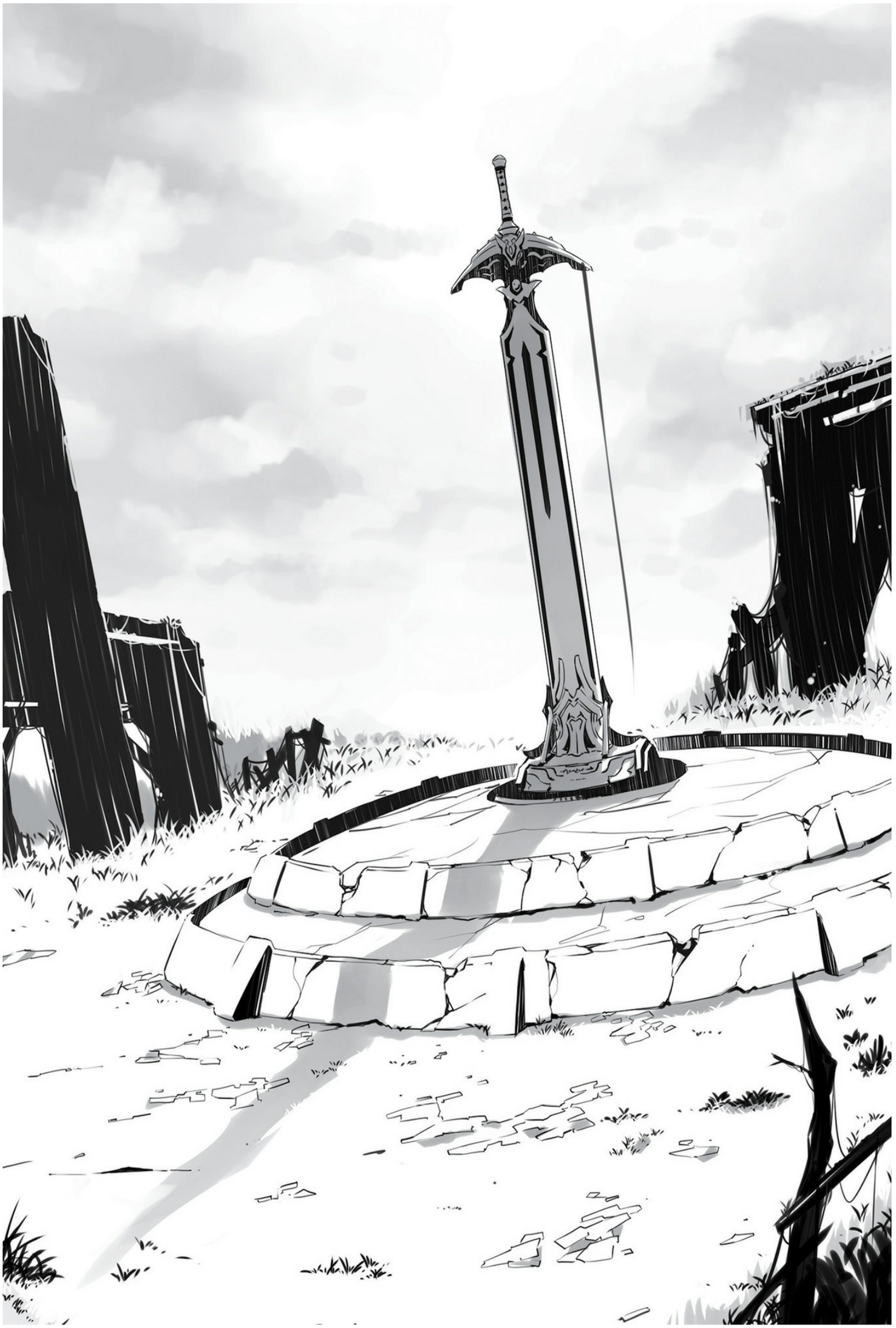
Seriously?! I began desperately casting Telekinesis to no avail. I was thirty meters off the ground. *Float! Please, just float at least!* My prayers were left unanswered and I hit the ground with a loud metallic clang which rang through the air. *Ow… That…didn't hurt at all, actually, but am I cracked anywhere? Any fractures?* I scanned my body and was relieved to find myself unscathed. My senses were working as they should, too. I might just be some sort of legendary sword after all if I fell from such a height and was no worse for wear. *But why did I fall?* I couldn't use Telekinesis anymore, and listlessness washed over me. I checked my stats to look for the cause of this accident.

Well, *there* was the problem. *Looks like I'm out of MP.* My Mana Pool was at 0/200. I must have been spending it the entire time I was using Telekinesis. This, too, must have been the cause of my listlessness. At least I didn't lose consciousness when my MP hit zero. *I think I was only flying for about three minutes. Couldn't have been more than five.* I lay on the stone pavement and waited to see if my MP would recover, and it did. I could feel magic flow into me

from my surroundings. The air must've been filled with mana. I counted the time it took to recover my MP and found it to be at a rate of one point per minute. I waited an hour to get my mana up to sixty before attempting Telekinesis again.

All right, I'm in the air. No problems so far. I checked my stats to see my MP steadily dropping. *I use a point of mana for every second of Telekinesis, which means I can get about three minutes of air time with 200 MP.* I didn't want to fall flat on the ground again, so I hurried back to my pedestal before my mana ran dry.

I felt oddly at ease when I slid back into it. *Home sweet home.* I shouldn't move about recklessly like that again; it was too risky. I held off going on any grand expeditions and took in the surrounding area.



I spotted many animals in the grasslands. It looked like a savannah from my Earth. There were mammals, insects, and oddly-shaped creatures which were probably unique to this world. One thing for sure was that things were much bigger here than they were back home. For example, the ant-like shadow I saw first was the size of a large dog. The things that looked like cows and bats were all gigantic in size. *Nothing like the ones back home.* I was only eyeballing, but they had to be ten meters tall, at least. That was bigger than an elephant, now that I thought about it.

I guess you could call them monsters. Which made me wonder, *With those huge monsters walking around, I don't suppose I'm bound to see any people running around these parts.* At least, I didn't see any humanoid shapes.

Reincarnation Log: Day Three I heard something coming from behind me. Footsteps; multiple pairs of them.

"Gehe, gehaf."

"Agyogyo."

"Gegya!"

Were they talking to each other? I wasn't sure if they were speaking a type of language, but it seemed they were communicating with each other. They could be wolves, judging by the sounds of their voices. They were coming closer, and I could feel them right behind me. *Come closer so I can see what you are*.

Rustling.

Come on…

More rustling.

Just a few more steps…

More rustling, which then stopped.

Damn it, they stopped right behind me.

"Gya gyu?"

"Gyal gaga."

“Gyang ga?”

“Gruhaaa.”

What were they saying? I thought one of them was asking for advice from the others, but then something grabbed me. I felt fingers wrap around my hilt, and, as hard and callused as they were, the hand they belonged to felt human. I guessed they were trying to pull me out of my pedestal. Yet I felt an odd revulsion to whoever it was that was trying to take me. I didn’t even know what he looked like, so the least I could do was give him a fair shot…but still.

I used Telekinesis to resist their advances and hold my ground. My resistance must have awakened their greed, because my mysterious visitor was now putting his back into yanking me out. Well, too bad. I rooted myself even harder. I wasn’t going to let this thing pull me out of my home.

“Gya gya!”

“Gyu gaga gaga…!”

“Haga hav!”

The others were getting riled up, as if they were cheering their friend on. They were dancing around me now, ready to take on the challenge of pulling the sword from the pedestal.

“Gyal gaga!”

“Gol gyal!”

And that was when I saw what they were.

Seriously?

He had green skin with a face that looked more brutal than a gorilla’s, and a pair of short horns coming out of his head. He wore a fur pelt and had a club in his hands.

Goblins?

They were goblins beyond any shadow of doubt. Excuse me, but I didn’t want to be used by a couple of goblins! If I ended up as a magic sword wielded by goblins, that’d be the end of me. If I had to settle for them, then at least have a

Goblin King wield me and not these mooks!

I continued resisting with Telekinesis and used Identify on the two goblins who were in my line of sight.

Name: Goblin

Race: Demon

LV: 1

HP: 17; Magic: 6; Strength: 8; Agility: 12

Skills: Club Mastery 1; Dig 2

Name: Goblin

Race: Demon

LV: 5

HP: 19; Magic: 4; Strength: 9; Agility: 10

Skills: Sword Mastery 1; Vigilance 1; Poison Resistance 1

I see. There were small differences even among members of the same race. I figured that'd be the case since they had different weapons between them, so they probably specialized in different things. The one trying to pull me out had finally tired and moved around to my front. I wasted no time in using Identify on him, too.

Name: Goblin Leader

Race: Demon

LV: 2

HP: 24; Magic: 11; Strength: 11; Agility: 13

Skills: Sword Mastery 1; Survivalist 1; Disassembly 2; Command 1

And here was their leader. Was his level lower than the rest because he had just evolved? Well, he was stronger than the other two, by about an inch. *What do I do now?* They didn't look like they had any intention of leaving any time soon. The leader began smacking me, seeing that he wasn't going to pull me out by conventional means. When I still refused to budge, he gave up and let

another goblin have a go. The next goblin—who had been in my blind spot until just now—grabbed my hilt, grunted, then heaved with all his might. In turn, I resisted with all my might.

Upon seeing that brute force wasn't going to be enough to claim his prize, the goblin leader took his flunky's club and began trying to smash my pedestal. The logic was sound: He would destroy my pedestal, then claim me in the aftermath. However, all his bludgeoning barely left a dent in the pedestal. His face reddened in frustration, and now I wasn't sure whether he was hammering my pedestal to claim me or simply vent. They were goblins, after all. *They really are as dumb as they say.*

The lead goblin struggled for a while before finally kicking the pedestal in frustration. Unfortunately, the pedestal proved to be much harder than he expected. He gripped his toes and began jumping up and down in pain, looking very comical as he did so. *Heheh. Good job, idiot.* The angry leader threw his club at the goblin who was in my blind spot. *Come on, don't take it out on your friends now.* Just when I thought he was done, the green bastard turned around and hocked a loogie at me. I could feel the disgusting liquid trickle down my blade. *Ew, gross! It's sticking to me!* But worse than that was the humiliation. *All right, you want war? I'll give you war.* I was oddly itching to get in a fight.

I started with the one who was right in front of me. The goblin swordsman went up following his leader's failed attempt at pulling me out. I calculated the exact moment he would begin heaving and stopped my Telekinesis then. He pulled me out that very instant. It was very easy for a goblin to pull me out now that I had stopped resisting. The sheer force the goblin put into the effort worked against him, as he lost his balance and fell right on his ass.

Hah, I got you now! I used Telekinesis to adjust the business end of my blade and cut right through the defenseless goblin's throat in one swing that looked more like an accident than an assault. Surprisingly enough, my first kill didn't disturb me. Instead, it excited me. In fact, I thought it was the obvious thing to do to a goblin who was right in front of me. *Oh, no*. Was I a cursed sword that hungered for blood and thirsted for souls? *Well, too late to stop now. I may as well finish the job.*

"Gya, gyago?"

The remaining goblins scurried to the side of their fallen comrade, unable to grasp what had happened. I slammed my body against the strongest goblin in the group (seeing that I was a sword, my body slam was roughly equivalent to a stab). The goblin leader barely had any time to react to my charge—after all, how could he expect a sword to move on its own?—and my blade pierced his belly, going straight through his back. All he did was look down at me in confusion before falling on the ground. Two left.

I didn't feel an ounce of guilt as I killed the next goblin. Even as I cut him open, I didn't feel the least bit disgusted. Maybe it was because I had the body of a sword now, but I didn't feel any aversion to slashing through my enemies. In its place was an odd sense of fulfillment; I was doing my job as a sword after all. That must have satisfied me. I chased after the one who was trying to run away and he, too, went down in one swing. Only one remained now and he was quaking in his boots. I took care of him in no time.

Name: Goblin

Race: Demon

LV: 2

HP: 12; Magic: 9; Strength: 7; Agility: 10

Skills: Sword Mastery 1; Kobold Killer Still, I was doing incredibly well. I may have taken them by surprise, but all of them had gone down in one hit. My attack power of 132 wasn't just for show. I didn't know how strong it really was, but it made quick work of those goblins. Then, something caught my eye.

Am I glowing right now? I emitted light on my third, maybe fourth, kill. I think I glowed on my second kill too, but I'd paid no attention to it then, thinking I was imagining things. I guess I hadn't been, although I was pretty sure I didn't glow when I killed my first goblin. I opened my stats to check if anything had changed.

Name: Unknown

Race: Intelligent Weapon

Attack: 132; MP: 166/200; Durability: 100/100

Evolution: [Rank 1; Crystals: 3/100; Skill Capacity: 10]

Skills: Identify 6; Self-Repair; Telekinesis; Telepathy; Status+; Recovery Rate+; Skill Sharing; Mage

Equipped Skills: None

Skill Bank: Dig 1; Disassembly 1; Sword Mastery 1; Club Mastery 1; Command 1; Survivalist 1; Kobold Killer What's this? It looked like I had gained some new items among my stats. The new description next to the Evolution menu specifically caught my eye: My Crystal count was at 3/100. Did that have anything to do with the three times I glowed earlier? And what of my Skill Capacity? I didn't know what that one meant either, only that it had something to do with Skill Bank, which came after it. I figured that I only kept the skills of the goblins if I glowed after killing them, since I didn't have Vigilance or Poison Resistance from my first victim. So, I absorbed the goblin's skills? I picked Skill Bank and heard a voice that sounded like a Tutorial Guide.

You have ten slots remaining. Would you like to equip skills from your Skill Bank?

Of course I do. The skill selection window opened.

Equipped Skills: Dig 1; Disassembly 1; Sword Mastery 1; Club Mastery 1; Command 1; Survivalist 1; Kobold Killer 1

Skill Bank: None Did that do it? I couldn't tell. I especially couldn't tell why I glowed some times and not others. Why didn't I glow after my first kill? I had a feeling it was linked to the things called "Crystals." They cropped up often in alternate universe light novels. From what I'd read, they were crystallizations of magic found within the bodies of monsters. If my assumptions were correct, it had something to do with the way I killed the first goblin. I'd killed him by cutting his throat, while finishing the rest off by stabbing them. That could be the difference.

I rushed over to the body of the first goblin and began stabbing his corpse with my blade. On my third stab, I found what I was looking for. I felt my blade

pierce through something hard, and I glowed again. Something flowed through me and I felt an odd sense of satisfaction. It felt like eating your favorite food after being starved for days. As I thought, I absorbed crystals by cutting through them, and it seemed the goblins had theirs located in their stomach. I didn't know if I had a hunger for crystals, but this could be why I'd felt an odd desire to fight them in the first place. I could have been reacting to the magic stones inside them. *I'll have to experiment later.*

For now, I looked at my Crystal count. Like I thought, my Crystal counter was now at 4/100, and Vigilance and Poison Resistance had been added to my Skill Bank list. The Goblin Leader had Disassembly 2 and his flunky had Dig 2, but the skills I absorbed were both at Level 1. I guessed the levels had been reset after absorption. *So how do I level these skills up?* Was using them in battle enough? Would I need to keep absorbing more crystals? I would have to experiment with these too. For now, I would equip Vigilance and Poison Resistance.

These goblin corpses are annoying me, though.

Their corpses lay in front of my pedestal, which meant I would have to keep looking at this sorry mess if I didn't do something about it. So I used Telekinesis and dragged their bodies out of the ruins. It left a trail of blood, but at least the corpses were out of sight now. I then put my newly obtained Dig skill to work and dug a hole for them. *That's pretty good,* I thought to myself as my slim blade repurposed itself into a shovel and made quick work of the ground. Though, I couldn't tell if that was thanks to the actual Dig skill or if Telekinesis was just that useful. It was one of the two, for sure. In any case, it was good for me to have a new goal while I waited for my User. I would go out and collect more skills, therefore making myself a stronger enchanted blade.

And so, I immediately set out on my hunt. I used Telekinesis to fly around the ruins and rested on the ground when I ran out of Mana. The plains were composed of flatlands for the most part, which was comforting because it meant I wasn't going to lose sight of my home pedestal any time soon.

The first thing I ran into was a small rat with six legs.

Let's Identify it real quick.

Name: Six-Legged Rat

Race: Animal

LV: 1

HP: 2; Magic: 0; Strength: 1; Agility: 7

Skills: None

Weak. Too weak. It didn't even have any skills. It might yield some crystals, though. My crystal count was currently at 4/100. I might rank up if I collected 96 more crystals. *Please die so that I may grow.* I came down on the rat with a sudden swing and cut the rat clean in two. It was easier to hit than I thought, but I wasn't glowing. *Huh? What's going on here?* I jabbed the corpse a little for good measure but still remained unlit. Was I unable to absorb crystals with that swing? Curious, I cut open the rats's body to investigate. It was such a grotesque sight that I counted myself lucky to have been born again as a sword since I didn't have the facilities to get sick or nauseous. I dug around and found no trace of any crystals inside the rat. *Oh, now I get it.* When I identified the rat's stats earlier, its race was listed as Animal. I supposed only monsters had them, since the animals on Earth didn't have any magic crystals inside them, either.

I'll look for a monster this time.

One was already walking into sight. A giant centipede, half a meter long, had come to scavenge on the dead rat.

Name: Giant Centipede

Race: Monster; Insect

LV: 4

HP: 18; Magic: 7; Strength 6; Agility: 14

Skills: Tremor Sense 1; Climb 1; Poison Fang "Race: Monster."

That should do it. I opened the fight by stabbing it in the head, but it struggled and flailed, yellow liquid gushing from its mouth as its body slapped helplessly against the ground. I put it out of its misery by cutting it in half. Its upper and lower halves squirmed with a vigor that was unique to the insect kingdom until it finally

ceased. Well, that was disgusting. But my slaughter of the centipede bore fruit when I stabbed the tip of my blade near its heart. I glowed, the satisfying feeling of crystal absorption coursing through me once again. I also absorbed its Tremor Sense, Climb, and Poison Fang, although it didn't look like the bug had any fangs to me… I equipped Poison Fang, reducing my Mana by five points and covering my blade with a subtle film of liquid. It was probably poison, but I was just happy it worked. I tried equipping Climb and Tremor Sense but couldn't.

You have reached the maximum amount of Skills you can equip.

It didn't look like I could equip all the Skills I had acquired. I looked at my stats again under Evolution Rank to find that Gems was now at 5/100, and Skill Capacity was at ten. Skill Capacity had to refer to the number of skills I could equip. True enough, I did have all my previous skills equipped at the moment: Digging 1; Disassembly 1; Vigilance 1; Sword Mastery 1; Club Mastery 1; Command 1; Survivalist 1; Kobold Killer 1; Poison Resistance 1; and Poison Fang. I unequipped Club Mastery—it was the most useless of my current skills—and equipped Tremor Sense in its place.

I'll go with this setup until I find a new skill.

In the list of other clearly useless skills I had: Command; Survivalist; and Climb. Hopefully I would get some more useful skills to replace these.

With that out of the way, I went back to my search. What I found next were two bowlegged, bipedal silhouettes which had the gaits of chimpanzees. Their green skin told me they were my old, ugly nemesis.

Goblins. And they have something in their hands.

I cast Identify on them and found they were little to no different from the goblins I had run into up to now. I was more interested, however, in the animal they were holding in their hands which looked like a large rat. I had never seen that one before.

Name: Poison Fang Rat

Race: Monster; Fanged Brute.

LV: 1

Status: Dead

HP: 0; Magic: 3; Strength: 4; Agility: 14

Skills: Vigilance 1

I'll take it. I slowly inched to some nearby bushes so I wouldn't be spotted. I was only a couple meters from them now, and I decided to start with the higher-level goblin.

Put 'em up! Your crystals or your life!

I promise you, I wasn't overcome with bloodlust or anything of the sort. I just wanted to say that line at least once in my life was all. I stabbed one of the goblins in the back and he slumped dead without any resistance. When I noticed I was glowing, I immediately pulled myself out of him and came down on his dumbfounded companion. Two down. I also got the Throwing Weapons and Hunting skills for my trouble; I equipped myself with those immediately. Then I came to my newly-discovered monster, which made me tilt my head in confusion. Not that I had a head, of course.

Why does this Poison Fang Rat not have any skills other than Vigilance?

I expected it to have Poison Fang at least. Talk about false advertising. I pulled back the dead creature's upper lip to expose its long canine. Yellow liquid was dripping from its tip. Was this venom?

Huh. What gives? The giant centipede had had Poison Fang in its skillset, but this "Poison Fang Rat" didn't? I didn't have enough clues to figure out why, so I decided to hunt some more monsters for more data. That was when my Tremor Sense and Hunting skills began reacting. The signal was weak, but I followed it by slowly circling to the other side of the bushes.

Name: Carrion Vulture Race: Monster; Bird.

LV: 5

HP: 13; Magic: 5; Strength: 9; Agility: 15

Skills: Poison Resistance 1; Enhanced Digestion A bird. It looked like it'd be incredibly alert, so it would be best to be careful. I

hovered above the ground, taking care not to rustle any tall strands of grass, and ambushed it before it had a chance to fly away. I cut off its head and it fell limp to the ground.

Phew. Good thing I killed it before it flew off. That would've been annoying.

I stabbed its corpse a couple times before absorbing its crystal. I learned Enhanced Digestion, although, having no digestive tract to speak of, it was of no use to me. I had to respect the lack of discrimination my Evolution menu had for even bothering to learn this skill. I felt legitimate satisfaction when I absorbed its crystal, though. I had joked about having a hunger for crystals earlier, but it seemed it was true. I wanted more.

What shall I have next? I'd like to have something that has a new skill if possible.

I was looking for my next prey when I saw a strange shadow. It belonged to something that looked like a kite gliding through the sky. It wasn't fast, but its movements were irregular, making it seem otherworldly. The thing looked like a green jellyfish that was drifting in the sky.

Name: Air Floater

Race: Monster; Plant

LV: 5

HP: 14; Magic: 10; Strength: 6; Agility: 4

Skills: Drain Magic 1; Hawkeye; Float I was about ten meters away from it now, but it didn't react to me and carried on drifting along. I guessed I could attack it, but I was careful in approaching it just in case it jumped on me. I aimed for the jellyfish's head, which looked like a mushroom cap. It housed something that looked like an eye, which I assumed to be its core. When I was about two meters away from it, the Air Floater began showing signs of intelligence and lashed out its tentacles.

Ew, gross!

There were about ten of them and they came at me fast. The dark red

appendages squirmed like a cross between a snake and a worm. They latched on to me as I was preoccupied with revulsion.

Is it draining my mana?

I could feel my mana being sucked away by its tentacles. The thing was as dangerous as it was gross. I was now solely focused on escaping its clutches. Fortunately, the tentacles weren't very strong, and I was able to wiggle free and cut through them with little difficulty.

Phew, that was close.

I checked my stats and found that my mana had dropped by ten. Who knew what would have happened if it had kept on draining me? But now I knew how dangerous it was and that it had to die. I circled over its head and lunged at top speed. It launched its tentacles one last time but I cut them down along with its torso. *Well, that was easy.* I felt my blade strike against something hard and I glowed, proof I had destroyed the crystal which was its weak spot. The Air Floater lost its floatation capabilities without its Float skill and its dead body laid limp on the ground.

I got Float, Drain Magic, and Hawkeye from that encounter. All of them seemed like useful skills, and Float seemed like it would have great synergy with Telekinesis after I played around with it for a bit. As its name implied, it allowed me to float in the air with little effort. Casting it consumed mana, of course, but it wasn't as much of a drain as having to constantly fly using Telekinesis. I could now cover five times as much distance as I did before, and with the help of Drain Magic, I could extend my excursions indefinitely.

Then, a thought crossed my mind as I was experimenting with Float. *That Air Floater had Float in its skillset, so why didn't the Carrion Vulture have Flight despite it being a bird monster?* The same could be said of the Poison Fang Rat which didn't have the Poison Fang skill. There had to have been something common between the two monsters. Then again, you might need wings to use Flight, so I might not be able to use it even if I got it.

Wait, I wouldn't be able to fly without wings? What if Flight isn't a skill to begin with?

The goblins didn't have Walking or Breathing in their Skill List, so maybe it was

the same with Flight for bird monsters. They didn't need magic or specialization to function considering it was a normal physiological feature. That would explain the Poison Fang Rat too. It already came equipped with specialized glands and fangs which allowed it to use venom, like venomous snakes back on my Earth. In comparison, the Giant Centipede's poison fangs must have been created with magic.

And seeing as Sword Mastery is an acquired skill, is that why I'm able to absorb it?

There were many things I didn't know about my body that warranted further experimentation. The Hawkeye skill proved to be of great use, too. It allowed me to zoom in and manipulate the angles from which I was viewing a certain object, which meant I was no longer restricted to a fixed camera angle. It didn't work if my target was too far, but I could now see almost everything around me.

Let's see what else I can hunt!

Reincarnation Log: Day Four.

Gimme all your gems!

I was just coming off my 124th kill of the day when I received a certain prompt.

You have reached a new Evolution Level. You have acquired 10 Evolution Points.

I opened my Status menu.

Evolution: [Rank 2; Crystals: 102/300; Skill Capacity: 12; Free Points: 10]

Well that was fast.

I had gone over a hundred crystals at some point in the day, despite only being at eighty this morning.

What did I do differently from yesterday? I guess I moved to new hunting grounds…

The monsters in the direct vicinity of the ruins were becoming easier and easier, and I had decided to move away from it. As such, the monsters got stronger the further I went away. There was the Crush Boar, a giant pig with a hammer for a snout; the Iron Ant, a giant ant with mandibles that could crush boulders; and the Rock Bison, which had fur as hard as stone. The beasts were larger, their levels higher, their skills more plentiful, and their crystals bigger.

I guess size does matter when it comes to magic crystals… Do I get more than one crystal out of the tougher monsters?

That had to be the case. There was no way the Crush Boar, which was over two meters in size, would yield the same amount of crystals as your garden variety of goblin.

I wonder what else has changed.

I looked to see if my other stats had gone up. The differences were quite significant.

Attack: 132, MP: 200/200, Durability: 100/100

Whoa, this is awesome! I could actually become the world's strongest sword! Haha, now I'm motivated! It looks like my skill cap went up, too.

I set my sights on capping all my stats.

So…what am I supposed to do with the ten Evolution Points?

I looked at the points I got with my rank up. A slew of items popped up on my menu under the header of Skill List.

Upgrades:

Attack Up (Small); Durability Up (Small);Telekinesis Up (Small); Telepathy Up (Small); MP Up (Small); Skill Capacity Up (Small); Increase Skill Level; Bestiary; Herbology; Mineralogy Boy, that's a lot. Am I supposed to pick some to level up? After mulling it over, I decided to increase my MP for now.

Spend 5 points to obtain MP Up (Small)?

I thought "Yes" to myself, answering the text prompt.

You have obtained MP Up (Small).

I saw that five points had been deducted from my total Evolution Points and that MP Up (Small) had been added to my Skill List. Finally, my MP had been increased by one hundred points.

Thanks, Evolution!

But what now? I wanted all the upgrades, but I knew I wasn't going to have enough points for all of them. I ended up picking Increase Skill Level since it looked like that was going to let me level up the skills in my Skill Bank. However, it looked like I had to level them up one at a time. I picked Sword Mastery to see what would happen and it told me I needed two points to level it up. Actually, most of my skills only needed two points to level up, with the exception of Poison Fang and Floatation which needed five. I wondered what the cause of the difference was and speculated that it had something to do with the fact that Poison Fang and Floatation didn't have numbers indicating their skill levels.

I didn't have much to go on, but I decided on Attack Up (Small) in the end. It was straightforward and had the most impact on fighting monsters. The skill was added to my Skill List and my attack power was increased by fifty points. Great, now I had more reason for crystal collection.

Now I'm really motivated! I'll hunt every last monster in these parts to extinction!

I was ready to get down to business. I soared through the skies with high spirits and descended upon every monster I came across like an eagle on its prey. Most of them went out in one hit while the ones that didn't were very close to dying. All that remained for the stragglers was their cruel slaughter. When I was done absorbing their crystals, I took to the skies again and resumed my hunt for prey. Search and Destroy. I didn't feel bad for my prey and I felt I was little more than a bloodthirsty cursed sword without a conscience. As a matter of fact, I had to hunt to survive. The sensation of absorbing crystals was the closest thing to eating that I had.

All in all, I was happy about getting all sorts of skills. *Ooh, I haven't seen that one before.* My skills were increasing at a steady rate, though I did get some useless ones like Enhanced Digestion and Enhanced Taste Buds. How was I

supposed to use either of those? They would come in handy once I found my User I guess, but until then they were completely pointless. This aspect of collecting skills did tickle my nerd side, and I found it to be more enjoyable than gathering up crystals. *I would love to get my hands on a monster that has a lot of skills,* I thought to myself, recalling the monsters I had faced until now.

Goblins taste pretty good, actually.

They usually moved around in small groups and yielded a decent amount of crystals. More importantly, they had an amazing variety of skills to choose from. Their opposable thumbs had given the goblins an opportunity to learn a great assortment of skills that would help with their daily lives which separated them from the animal-type monsters.

Guess I'm going on a goblin hunt.

Fortunately, I saw them quite frequently around the pedestal, so they shouldn't be too hard to find. However, just as I decided to make goblins the main part of my crystal diet, I immediately hit a wall.

Where the hell are all the goblins?!

They weren't completely absent, but they weren't flourishing, either. What was a magic sword to do in this situation?

Hmm… I know! I'll look for the goblins' nest and exterminate every last one of them!

I hadn't noticed anything that resembled housing on the plains, so they had to be in some sort of hole somewhere. It shouldn't be too hard to spot from the sky.

Or so I thought.

Can't seem to find any goblin nests.

Two days had gone by and I had yet to find a single goblin nest. I supposed they were craftier than I thought. All right then. The next time I fought a group of goblins, I would let some of them escape and let them guide me to their base of operations. Then I could just slaughter them all in one fell swoop. A brilliant plan, if I did say so myself.

I spotted a group of goblins and hovered at a lower altitude to follow them. I stalked them for about an hour on my tiptoes (if I had any toes to speak of), remaining as quiet as possible. I observed that the goblins would break into a dance at times and be completely entranced by a formation of ants at another. All in all, they wasted so much time getting to where they were going which I found irritating. So irritating, in fact, that I thought about killing them at multiple points during the observation.

I've gotten way too used to Search and Destroy.

I wanted to give myself a pat on the back for showing restraint as I infiltrated the hole in the ground hidden by some shrubbery. The further I went in, the less able I was to restrain my laughter.

Heheheh… I don't have to hold back anymore, do I?

In an instant, I let out my pent-up rage along with my mounting hunger for crystals.

Give me all your crystals!

"Shoo gya gya!"

"Gyuha!"

This hole in the ground was a great idea.

Magic coursed through me after my meal, soothing the sensations which felt like thirst and hunger. I dusted myself off, concealed my presence, and resumed my stealthy hunt for more goblins. I had to have killed around thirty of them after an hour, but they hadn't sent any of their troops after me yet. Had they not noticed?

Well, this is *a big hallway.*

I followed it until I turned a corner and entered a room the size of a gymnasium that was filled with goblins as far as the eye could see. There must have been around fifty of them. They were a considerable threat at that amount, even if all of them were weak individually. I figured they could easily mob a medium-sized monster to death. As I was scanning the room, one of the goblins caught my eye. Its face was covered with scars and its body was twice as

large as the rest of the greenskins; it looked like an old war veteran. It wore armor, which may have belonged to an adventurer once, and its giant sword was stuck in the ground next to it.

Yes, jackpot!

Name: Goblin King

Race: Demon

LV: 21

HP: 97; Magic: 26; Strength: 57; Agility: 26

Skills: Intimidate 2; Sword Arts 2; Sword Mastery 4; Command 4; Morale Boost 3; Shield Mastery 2; Provoke 1; Throwing Weapons 1; Vigor 1; Spirit Manipulation The Goblin King himself. The other goblins' stats were nothing compared to his.

I guess they found out about my intrusion and went to protect their king.

I trembled with excitement as I looked at his stats. It was the sort of euphoria you got when you were about to be served a high-class dinner, except this was also an all-out buffet to boot. There was a veritable assortment of goblins: soldiers, archers, knights, mages, warriors, monks, medics, and shamans.

Let's do this!

I focused my energy, careful to hold nothing back since my will commanded the intensity of my Telekinesis. I gathered up all the mana I could put into Telekinesis to accelerate toward the mob at blinding speeds. I called this one the Telekinesis Catapult.

You're going down first, Your Majesty!

I unleashed my charge and launched toward the Goblin King in an instant. The silence of my Telekinesis gave him no chance to react. Despite being a sharp object, the impact of my blade was closer to that of a cannonball, and I ended up exploding his head before getting stuck in the cave wall. I was quite impressed with myself. A few moments later, the beheaded body of the Goblin King slumped forward and fell to the ground with a thud. Blood gushed out of his neck and stained the ground. Silence fell upon the cave as the goblins

realized what had just happened to their king. Then they erupted, in anguish and rage, and it felt like their voices shook the room itself.

"Gyaooo!"

"Graaah!"

"Grooo!"

There were a whole slew of reactions. There were those who panicked and ran around the room; those who ran up to the king's corpse; those who stood in place, roaring as they stood.

Now the goblin king's aide, who had been standing next to the king before he died, faced the other goblins and barked orders at them. Five of them ran out of the room to check if anyone had thrown the sword which killed their leader, seeing as they thought it impossible for a sword to throw itself. The goblins' gazes were fixed on the hallway, anxious to find their mysterious assassin.

Except there's no one for you to find, you fools!

I put on a show of falling to the ground due to a breeze, but I turned and launched myself at the aide instead. He looked like he was the brains of the operation in my opinion.

Now give me your magic!

As useful as the Goblin King's physical stats may have been, the goblin mages were my main target from the start. I had been itching to get my blade on their spells since the first time I used Identify on them.

Name: Goblin Mage

Race: Demon

LV: 9

HP: 27; Magic: 36; Strength: 14; Agility: 20

Skills: Mineralogy 1; Command 1; Staff Mastery 2; Battle Staff 1; Fire Magic 3; Fire Magic Up (Small); Mana Manipulation

Bwahahaha! Now I can use magic, too!

It was every nerd's dream to use magic in an alternate universe, after all, and

seeing that I was a nerd myself, my excitement was a foregone conclusion.

But before that, I'll have to clean the rest of you up!

It was a one-sided fight from there. The goblins were in a state of fearful panic throughout, most likely because they were no longer under the effects of the Goblin King's Morale Boost. The Goblin Mage wasn't around to give them orders anymore either, so they no longer had anyone to quell their hysteria. Having lost their leaders, the formidable fighting force that was the goblin troop was reduced to little more than a terrified mob. The stronger goblins fought back, but their uncoordinated attacks were no match for me. Meanwhile, the weaker goblins couldn't land any direct hits on me either, and I came out unscathed. In fact, the goblins got in each other's way more than they got in mine.

And this would be the last archer!

I prioritized taking out my long-range attackers. With them taken care of, I flew close to the ceiling where the rest of the troop could do nothing but stare. I looked down on them like the pile of EXP that they were. I swooped down and circled round the mob, cutting goblins down as I went. I killed the ones who were trying to escape first, and, although a significant amount of them got away, I managed to take down thirty of them during my assault.

Boy, did I level up after that.

My skill levels for Sword Mastery and Club Mastery went up with nearly every crystal I absorbed. I supposed my skills leveled up when I absorbed a crystal which had the same skill. Alternatively, I had to absorb a certain number of crystals with the same skill to level it up. In any case, the fact that I was able to level up made me quite happy.

HAHAHAHA! NOW I HAVE ALL THE EXP!

After slaughtering the stragglers and absorbing their crystals, I left the goblin nest with something akin to a full stomach.

Now, where's my pedestal again?

Night had fallen by the time I had demolished the goblin nest and. Although I was flying around in high spirits, darkness had enveloped the land and I lost my

sense of direction.

The moon's over there, which means…

Not much, really. The moons moved differently in this world, so I could scarcely rely on them for direction. The moonlight may have brightened up the landscape but I still couldn't see as well compared to daytime. I was completely lost.

I guess I should give up on going home tonight.

The pedestal had become something of a home to me, so I wanted to go home at least once every day where possible. Resting within the pedestal made me feel at ease, if nothing else. Returning under the cover of night seemed impossible, however, so I figured I may as well spend the rest of the night hunting since I no longer had any need of sleep. I hesitated for some time since the idea of nocturnal exploration scared me, but it wasn't as if I had any other choice.

I headed out, flying at a lower altitude this time. The less distance I had to fall to the ground in case of any surprise attacks, the better. I had seen some large flying monsters earlier, like a bat the size of a cow and a winged anaconda, so I had to play it safe.

I used not only my eyes but all my senses, if you could call them that, on my hunt. I had half expected the monsters to be stronger at night, but it was quite the opposite; they might have been weaker since they had to live under the cover of darkness. It took some time to find my quarry but none of them put up much of a fight.

Nice! Echolocation and Awareness! I'm getting so many great utility skills!

The nocturnal monsters were loaded with exploration and detection skills. One of the most helpful skills was Echolocation, which I got from a Giant Bat. It allowed the user to use mana and sound to locate creatures and objects within a thirty-meter radius. Nocturnal exploration became a walk in the park with it.

Time to rake in those crystals and rank up!

I proceeded to hunt down monsters I hadn't seen during the daytime and was filled with so much ecstasy that I couldn't see two feet ahead of me. All I could

think about was going after my prey. Looking back, I may have let the thrill of the hunt get to my head.

"GRAAARGH!"

Which was why I was caught off guard by a sudden roar that sounded like it came from right above me. I looked up at the source of the noise and saw a huge black shape the size of a Cessna plane.

What?! How did Echolocation not detect that thing?!

I had scanned the area with my Skill a few moments ago and that huge shadow didn't show up in the results. It roared again, whizzing by me at what felt like supersonic speeds. It grazed a part of my blade, and a high-pitched metallic clang rang through the air. The creature's lunge was so powerful that I flung back about ten meters in a tailspin. That wasn't all: The graze had decreased my Durability by 30 when I checked my status screen.

You'd resort to an ambush, you coward?!

Now, you might be thinking, "But you ambush monsters all the time," and you'd be right. But it was okay if I did it, because I was a sword. Why does that make it okay, you ask? Well, because! Being on the receiving end of an ambush also pissed me off!

I tried stabilizing myself as I spun in the air from the ambush. I needed to see what I was up against, but I couldn't even see it. It was too fast to see with the naked eye—and I suddenly understood why Echolocation didn't work on it. I only used Echolocation once every few minutes to check my surroundings, but a creature with that kind of speed would only take an instant to get to me; it was well outside the effective range of thirty meters. Considering the thing was already a tiny dot in the distance in the five seconds after it had grazed me, I figured it probably took less than three seconds for it to find then carry out the initial strike against me.

The creature roared again.

Damn, it's coming in hot!

I cast Identify on it, barely evading its assault.

Name: Lesser Wyvern

Race: Monster; Lesser Dragon.

LV: 21

HP: 223; Magic: 95; Strength: 122; Agility: 142

Skills: Intimidate 2; Stealth 2; Fire Resistance 3; Air Manipulation 3; Poison Resistance 3; Hardened Scales; Enhanced Olfaction; Enhanced Absorption; Enhanced Sight It was strong! The wyvern may have been a lesser dragon but it was the strongest monster I had come to face yet. It had more skills, too. I managed to avoid a direct hit this time, but the wind pressure it generated was enough to knock me off course. It was then I realized that I had taken this world lightly. I had yet to face any hard opposition, but throwing me a dragon for my first real fight was overdoing it, don't you think?

Damn it!

My formidable foe circled around, moving even faster this time. This seemed to be a hopeless boss fight, but giving up wasn't an option on the off-chance I got a Game Over screen instead of progressing my story. I resolved that, if it came down to it, I would hover close to the ground to escape the dragon's missile-like assaults. That might be enough to do it. Maybe.

For now, I was going to try and fight it since it was doubtful whether I'd be able to run away from it in the first place. It was probably going to pursue me as long as I stayed in its territory, so I may as well find a way to create an opening and fight back. Its supersonic speed seemed like a double-edged sword I could use to my advantage, so I decided to start there. My own survival took precedence of course.

I waited for the Lesser Wyvern to make its next attack. The creature's speed worked against it, making it difficult to alter its own flight course. Thankfully, I didn't need to worry about the certainty of the dragon's next assault. It made a great turn and lunged toward me once more.

Here it comes!

The creature let out a mighty roar as I readied myself to aim for its soft underbelly. My plan was to dodge its charge while staying close to the creature's stomach. I could then slash upward to cut it open in one quick swing. I wasn't sure whether it would work, but I was all for trying it out. If I was damaged in the process, I would hastily make my retreat.

The dark shape grew larger as it closed in on me, but I was oddly calm. It was fast, but it wasn't quite as fast as the cars and bikes back home. Add the fact that it couldn't make any fancy maneuvers, and you had what was essentially a flying freight train; fast, but predictable. This might just work.

Come on!

"GROAR!"

No, never mind. I had managed to dodge the wyvern's charge, but I only grazed the belly of the beast. Trying with all my might to stay calm, I had overcorrected the course of my swing out of subconscious fear. At least I knew I could hurt it now though, even if it was just a scratch. The graze gave me a chunk of my mana back, given the wyvern's high magic value. This would make it easier for me to cast my skills.

A low growl emanated out of the creature.

Crap, it looks pissed now. I barely scratched you, buddy.

I may have made things worse for myself, seeing that the dragon was now glaring at me with resentful eyes.

This may not end well.

It charged at me again. I tried to get away, but, alas, it hit me dead on.

Ow! That's it, you oversized, winged lizard!

It got a good hit in, I had to admit. The Lesser Wyvern flicked its tail as it grazed against me, as if expecting my counterattack in a display of acrobatic flair to knock its talons on me. But I wasn't about to just float there and take it. I took advantage of the momentum from its claw striking me and charged straight into its right eye. However, gouging the eye proved to be too great an effort for my blade and the tip of it snapped. It was so worth it, though. The

creature roared and flailed in pain, its flight becoming erratic.

Now let's see if I'm okay.

I still had two thirds of my blade left on me. It didn't hurt, but I wasn't sure if I was going to be all right after this encounter. It didn't look like I had any problems with flying either, likely thanks to my use of Telekinesis. My broken shape had no apparent effect on my aerodynamics, and neither was I leaking mana from my broken blade. I was in surprisingly decent shape. I had that Self-Repair skill, so I wondered if that would fix me after this. *It would suck if I had to remain broken though,* I thought to myself. Just then, my blade began glowing and a couple millimeters of my broken cross-section had begun fusing itself. The Self-Repair skill was kicking in. I sighed in relief. It looked like I was going to be whole again.

You're done for, you oversized lizard!

Having checked to see that I was all right, I resumed my furious name-calling of the wyvern. My beautiful white blade was now cracked and in pieces, and I wasn't going to let it get away with that. I suspected it wasn't going to let me get away, either. The wyvern reared up resentfully and launched itself toward me again, set on destroying me for the injury I had dealt it. It was slightly slower, but it was still faster than I was by far.

Bring it on!

I had made peace with the fact that my broken blade was going to make my life difficult, but I had steeled myself. I was ready to lose one battle to win the war against this thing. First, I slowed myself down, deliberately allowing the flying lizard to gain on me. Having tricked it into thinking I was limping away, it charged in a straight line toward me.

Hah, you fell for it, you winged bastard!

I pivoted, aimed my blade at its wings, accelerated, and was rewarded with a body blow. The wyvern couldn't dodge my attack with how fast it was going, and we rammed into each other. Only a tenth of my blade remained after the crash, most of it shattered by the smash. But the Lesser Wyvern wasn't doing so great, either. I had cut its left wing clean off its base and it was now hurtling toward the ground. We were about thirty meters in the air, and I figured that

wasn’t going to be enough to finish off a lesser dragon. But as I approached the Lesser Wyvern, I found that its neck was bent at an odd angle and was now sputtering copious amounts of blood from its mouth. The creature was in its death throes, and it was only a matter of time until it ceased moving entirely.



Phew, I survived that encounter somehow.

My Durability counter was at 23 now. That was too close for comfort. I wouldn't have survived if I had taken more damage from the first hit.

Well, it's a good thing I won…but how do I go about getting your crystal?

Digging out my hard-earned prize was going to prove difficult with only a tenth of a blade. Considering how long it took for Self-Repair to work, it was probably going to take more than a night to get back to my original shape. In the meantime, the corpse of the Lesser Wyvern might not be safe from the scavengers wandering the grasslands at night.

What do I do now…?

I felt a bond forming between my broken pieces thanks to my Self-Repair skill.

Maybe…

I focused my energy and visualized Self-Repair energy flooding my blade in the hopes it would speed things up. Granted, it was a silly speculation but—

What's this?

My blade was now glowing brighter.

This might just work…

Focusing my energy made the Self-Repair skill work faster. This was quite the discovery. It meant that increased focus during the casting of other skills may increase the effectiveness of those skills. On the flip side, I was now consuming mana at a rate of 1 MP per second. My mana consumption wasn't without merit however, when I had recovered the entirety of my blade in about three minutes' time. I had 15 MP left by the end of my repair. I wouldn't have had enough if I hadn't drained mana from the Lesser Wyvern during our fight.

I learned a lot from that fight.

Now I had enough blade to carve myself a crystal. The Lesser Wyvern's crystal was in its neck (I should've aimed at this spot instead) and was worth 20 points, indicative of how hard the fight against it was.

I guess I'll find a bush to hide myself in for the rest of the night…

It was the morning after I had defeated the Lesser Wyvern. I was hovering in the air trying to locate my pedestal. It was a bright day, and the increased visibility aided me in locating my home. I spotted it eventually, much farther away than I had thought. I must have gotten turned around the other night and went in the opposite direction.

And away we go!

I launched myself in the direction of my pedestal. I took down some weak monsters who were unfortunate enough to be caught in my flight path and had a hearty breakfast of crystals. The fight with the wyvern last night strengthened me to the point where the weaker monsters had become little more than trash mobs. I noticed monsters grew stronger the further away I went from the pedestal, and weaker the closer I was to it. It might have something to do with the magic emitted by the pedestal; perhaps it made a barrier of some sort. Incidentally, I only noticed this barrier ever since I began using magic. I didn't know who put it up, but I speculated that it might have been my creator.

It took a little under an hour to reach the pedestal I called home. Flying in a straight line helped, and it was a lot easier to navigate now that it was light out. I was only away for a night, but I had already begun feeling homesick. As I drew closer to the pedestal, the warm magic of the barrier welcomed me home.

I'm back, Pedestal! Did you miss me?

I dove into it and sheathed myself with a plop. Resting within the pedestal was comfortable beyond belief.

Home sweet pedestal. I can finally kick back and relax!

I spent a few minutes just staring at the clouds as they went by. Then, it was time for entertainment.

*Heheheh… Mwahahaha! I finally have it! I have ceased to be a mere sword, J*jo!*

It was time for some magic. I had gotten fire magic off a Goblin Mage during my goblin slaughter the other day and I couldn't wait to try it out.

Let's just equip it real quick… And, we're set.

I concentrated on casting it. I was no stranger to using my Skills, so I was curious as to how a Spell would work, if at all. My initial results were disappointing, to say the least.

It doesn't look like it's doing anything…

I had cast the spell, but nothing came of it. Though, it didn't feel like I had failed to cast the spell, either.

What gives? Do I not have enough magic? I'm pretty sure that Goblin Mage had less magic than I do though… I'll try equipping all of the mage's skills for now.

I equipped Mineralogy, Command, Staff Mastery, Battle Staff, Fire Magic, Fire Magic Up (Small), and Mana Manipulation to start. Suddenly, some new images came into view.

Fire Arrow and Fire Shield?

I picked Fire Arrow because if I was going to use any magic at all, then it had to be offensive magic.

Whoa, there's an actual incantation in my head now.

I began reading the incantation and my blade glowed by the time I finished.

Fire Arrow!

An arrow made of flames shot out of me when I said the magic words. It flew off into the distance at the speed and trajectory of an actual arrow.

Whoa…

It worked!

Hahahaha! I did it!

The fire arrow only singed the grass it flew over. If we were talking about pure damage, then flinging myself at an incoming enemy would've been a hundred times more effective; but that wasn't the point. The point was that I was now able to use magic.

All right, let's try this one next! Fire Shield!

A small, flaming buckler projected itself in front of me.

Hm. I wonder how strong it is.

I picked up some rocks with Telekinesis and began flinging it at the shield. Nothing too powerful, I was only tossing them at the speed a baseball pitcher would throw a ball. It took the first rock without any problems but began wavering by the third.

That's about it, I guess.

The shield was good for three hits, after which it dissipated. It was going to suffice for any projectiles, but I was doubtful about putting it up against swords and axes. For now, I was content playing around with these two spells. I had more than enough mana to spare after my rank up and they both only cost 5 MP to cast. I enjoyed myself, casting one spell after another.

Fire Arrow! Fire Arrow! Woohoo!

Thirty minutes went by before I started coming down from my high. The surrounding shrubbery appeared to have been on fire, but that could've been my imagination.

Phew. Speaking of, I should look into my skills.

Specifically, I wanted to know which skills I needed to equip to cast magic. I began by unequipping the two skills which obviously had nothing to do with magic: Mineralogy and Command. With Staff Mastery, Battle Staff, Fire Magic, Fire Magic Up (Small), and Mana Manipulation still equipped, I cast Fire Arrow again.

That worked.

I then unequipped Staff Mastery and Battle Staff.

Fire Arrow!

No problems there. I unequipped Fire Magic Up (Small) and found I was still able to cast magic. This time, I unequipped Mana Manipulation so that Fire Magic was the only magic related skill I had equipped.

Nope.

I re-equipped Mana Manipulation.

Fire Arrow.

Whoosh.

It looked like I was going to need Mana Manipulation to use any magic at all, so I may as well just leave it equipped at all times. Which brought my attention to another skill with a similar name: Spirit Manipulation.

If Mana Manipulation is for Magic, what's Spirit Manipulation for?

The skills the Goblin King had were as follows: Intimidate, Sword Arts, Sword Mastery, Command, Morale Boost, Shield Mastery, Provoke, Throwing Weapons, and Vigor. Was Spirit Manipulation for Sword Mastery? Or maybe it was for this new skill called Sword Arts. After some time experimenting with my skill sets, I figured out that Spirit Manipulation indeed went with Sword Arts. I was able to expend Spirit to unleash devastating attacks called Sword Arts. There was the Double Slash which allowed me to attack twice, and the Heavy Slash which was a devastating strike sure to kill most enemies. They looked intriguing.

I can't wait to try them out on a moving target.

I could hunt tougher monsters with all these new skills. I'd be able to expand my hunting grounds as well.

I've already taken care of the goblin situation, so I guess I'll try venturing farther out.

Four days had gone by since I first learned fire magic. The local monsters had begun fearing me as the murderous magic sword, and some even took the initiative to destroy me. I carried on absorbing crystals and was now at Rank 4. I had developed a taste for the various kinds of magic crystals available; not that the crystals themselves literally had different flavors, but there was a difference in the quality of magic between every monster type. The orcs and goblins I'd been killing as of late had a stronger taste compared to the other monsters. Absorbing the crystals of the demonkin was like eating spicy food in my previous life, although the resemblance was vague at best.

I'd collected a myriad of different skills and was slowly increasing their levels as well. My raid of the Gourmet Orc's nest proved to be a delicious venture,

both in the skill acquisition and crystal absorption senses. I acquired various weapon skills which included my most frequently used Sword Mastery and Sword Arts, both of which were now at Level 3. Leveling Sword Mastery to Level 3 really made a difference as I could manipulate my blade, which was really my body, much better, and I was much more efficient at striking the enemy's vital parts as well. I could deflect the attacks of some of the larger monsters, too. This really was the most important skill to have if you had a sword for a body.

I also acquired a variety of skills from the other monsters of course: The rock-like Stone Spider gave me an upgrade of my Poison Fang skill, Advanced Poison Fang; the carnivorous Giant Mole gave me Heat Sense; and much like a certain Poison Fang Rat, the Paralysis Cat didn't give me Paralysis Claws, but it did give me Conceal Presence. On top of that, I got Air Current Sight from the bird-type monsters, a skill which fell under the Sense category, and other Stealth skills from the smaller, fanged monsters. They were all easy to use and had great utility. I had explored seventy percent of the grasslands and it now felt like my backyard.

Take this! Fire Arrow!

I was currently fighting some Slimes, a creature which was either the weakest or the strongest, depending on the work of fiction it appeared in. It was quite strong in this world, having amazing regenerative capabilities, strong physical defense stats, and being able to conceal itself to mount an ambush. It also had various ways of manipulating its gelatinous body to mount an attack, such as forming tentacles which lashed like whips and shooting out parts of its body like bullets. The Slime was made up of multiple layers, including a tough outer layer, an acidic inner layer to digest its prey, and its deepest layer being poisonous so it could better defend its precious crystal.

All in all, they were incredibly annoying. Especially the acid layer, since I took damage just from touching it. The only way forward was to spam my fire magic. They were quite large however, with the smallest one being around a meter tall and the biggest being two meters. They could take a great deal of punishment from my fire magic; I didn't even know how many fire arrows I'd shot by now.

My current plan was to cut open the Slimes, fully prepared to take damage in the process, and shoot my fire magic right into the place they stored their

crystals. The Slimes would sometimes resist by lashing away at me with their tentacles, which was a decent way of fighting back. However, forming tentacles took away from their overall body mass and in turn made it easier for me to fire my magic at their crystals. In the end, most of my mana went into healing myself instead of endlessly casting fire magic.

Is that all of them?

I must've stumbled upon their natural habitat because there was an absurd number of them. With every Slime I killed, two seemed to spawn out of the ground to take its place. The Slimes weren't as strong as the rest of the monsters around here, but there was strength in their numbers.

I hear something…

I barely had time to catch my breath before I felt the presence of a new monster fast approaching. It might have been attracted to the pile of freshly slaughtered Slime. The creature approached me and roared, showing itself to be a giant turtle three meters in length. I wasted no time in using Identify on it.

Cannon Tortoise? I guess that tube must be a cannon.

There was a meter-long protrusion sticking out the front of its gigantic shell. That must have been the barrel of the cannon. So what was with the thin piping on the rear end of the shell? It looked like the exhaust pipe of a modified motorcycle. The turtle roared again, and what followed was the high-pitched sound of a vacuum cleaner as it sucked up the air around it.

I see, so the pipe's an intake rather than an exhaust.

The Air Current Sight I got from the bird monsters allowed me to see the Cannon Tortoise suck up the wind around it to its rear intake. It then fired an invisible bullet out of its cannon. It would've been impossible to dodge had it not been for my vision.

So it shoots out highly-compressed air!

It wasn't often that I ran into a monster capable of long-distance artillery. Its movement was appropriately lumbering, however.

Too slow!

But it could only fire one shot at a time, and the shots only came from one direction. I quickly flew behind it but it was very slow in turning to face me. Its shell was sufficiently hard, and I certainly didn't look forward to being plowed under it.

I'll just have to kill you before that happens!

I flew up and out of the Cannon Tortoise's field of view. I could see its head as it looked at its surroundings to look for me, so I immediately plunged my blade through its head, killing it instantly.

Just as planned!

I couldn't bask in the glory of victory for long however, since the other monsters were now swarming the Cannon Tortoise's fresh corpse just as the Slime remains had called the Cannon Tortoise to begin with.

Could you at least give me a second?

Nature was enacting her law, but I couldn't help but sigh since I was a concerned party for once. The monsters that came along looked pretty strong, too.

You don't look very friendly…

Indeed, I was now face to face with a giant red leopard which stretched seven to eight meters in length. The tip of its tail looked like a torch that burned with a red flame.

Let's Identify you real quick.

The monster was called a Flare Leopard. It had the highest stats of all the monsters I'd encountered so far. Its Agility even topped that of the Lesser Wyvern's, coming in at 305. It also came equipped with Fire Magic, making it a force to be reckoned with at both close and long ranges.

You look like trouble.

But a creature this strong had to have had equally large crystals. I wondered what its crystal must have tasted like.

Only one way to find out!

The leopard roared as I thrust myself into battle.

Two days had passed since my fierce fight with the Flare Leopard.

I should get going.

Specifically, to the outer rim of the grasslands, a place I had christened Area 5. As I mentioned earlier, the further I went away from the pedestal, the stronger the monsters became, possibly as a result of the barrier. So I decided to call the immediate area surrounding the pedestal Area 1, as it was populated with goblins and other lower-level monsters. Area 5 was the furthest away from the pedestal and was therefore populated with the strongest monsters in the grasslands. Beyond Area 5 was unexplored territory. It was where the grasslands ended and the forest started. However, I would sometimes see monsters from Areas 1 and 2 peeking out of the woods of the forest, so it was doubtful the forest was more dangerous than Area 5. I didn't know why the monsters of Area 5 didn't move into the forest, but maybe I'd figure that out once I got there.

It doesn't look like there are any trash mobs around.

The number of monsters dropped the further out I went into the grasslands. The difficult areas were populated with large monsters who, although not as plentiful, maintained control over vast territories. I was hunting in Area 4 the other day and I had only managed to take down twenty of such creatures. However, the average crystal drop rate was about fifteen per encounter, which meant I had farmed far more crystals out of those twenty than I would have if I had hunted down a hundred goblins. Here was my current stat spread:

Name: Unknown

Race: Intelligent Weapon

Attack: 314; MP: 1000/1000; Durability: 800/800

Evolution: [Rank 5; Crystals: 1366/1500; Skill Capacity: 34; Free Points: 38]

Skills: Identify 6; Attack Up (Small); High-Speed Self-Repair; Skill Sharing; Recovery Rate+; Status+; Telekinesis; Telekinesis Up (Small); Telepathy; MP Up (Small); Bestiary; Mage; Skill Capacity

Up (Small)

I used the points I received from my rank up to level up my Self-Repair into High-Speed Self-Repair and equipped Telekinesis Up (Small), Bestiary, and Skill Capacity Up (Small). I was free to switch up the skills I had in my Skill Bank, and it wasn't like I could use all the skills I had acquired anyway. In fact, I couldn't even use most of them.

Oh, I see a monster!

Name: Goblin

Race: Demon

LV: 3

HP: 10; Magic: 2; Strength: 7; Agility: 8

Skills: Vigilance 1; Poison Resistance 1; Cooking 1

Details: A demon born from a piece of the Demon God when it was destroyed 100,000 years ago. Bears deep hatred and resentment toward all non-demon species. While nimble and dexterous, it has a vicious and brutal temper. Being evil by nature, it is recommended to exterminate them as you find them.

Crystal location: belly; tailbone.

Two goblins were walking side by side on the borderline between Areas 2 and 3. Although I was able to destroy their base of operations, I still hadn't managed to eradicate them completely. I got some extra details when I used Identify on them this time around, a benefit I most likely owed to investing some points into Bestiary. Who knew it would kick in when I used Identify? It actually made fighting monsters so much easier. It told me of a monster's weak points and where its crystals were which made it possible for me to kill most my foes with one strike.

"Exterminate as you find them"… So, like cockroaches.

They were much eviler than I thought, which made sense from a human standpoint. As a former human, I was on the side of humanity. I was strengthened in my resolve to convert them into quick EXP.

Now what about the other one…

The other goblin looked slightly different from the first one. Its horns were about twenty centimeters long and were curved at a wicked angle. Its clothing was slightly different too, as it was dyed pitch black.

Name: High Goblin

Race: Demon

LV: 2

HP: 38; Magic: 21; Strength: 26; Agility: 19

Skills: Sword Mastery 2; Throwing Weapons 1; Climbing 1; Poison Resistance 1

Title: Slave of the Demon God

Details: Unknown.

Here was the High Goblin. I had actually run into some at the goblin nest before, but I had thought them to be nothing more than just odd-looking goblins at the time. The Goblin King notwithstanding, they were far stronger than any of the normal goblins. The stats this thing had at Level 2 were ridiculous, and it even had a title to boot. They were probably the elite fighting force of the goblin race, considering I had often seen them lead a crew of goblins. There were no further details about the High Goblin and I wondered if I needed to put more points into Identify, or if I needed to kill more of them to get it to unlock. Well, I was told to exterminate any goblins I came across, so it must have held true for the high goblins as well. EXP was EXP.

Still, I was amazed to discover that gods existed in this world. I didn't know whether the gods here were self-proclaimed superhumans or actual gods, but I didn't want to run into them either way. Gods and religions were both annoying to me.

Leave your crystals at the door!

And so, I carried on my hunt for monsters.

Yeehaw!

I came up with a great method of getting around the other day. I would charge up Telekinesis and launch myself at great distances. Then I'd let myself fall wherever I would. I called it the Telekinetic Catapult. It was much more mana-efficient, since all I needed to spend was the initial mana it took to cast Telekinesis. With this method of transportation, I reached Area 4 sometime before noon.

The residents of Area 4 were as strong as I expected. I could no longer one-shot everything I came across, and I took significant damage to my Durability whenever the monsters hit me. An attack from a goblin in Area 1 wouldn't even register a decrease in Durability, but a direct hit from the monsters here knocked my Durability down by at least one hundred points. I needed to be careful.

Eventually, I reached Area 5.

What monsters await me here?

I used my various detection skills to scout the area for monsters. Getting a preemptive attack on my enemies was a vital strategy in my hunts, and, at times, I would come out of the ensuing scuffle unscathed because of it.

Where are all the monsters, though?

I had been searching for monsters to kill for close to an hour to no avail. Were there no monsters to be found here? Was Area 4 the final stop in my journey after all? Just as I was beginning to question myself, I sensed a large magic source coming from a corner of the area. It had to be a monster, and a strong one too.

Ooh, that's one hell of a pulse!

The response was even stronger than the Flare Leopard in Area 4, which was the strongest thing I'd fought up till now.

Let's get some altitude.

I flew up into the sky so the thing wouldn't be able to see me; at this height, it'd be difficult for monsters without advanced detection skills to do so.

Found it! Wait, what is that, a puddle?

A pool of water about five meters in length lay over the spot where the strong pulse was coming from. Was the pulse coming from inside it? It didn't look like there was anything living within it from a glance.

I'll get closer and use Identify on it.

Identify didn't work with this much distance between the target and me. I figured its effective range was about twenty meters. I closed in on the body of water and its surface began wobbling. Was it the wind? The wind wouldn't make it wobble so much as ripple. The gelatinous pool of water continued shivering before breaking the optical illusion and exploding to reveal its true identity. The pool wasn't a body of water after all.

Ew, that's one huge Slime!

The puddle gathered itself and formed a giant Slime. It must've sensed I was around and prepared itself for confrontation. The thing jumped up with the pressure of a water fountain, but soon lost to the force of gravity. Its gelatinous body looked like a waterfall as it fell to the ground. It splattered against the earth before reforming into a gigantic blob of Slime.

Aside from its massive size, it looked like all the other Slimes I had faced. A regular Slime was about one meter in diameter, two meters at the most, while this gargantuan blob was over fifteen meters long and loaded with magical energy. It was quite intimidating.

L-Let's just Identify him for now…

Name: Gluttonous Slimelord

Race: Monster; Slime.

LV: 58

HP: 620; Magic: 822; Strength: 539; Agility: 308

Skills: Evasion 3; Evasion Up 4; Camouflage 6; Drain 8; Harden 8; Instant Regen 7; Abnormal Status Resistance 7; Jump 5; Soften 8; Fluid Mastery 7; Fluid Arts 8; Physical Resistance 7; Predator 9; Magic Sense 7; Pocket Dimension; Spirit Manipulation; Enhanced Drain; Acid Body; Enhanced Digestion; Mana Manipulation

Details: The final evolution of a Gluttonous Slime. Consumes every living thing in its vicinity and possesses unlimited capacity for growth. Stores away its defeated prey in a pocket dimension for later consumption, making it capable of time-space magic to some degree. Some speculate it is capable of killing and eating dragons when there are no smaller creatures to consume. Upon sighting, some countries dispatch entire squadrons to deal with this threat.

Crystal location: Center of the body.

Whoa, that thing looks dangerous. "Unlimited capacity for growth"?

The Slime in front of me was quite young by the looks of it, but that didn't change the fact that it was high on the threat level, particularly with the skills of Physical Resistance and Acid Body. It might drag me to my slimy grave if I wasn't careful. Also, where the other Slimes only had four levels of Fluid Mastery, this guy had seven.

I'd probably die if I committed to a frontal assault.

So, what then? Do I start spamming fire magic? Even if I did, it would've taken hundreds of Fire Arrows to take this thing down given the sheer bulk of it. I'd run out of mana before that even happened. The Slime formed a tentacle to lash at me, but it fell short given how high in the sky I was. Its high level in Magic Sense probably told it that I would make for a decent meal. Do I start pummeling it with my physical skills? Not that it would do much good against the Slimelord's Instant Regen.

Would I even be able to withstand attacking him?

It had Acid Body too, so I wouldn't be able to attack it without taking damage myself. I had a limited number of strikes to work with.

Whoa!

My Dodge skill helped me evade the Slime's attack, though I had a feeling that that was just a prelude to its real assault. I wasn't sure if I could dodge this thing when it got serious.

That just means I'll have to send you to your grave with one attack. Your death will be quick and painless.

I aimed at the Slimelord and shot my fire magic at it. It didn't do much damage, but that was enough for me.

I know how you Slimes think.

I continued pelting Fire Arrows and stones that I shot with Telekinesis at the beast. I pressed my advantage, fully expecting to take damage during my offense. The Slime lashed out its tentacles at me to the point where I was spending more MP on healing than on attacking.

Damn it, I can't heal fast enough to cover the damage I'm taking.

The Gluttonous Slimelord became more frantic with every tentacle it sent after me, but that was exactly what I was aiming for.

Evolve all you want, you still have the habits of a Slime!

With most of its body mass focused on offensive tentacles, it didn't have much Slime left to protect its magical core, so I used Telekinetic Catapult to launch myself directly at the thing's crystal. It was a reckless charge into which I put my entire being. Indeed, I had increased the potency of the Telekinetic Catapult with the wind magic, Wind Shooter. Coupled with the boost in attack power from Sword Mastery, this was the deadliest move in my repertoire.

I'd even thought of a name for it. "Heavenly Slash!" I shouted in my excitement. If I took some time to consider the name, I would have probably rejected it. Probably.

Silence fell upon the grasslands for a moment which was followed by an ear-piercing roar. If I had ears, they'd probably be ringing right now. I had stabbed a huge hole in the Slime's body, which left it unable to counterattack. Its crystal was clearly broken as well. The Slime stopped moving and melted all over the ground. It was a strange sight to behold as earth and grass were covered in mucilage.

Phew, I did it… That was dangerous.

Half my blade had been melted off. The Slime would've dissolved me if it had gotten a hold of me, and I felt good about my decision to end the fight as quickly as I could.

You have reached a new Evolution Level. You have acquired 30 Evolution Points.

I got 150 crystals out of it—I expected nothing less from a high-level monster.

Name: Unknown

Race: Intelligent Weapon

Attack: 352; MP: 1300/1300; Durability: 1100/1100

New skills: Camouflage 1; Harden 1; Instant Regen 1; Soften 1; Pocket Dimension

It looked like I got some useful skills out of that skirmish. I would have to try all of them out.

Hmm?

I began with Camouflage. It supposedly allowed me to blend into my surroundings, but I had no way of telling if it worked; I personally thought it didn't. The same thing happened with Harden, seeing as I was already solid enough as a sword.

Instant Regen, though, was impressive. It consumed an extraordinary amount of mana, but it regenerated most of my blade in mere seconds. It was good for when I would be pressed for time, whereas Self-Repair was sufficient when I would have time to wait.

Ooh, I'm all bendy.

Soften really did soften my blade. Not by much since it was at such a low level, but shaking my blade did make it bend. It was a funny looking skill.

In any case, it was time to move on from the appetizer skills.

Activate Pocket Dimension.

It was an ability which gave me a private item box. I focused on a rock in front of me and thought about storing it, which caused it to disappear. I then thought of taking it out of storage which caused a pebble to appear out of thin air. I added some grass and stones into the storage space which prompted a list of my stored items when I tried taking something out of storage.

How's the capacity then?

I'd be disappointed if it couldn't store much, so I began testing the limits of the Pocket Dimension by putting more stuff into it.

Let's start with you.

I looked over at the remains of the Gluttonous Slimelord. There was enough of it left to fill half of a pool twenty-five meters wide, so I was doubtful. But the Pocket Dimension easily stored it away in an instant.

That's high-rank magic for you.

I didn't know its upper limits, but it was bound to be useful for my User if it could store this much mass inside it. I could store away monsters we killed, as well as food supplies. I could even use it as a substitute wallet.

I had refilled my Durability and MP when I ranked up earlier, so I was in top condition. That said, it didn't reduce any of the mental stress I had incurred during the fight.

I'm kinda tired, so I'll go to the lower-level areas to hunt for a bit.

I began exploring the rest of Area 5 a day after my fierce battle with the Slimelord. I fought the beast somewhere in the south, so I thought I'd cover some other patch of land today.

I'd already run into some monsters that looked as strong as the Slimelord, like the twenty-meter-long Doppel Snake whose body was as thick as a barrel. As its name implied, it had the ability to make copies of itself. The copy would disappear shortly after being killed, which gave me a genuine fright. Worse, the skill was at such a high level that the copies were stronger than the Doppel Snake itself, which was kind of a letdown when the serpent unceremoniously died after I put all my strength into killing it. In fact, the snake was weaker than most of the monsters in Area 4; it was only dangerous mainly because it could make copies of itself. Still, I happened to find it resting in its hiding hole, and the cramped space may have been part of the reason it couldn't put up much of a fight.

Heheheh, now I'm exponentially stronger…

I wasted no time in using my newly acquired Doppelganger, but…

"Huh, I'm not a sword…"

What? It's just me from my previous life?

Yes, the copy the Doppelganger skill had produced was in fact the human me. Split Thinking, another skill I got off the Doppel Snake, allowed independent movement of my sword self and my copy.

"Does this mean I don't need a User?"

Seriously? How strong is my copy, though?

I was hopeful about the possibility of foregoing a User altogether, but reality wasn't as sweet. For starters, the Doppelganger skill had a time limit: five minutes for now. On top of that, my copy was extremely weak. It had an average stat of five and was therefore weaker than the average goblin. It could use all my skills, but they were all Level 1. I wouldn't be able to use it if I tried.

Adding insult to weakness, my copy was butt naked. I thanked my lucky stars no one was around to see it. I recast it many times but could only conjure up dirty rags to clothe my copy at best. Was it because the Doppelganger skill was only Level 1? I supposed I could use it as a distraction, but creating a weak copy ate up so much MP—500 to be exact—that I didn't think it was feasible. Using it in its current state, this skill would probably kill me in a fight.

Aside from Doppelganger, the snake gave me Molt Skin, Heat Seeker, and Scale Regeneration, which seemed pretty useless to me. The rest were skills I already had in my Skill Bank. The most useful among them was Ultimate Poison Fang, a further upgrade of Advanced Poison Fang.

I'll have to try that one out in an actual fight.

I proceeded to store away the gigantic Doppel Snake in my Pocket Dimension, which still didn't fill it up. The thing was roomier than I thought.

I headed north around midday, beating up monsters and storing them as I went. It occurred to me that each of the cardinal directions in Area 5 was ruled by a powerful monster, something that was made apparent to me after my campaign in the southern and eastern regions.

I thought of the powerful monsters, like the Slimelord and Doppel Snake, as Area Bosses. The weaker monsters in the area seemed to serve only as prey for these apex predators. I was on my way to beat up the Northern Area Boss now.

These Area Bosses have given me powerful skills so far. I can't wait!

What I found was the smallest among the area bosses I'd fought up till now. The turtle monster radiated strong magic though, and it was no slouch compared to the other area bosses.

The reptile's body was about five meters in length. Its ten rear intake pipes shone a metallic black as they connected to a thick cannon sticking out from the front of its shell. I used Identify on it to figure out its name.

Blast Tortoise.

It looked to be a close relative of the Cannon Tortoise I had run into before, which meant it also had the ability to suck up air and shoot out blasts of air pressure. The creature roared as if to showcase its power. It must've been much stronger than its cousin, given the amount of intake pipes it possessed. It also had better detection skills to go with its artillery capability, as it was already lining up its barrel to fire at me at this great a distance. It shot out one air blast after another.

Whoa!

I didn't see that coming. The Cannon Tortoise needed to reload after every shot, but this high-rank monster was worthy of its title. The creature roared as it shot out another blast of highly compressed air. I managed to avoid a direct hit so far, but the air bullets had suddenly exploded around me, dealing massive damage—and that was just the aftershock! The fact that it could detonate its air charges remotely was also a sign of its advanced evolution.

This is bad!

Explosions of air pressure followed one after another as I tried to get away while the blasts chipped at my Durability. I could see the air bullets better now, but escape was my top priority. I plunged myself toward the ground with Telekinetic Catapult to dodge the ensuing barrage, zigzagging left and right.

I've had enough out of you!

I closed in on the turtle, taking every hit that came my way in stride.

Got you!

The battle was mine now that we were in close range. I brought my blade down upon the turtle to cut it open, but—

Hey, get back here!

The turtle drew its head and limbs into its shell at a speed I'd never seen before. I slashed its shell out of frustration, but it was of little to no effect. I wondered if I could wear its shell down if I cut it enough times…

But I'm not letting you get away that easily!

The turtle, all holed up in its shell, began spinning in place (it sorta looked like Gamera), and indiscriminately shooting its payload of air bullets all around it. It was a mindless barrage which made it hard to read and difficult to dodge. The air grenades rolled up the ground in its immediate vicinity but reverted to regular air bullets at a distance. Its detection skills must've told it of my every move, and it therefore decided to shoot at its main blind spot above its shell by tilting its body.

Jeez!

I couldn't stay above it, so that meant I had to go under it. I checked my stats while dodging the incoming air bullets, an ability I gained thanks to the Doppel Snake's Split Thinking skill. I put my Evolution Points, which I was saving up, into my Earth Magic to bump it up to Level 4. The monster I got that from was the Gourmet Orc Mage, and its Earth Magic was also at Level 4.

There it is!

I was now able to use the Gourmet Orc Mage's hole-digging spell.

Earth Digger!

I jumped into the freshly dug hole and continued burrowing using Earth Digger until I was directly under the Blast Tortoise. I couldn't see him, but I could feel his presence.

Earth Wall.

I used the Level 3 Earth Magic, Earth Wall, to erect a two-meter-high wall from right under the Blast Tortoise's giant body. It drove the creature high enough that it couldn't feel the ground anymore, confusing it. I took the chance and charged right into the turtle. Damaging it wasn't my main objective, however.

I've got you right where I want you!

The turtle toppled from my tackle, unable to gain stable footing on the Earth Wall, and fell to the ground with its belly exposed. It tried turning itself right side up with its tail but failed miserably. It wouldn't be able to get away now. The turtle stretched out its head and limbs in a desperate attempt to regain its footing, but I wasn't about to let this chance slip by. I used my greatest skill, the one I used to defeat the Slimelord, and launched myself at the turtle's head with the Telekinetic Catapult. It was only a turtle after all; it was no match for me.

I win!

That was dangerous, though. I couldn't afford to underestimate Area 5. I went inside the turtle through the hole I made in its head and dug around until I found something that looked like a heart containing its crystal. I absorbed it and stored the Blast Tortoise away. And the Pocket Dimension *still* wasn't full.

I don't think I have enough MP. I should head back.

I would leave investigating the western part of Area 5 for tomorrow. I needed to look at the skills I got from the Blast Tortoise anyway.

I returned to the pedestal and found that the only skills I could use were Air Compression and Air Blast. Granted, these were both useful skills. Air Blast allowed one to draw in the surrounding air and shoot it out like a bullet. The Blast Tortoise had specialized organs which allowed it to use this skill whereas I, on the other hand, used Air Manipulation and Wind Magic to achieve the same effect.

Air Compression seemed useless at first, but it was actually an interesting skill. Using it with Air Blast buffed up the power of the air bullets, and casting it on myself allowed me to put up a shield of compressed air. It was useless by itself, but it seemed to have interesting effects when used together with other

skills.

I'm glad I have a lot of skills now, but I'm gonna need some practice so I can put them to good work.

A skill was only as powerful as how I used it after all.

The following afternoon—

I was locked in a fierce battle with the last area boss, Tyrant Saber-Tooth. It was a gigantic tiger with long fangs, its body standing four meters tall and spanning ten meters long. It was incredibly fast for its size, too. Its ability to jump mid-air made it a deadly and agile enemy. It had various abilities to oscillate its body parts which made its attack power disgustingly high. Its fur was covered in some sort of magic that made it difficult for my blade to cut through. I managed to slip through the tiger's claws and charged to its side, but I barely scratched it.

I managed to avoid the Tyrant Saber-Tooth's clamping jaws, but the aftershock dealt incredible damage regardless.

Was that from its skill?!

If its graze was enough to rattle me, a direct attack may break me in one hit!

The tiger didn't have any way of attacking me from a long range, so putting some distance between it and me seemed to be the best strategy. However, the big cat's insane speed, and its ability to traverse mid-air, enabled it to catch up no matter how far up in the sky I flew.

Fire Arrow!

The fire arrow bounced off its fur, leaving little more than a singe in its place. Well, that didn't work. I had to put my back into my slashes to cut through this thing, and magic fared little better. The creature roared though, so I supposed my efforts weren't all for naught. It seemed I did enough damage to greatly annoy the Tyrant Saber-Tooth.

This can only get worse…

Should I go for its weak spots, or stick to my bread and butter skills? I dodged the creature's attacks as I pondered this question and looked through my Skill

Bank. Eventually, I found my answer.

That's it!

I decided to use my remaining Evolution Points. However, I wasn't sure if this would secure my victory.

You have spent 15 Evolution Points to upgrade Ultimate Poison Fang to EX Poison Fang.

My solution was Ultimate Poison Fang. The Tyrant Saber-Tooth didn't have Poison Resistance among its skills which meant Ultimate Poison Fang should work against it, and I may as well evolve it further with my remaining EP. If it still didn't work, I would make my escape.

With that plan in mind, I poked the Tyrant Saber-Tooth.

How do you like that?

I cast Identify on him while flying away.

Yes, it worked!

The Tyrant Saber-Tooth was now poisoned, its life draining away rapidly. The tiger roared again in a frenzy, its attacks more frantic in its poisoned state. I kept up the offense to make the poison work faster.

Three hours later…

I won!

I pointed the tip of my blade to the sky in an expression of victory. At my hilt was the corpse of the final boss of Area 5, the Tyrant Saber-Tooth. The poison had worked its magic, but it entered an enraged state when its Life Points counter was at about half. I honestly thought I was going to lose that fight, but it was a risk worth taking.

First, the skills: I got Oscillation and Vibrofang for my trouble. Oscillation allowed me to use vibrations to destroy a target from the inside out, while Vibrofang allowed me to increase the sharpness of my blade by vibrating it, essentially turning me into a high-frequency blade. The slightest touch would make a target explode, so I quite liked this skill.

Next were the crystals. Beating a boss in Area 5 gave me 150 crystals, at least. Pair that with the crystals I got from hunting around in Area 4 and I was ready to rank up again.

Name: Unknown

Race: Intelligent Weapon

Attack: 392; MP: 1650/1650; Durability: 1450/1450

Evolution: [Rank 7; Crystals: 2109/2800; Skill Capacity: 47; Free Points: 82]

Skills: Identify 6; Attack Up (Small); High-Speed Self-Repair; Skill Sharing; Recovery Rate+; Status+; Telekinesis; Telekinesis Up (Small); Telepathy; MP Up (Small); Bestiary; Mage; Skill Capacity Up (Small)

The rank up had also topped me off.

What should I do now?

I was going to go back to the pedestal after the fight was over… But the sun was high in the sky, and the mysterious forest line surrounding Area 5 was staring me right in the face. I had plans to investigate it later, but…

Hm, I dunno.

I was fully healed, and I had time. I thought I could take a peek.

I may as well check it out while I'm here. It'd be a shame to go back empty-handed.

And so I decided I would explore these uncharted woods. I took my time and inspected my surroundings using Night Vision and Thermal Vision to look for potential predators.

Doesn't look like there's anything here…

There were quite a few animals, but not that many monsters. I spotted some goblins, but they weren't worth the effort killing at this point.

Nothing but low-rank monsters around, it looks like.

I thought I would have run into an impossibly difficult god monster in Area 6,

but this was no different compared to Area 1.

Man, I'm kinda disappointed…

I launched myself into the air with Telekinetic Catapult to get a bird's eye view of the woods. It seemed to be a normal forest, and I didn't feel the presence of any large monsters around.

Oh, I can see a clearing.

There was a patch of land in the forest which was clear of trees. I turned around and dropped myself to the ground. I fell, blade first, and lodged myself inside the earth.

Perfect landing!

Telekinetic Catapult often put my blade in a horizontal position, so there had been times where I smacked against the ground with the flat of my blade. It didn't do any damage to my Durability, but I considered it a failed landing. I considered sticking the landing with the end of my blade the ideal landing position since it felt nice. It would've been easy to alter my course with Telekinesis of course, but it felt more rewarding to let gravity be the judge of my landing. It was an alternative form of entertainment that wasn't hunting and killing monsters.

My blade pierced through the moist ground, and I deduced from its humidity that the ground here was mostly made of clay.

All right, let's do another jump… Huh?

I couldn't move.

Was the clay's hold on my blade stronger than I thought? I concentrated to increase the potency of my Telekinesis.

N-no way… I can't cast Telekinesis?

More specifically, something cancelled my Telekinesis just as I cast it.

Time to put some oomph into it.

I focused all my magical energy into casting Telekinesis, but it whiffed with a weak noise and nothing happened.

Ugh, that didn't work?

I knew now the ground was absorbing my magic. It drained all the magic I had focused in a flash.

What about this?

I tried using my skills now. I used Vibrofang to vibrate my blade and create a gap in the ground to wiggle myself out.

But Vibrofang wouldn't even cast.

Then I tried shooting Air Bullets to blast myself out of the ground.

That didn't work, either.

I attempted to use fire magic to burn the surrounding ground away…

…but no luck.

Oh, come on…

I took a break from trying to escape and looked at my surroundings. It was a forest—nothing more, nothing less. I was now sure the reason for the lack of strong monsters in the forest was because of this mana-draining phenomenon. If a powerful monster walked around here, it wouldn't take long before it would start feeling sluggish and unable to move like yours truly at the moment.

It's a good thing I don't get hungry…

In my attempts to escape, I confirmed that any magic which projected out of me didn't work at all. Oddly enough, mana was drained from my blade only when I cast skills or magic and not throughout the entire time I was stuck in the ground. I didn't have any problems with my vision (which was also maintained by the blade's mana) either.

But I noticed something after a few hours of being stuck in the ground:

Oh god, my MP's not recovering at all.

I still had more than half left over, but it meant I shouldn't use any more of it carelessly. I didn't think there was any way of escaping on my own now.

How did this happen…?

Three days had gone by and nothing had changed. On day one, I experimented with all the skills I had in an effort to escape but soon realized it was to no avail. I couldn't project any magical objects out of me which meant my attack skills, magic, and Telekinesis were out of the question.

All that was left to do was wait for some sort of creature to pull me out out of curiosity or a miraculous natural disaster to blow me away. The best-case scenario would be for a human to come along and pull me out of course.

A month had gone by and no one had come to my rescue.

Please! I'm a really good sword! Top quality, in fact!

I was enchanted, and I could think and move for myself. You couldn't get a better deal if you tried!

You ever seen a sword that can cook? Well, look no further. See, I'll even max out the skill for it right now.

Cooking is now at Level 10. You have unlocked skill and status bonuses for Cooking.

You have unlocked a new option for evolving.

You want something demolished? I have that skill too. It's super useful. It's at Level 10 too, see!

Disassembly is now at Level 10. You have unlocked skill and status bonuses for Disassembly.

I have Identify too. I'll even level it up for you right now. And I'm one hell of a fighter. My Sword Mastery and Sword Arts skills are at Level 7 you know. You want me to throw in some magic in there too? No problem! How's Fire Magic 10 sound?

Fire Magic is now at Level 10. You have acquired a new fire spell.

Would you look at that! And I won't stop there, here's some stat bonuses to boot!

You have obtained Status+ (Medium).

Just equip me and you'll be one hell of a fighter too! How's that? I'm not some

random piece of junk, and would you look at this skill right here—

"Help!"

I was getting delusional now; I could've sworn I heard someone talk. This might be the end of me.

"Help me!"

Wait, was I really hearing things?

I felt the slight vibrations of the ground through my blade. I wondered what was making that rattling noise.

"It's—still on us—"

"Damn it!—no choice…"

They were human voices! Finally! Thank you, God!

Hey, I'm over here! See the sword that's stuck in the ground that looks all legendary? Come on! Get me out of here! Please?

The rattling came from the wheels of a horse carriage. A wagon shot out of the forest like a bullet. It looked quite dangerous, what with how fast it was going, especially since it looked like it was going to make a sharp turn—which was how the carriage turned over in front of me.

Whoa, is everyone okay in there?!

I didn't understand why they were in such a panic, though. It looked like they were being chased by something. I couldn't use Telekinesis, so I had no choice but to watch with bated breath as the passengers crawled out of the cart.

It looks like everyone's in one piece.

Were they merchants? They didn't look like warriors, but they didn't look like civilians either. Their heads were wrapped with bandannas and their clothes were ragged which showed signs of their long journey.

The small man, which I assumed to be a lackey, led out several men and women who, frankly, looked…terrible. Their clothes were in tatters with nothing more than pieces of string keeping it all together. Their hair was a ragged mess and heavy iron collars were placed around their necks.

I guess this is a world with slaves.

“Hey, get the slaves to carry the goods!”

“Yessir! You heard the man, hurry up, you subhumans!”

“Uugh…”

“Aargh…”

“Don’t just sit there!”

Oh, he’s human filth, isn’t he?

The sight of the small man cracking his whip at the slaves to make them carry the heavy-looking load was enough to make me sick.

“Come on! I-It’s coming!”

“It”? I wonder what’s chasing them.

The answer soon announced itself to me with a deafening roar.

“Oh my God, it’s here!”

It was a monstrous, two-headed bear.

Chapter 2:

Sword Meets Girl The slave traders and their slaves were all in a panic. A two-headed bear was chasing them through the forest. The monster was after their caravan, to be precise. The slaver's lackey ordered the slaves to save some of their goods before issuing the slaves another order.

"Slaves, slow that thing down while we get away!"

The slaves had no weapons with which to fight the bear monster. The only thing they could've done was stand there and be eaten. The slaves must have known this, and yet, they stopped in their tracks, turned around, and threw themselves at the beast.

"Nooo!"

"I don't wanna die!"

They screamed in anguish as the bear tore them apart. It looked like they were unable to go against the slaver's orders. Were they under some sort of spell? It must have had something to do with the collars that were fitted around their necks. I could feel magic coming from the collars, though my senses had been dulled by the magic sapping field. The mana drain only affected living bodies, which must have been why the collars maintained their effectiveness on the slaves. The field would've drained me dry of my mana if it was strong enough to drain the collars of their magic.

The beast roared as it swept through one of the slaves' bodies. One ferocious claw swipe was enough to separate torso from limb as the man barely had enough time to let out a horrified cry. Even if the bear was one of the weaker monsters, facing it without any equipment was an awful idea. The slaves were helpless in the face of such a violent beast. It would only take a few minutes before the creature wiped out the lot of them. I felt sorry for them, but there was nothing I could do. I couldn't call out to them even if I tried. I could only watch as the slaver made his escape. *Damn it, if only there was someone who would pull me out of the ground!*

The beast roared as it charged toward the slaver and tore him apart. Good job, bear! That piece of human trash deserved it! Still, was there no way of saving the rest of the slaves?

Then, a shadow approached me. It belonged to a little slave girl. She must have been free to move now that the slaver who ordered her to be a distraction was dead. Her face was covered with dirt, which made it difficult to discern her features. However, my attention was fixed not on her face or dirty hair or her ragged clothing; instead, I noticed something sticking out of her head.

They were ears—cat ears, in fact. They looked fluffy, too! This girl was a beastman, but I was so overwhelmed with emotion that I forgot all about the current situation. She had cute animal ears, after all. How could I not be touched by this turn of events?



Damn it, it's so annoying that I can't call out to her! Girl, I don't know if you can hear me, but, if you can, you need to pull me out of the ground. Then, you must let me touch your fluffy ears! Wait, how would that work? I guess I could use the flat of my blade but— The girl had gotten closer to me and wrapped her fingers around my hilt. She gripped it and began tugging. It was a desperate situation, but she wasn't about to give up and accept death. I liked her already.

Come on…

The girl tugged harder now.

That's it! Pull me out!

But it looked like I was stuck in the earth harder than I thought. The clay-infused ground had wrapped itself around my blade and was my greatest adversary yet; it wasn't about to let go of me so easily. The girl looked to be about twelve or thirteen years of age, and her body was frail and malnourished. She didn't look like she had the physical strength to yank me out of my prison.

Come on, you have to keep trying! Aaah, look out behind you!

The bear was fast approaching the girl now. The other slaves hadn't made it, their remains scattered across the grass. The girl was the only one left.

You have to pull me out, girl!

"Who's there?"

Oh, you can hear me?!

"Who are you?"

I'm the sword you're trying to pull out.

"I'm shocked."

You don't look shocked…

"I am."

Anyway, the bear's coming in hot. You have to do it quick, girl!

It looked I was able to communicate with Telepathy since she was touching me. The girl also seemed to be the quiet and cool type. I didn't dislike that. *But*

never mind that, the bear is coming!

The girl grunted as she tugged harder.

I can feel movement!

“Nggh.”

You can do it!

More movement.

Just a little more!

“Hnngh.”

Extraction complete.

You did it!

“You’re a pretty sword.”

Why, thank you. But now’s not the time!

“You’re right.”

Can you fight?

“A little.”

I looked at the girl’s stats to be sure.

Name: None Age: 12

Race: Beastman; Black Cat Tribe Class: None Status: Slave LV: 1

HP: 19; Magic: 10; Strength: 9; Agility: 16

Skills: Sword Mastery 1; Night Vision; Expert Carver; Sense of Direction She wasn’t kidding. But this wasn’t a problem.

You need to equip me!

“I already am.”

Equip me faster. You have to equip me like you mean it!

“Okay.”

Nameless has been registered as your User.

All right, my Skill Sharing skill should kick in now. Let's see what it does.

Nameless has acquired several titles.

Huh, what's that about?

I could use Identify on her…somehow. The girl had acquired the titles of Fire Mage, Master Chef, Disassembly Expert, and Skill Collector, all the skills I had leveled up to Level 10. This seemed to increase the effectiveness of each skill, with Skill Collector increasing the chances of skill acquisition. I could go into it later since they weren't immediately useful.

You should be able to fight now. Go.

"Uh."

You need to think about killing that thing. Then let your body tell you where to swing the blade!

Sword Mastery should kick in at that point. The skill was at Level 7 and the two-headed bear was a low-rank monster. Add to the fact that she was getting a status buff just by holding me and there was no way we could lose this fight.

"Okay… Got it."

Good girl.

"Here I go!"

In a word, the girl's movements were beautiful. She gracefully closed in on the beast like an experienced swordsman and pierced its heart with one thrust. My blade cut through its hide like tofu.

"Huh?"

You did it. What do you think?

"Was it thanks to you?"

Kinda. How do you feel?

"Grateful."

With those parting words, the girl was about to stab me into the ground again. I practically screamed in order to stop her.

Wait! Don't leave me in the ground, please!

"Huh?"

The ground here strips me of my power, I wouldn't be able to do anything if you left me here. Could I bother you to carry me just a little further?

"Hmm?"

Please?

"He's probably going to take you away from me."

The slaver?

"Yeah."

I wouldn't want that, not after I found a cute, fluffy-eared girl. I wanted her to wield me! The slaver would probably sell me to a collector if he got his hands on me. It'd be even worse if he could steal my powers after discovering I was an enchanted sword.

Can't you run away somehow?

"No. Not with this collar on me."

So it really is enchanted then?

"It's a slave collar. It makes it impossible for a slave to disobey its master's commands. And I tried killing them a few times, too."

The slavers?

"Yeah. I thought I'd kill them and run."

Wow. This girl was more dangerous and hungrier than I thought. Again, I didn't hate that.

But you couldn't because of the collar.

"Yeah."

A man came running to us from the other side of the forest: the slaver.

"Damn it, only one of you is left! What the hell were you doing?! Look at this pot, it's cracked!"

He didn't care that his lackey and the rest of the slaves had died, lamenting only over the broken pottery. This man was clearly human filth.

"Did you kill the Twin-Headed Bear?" he demanded.

"Yes."

"How did you… Did you use that sword?"

"I found it."

"Give me that."

She didn't say anything for a moment. "No."

"What was that? Give it!"

"Aah, I'm sorry."

The man slapped the girl with the back of his hand. "You think you animals have any right to look at me like that?!"

"Ow…"

He hit her again. He seemed used to it. The man wrenched me from the cowering girl.

"That's a fine blade. I'll be taking this as compensation for this little squabble."

The man ignored the girl, who was squirming in pain, and began examining me.

"Mangy beast, take whatever goods you can salvage and carry it. We'll be heading to the nearest town."

The slave collar kicked in. Although the girl was in pain, she couldn't disobey the slaver's words and began staggering toward the remains of the caravan.

This guy was pissing me off. My intent to kill was rising and I was on the verge of hacking the scumbag's head clean off. Damn it! If only this place didn't suck my mana dry, I could kill him right here and now!

"Gurk?"

I cast Telekinesis out of spite, but it worked somehow. *Whoops.* I'd been out

of the ground long enough that my mana had begun recovering. My natural mana recovery was outpacing the ground's mana draining properties now that I was no longer inside it. I had used Telekinesis while thinking of slaughtering the slaver and I immediately swung into action, stabbing the scumbag's face dead center and piercing right through his skull. His brains splattered across the ground.

Oddly enough, I felt less guilt than killing a goblin, despite the fact I had killed a human. Was it because the man was downright scum, or because I was a sword?

Sooo, what now?

"Hm?"

Anyway, just calm down. I'll figure something out.

"I am calm."

You are much too *calm, young lady.*

The girl didn't seem fazed by the gory death of her captor. She had the seeds of greatness in her.

You are now my User.

"Yes."

I'm something of a magical sword…so I'm kinda strong.

"Okay."

I want you to keep using me, as a sword. Although, I'd appreciate it if you didn't put me away in storage. Are you interested? You're also going to have to kill monsters of course.

I couldn't force this little girl to go down this path. Even if she was my first User, I was ready to let the matter go if she refused.

"Yes. I do."

The girl gave an instant reply. She looked dignified as she held me up to the sky.

"I need to get stronger. I must."

She must have had her reasons for being so motivated.

Is there a goal you're striving for?

"I have to break through a wall."

A wall?

The girl explained that beastmen like her had the ability to evolve. There were different conditions for every tribe, but those who succeeded were greatly revered. However, most beastmen never lived to see the day of their evolution, a testament to how difficult a task it was. The Black Cat Tribe, the clan this girl belonged to, had never had a successful evolution to date, and they were looked down upon as the weakest of the beastmen.

The girl's parents had tried to evolve themselves, but they met their end during their adventures and the girl was left to fend for herself. It didn't take long after for the girl to be kidnapped by slavers. The girl was now intent on carrying out her parents' wishes to evolve.

Oh, you're such a good girl! All right, I'm in! I'll help you evolve, don't you worry!

"Thanks."

Hey, don't mention it! You're my User after all! What's your name, by the way?

It would've been silly to go on this adventure without knowing my precious User's name. Still, the girl's reply was about what I expected.

"I don't have one."

You really don't have a name?

"No."

I had guessed from Identifying her earlier, but to think she would completely lack a name…

Why not?

She had had parents after all. They had to have given her a name.

"A Slave Contract deletes your name."

Uh, what do you mean by that?

"There may be slave owners who would want to rename their slaves. That's why they deleted our names."

So the slave contract prohibited slaves from even having a name. How terrible.

"The slavers got rid of my name when I was eight."

The girl had been living as a slave for four years, and she was still set on reaching her objective. I was impressed.

I see… Then what was your name before?

"Fran."

Funny, I used to have a dog named Fran. Well, at least she had a name I could call on now.

All right, then Fran it is.

"Are you sure?"

You don't like it?

"No, I do. I'm Fran."

She seemed quite happy about her new old name, judging by the way her tail stood up and curled. Problem solved.

Now it was Fran's turn to fluster me.

"What's your name?"

Uh, me?

"Yeah."

No one had ever asked me that question seeing as she was the first person I'd talked to since reincarnation. The subject of my name, specifically the lack thereof, had honestly slipped my mind. I couldn't remember what my name was, and even my Name field was still Unknown. Damn it! I should've given myself a cooler name sooner!

Uhh…

“You don’t have one?”

No.

“Then I’ll give you one.”

I guess that would work. Users had naming privileges, after all. I was sure I could get used to whatever Fran named me, so long as she liked it. To be honest, I didn’t really have any preferences.

“Hmmm…”

What’ll it be?

“Mm…”

Well? Well?

“Hmm… I got it.”

Really! What is it?

“Teacher.”

What.

“Teacher.”

Why?

“You said you’d teach me how to fight. That’s why you’re Teacher.”

Uhh, are you sure you don’t have any alternatives? That’s it?

“Yes. Nice to meet you, Teacher.”

Your name is now Teacher.

Whoa! I jumped at the sudden text prompt. *Seriously? My name’s Teacher now?*

“You don’t like it?”

The girl maintained her blank expression, but there was a hint of worry on it now. How was I supposed to say no to that face?

Of course not, I absolutely love it! It’s a great name!

“Mm.”

From then on, I was named Teacher. It was somewhat weird as far as sword names went, but I told myself that Fran liked it and that was all that mattered.

So, what now? Does the slave contract expire now that the slaver's dead?

"I don't think so. My collar hasn't come off." Fran pointed to her collar. We had to do something about that.

Can't we just force it open? Destroy it?

"No. Breaking the slave collar kills the slave wearing it."

Whoa, seriously?

"Seriously."

That was close. I was about to start swinging at her neck.

Then how do we annul the contract?

"By destroying the contract papers."

I see. Would that guy have it?

"He should. I'll go look."

I was worried the slaver wouldn't have it on him and had it hidden elsewhere, but my worries were for naught.

"Found it."

Fran took out a folder filled with parchment paper from the slaver's shirt. One of them was Fran's slave contract, the cause of her slavery. With it gone, Fran would be freed.

Just rip that thing to shreds!

"Hng!"

Fran gripped the edges of the parchment and began pulling. The document proved to be tougher than we thought, however. She grunted and heaved at the contract, but she wasn't strong enough to tear it.

"Nope…"

All right, we'll chop it up then. Put the contract on the ground.

“Okay.”

Fran heaved me up then swung me down at the document.

That did it!

The slave contract was now in two pieces. Seconds later, Fran’s slave collar unlocked itself and fell to the ground.

“The collar came off.”

Whoa! Are you okay?

“Yeah. I’m fine.”

I didn’t feel any magic emanating from the collar anymore. The contract really was the key to freeing her from the collar’s bondage.

“Thank you.”

She was blushing all the way to her cat ears. How adorable. She really was a sweet-looking girl. Give her a few years and she’d be a heartbreaker. Not that I was going to let anyone go out with my Fran. They’d have to go through me first.

“Here.”

Fran brought something to my attention as I was getting all fired up by myself. It was the slaver’s bag.

What’s in it?

A bunch of stuff apparently. There was money, for starters, though I didn’t know how much the stuff was worth since I wasn’t familiar with the coinage of this world. It couldn’t have been worth much though, because most of it was silver and copper coins.

Next were some basic tools. Some of them seemed to be magical in nature too. There was a magical torch which gave out light, a small jug which produced potable water, and an armband which increased your strength by a little bit. They didn’t amount to much, but they did seem interesting. We would have to try them elsewhere though, because of the mana-draining nature of the forest. I was anxious to get out of the area as fast as I could, too.

I don't know how big this mana-sapping area is, but we'd better get out of the forest as soon as we can.

"Okay."

We took some knives, utensils, clothes, and anything that looked like it might be useful from the caravan before we headed out. I had, of course, stored the bear's remains in my Pocket Dimension for later use. As usual, the storage process only took a few moments.

I wrapped my blade in the canvas covering the carriage and fashioned a loop out of the smaller man's belt so Fran could sling me over her shoulder. She was a bit on the shorter side, so I asked her to be careful since she may end up dragging me across the ground.

We had also dressed up Fran in some basic clothing we found in the cart. It was still meager, and she still looked like a slave, but at least she didn't look homeless now.

Shall we?

"Yeah."

Equipping me had made her stronger, and I could see she was surprised by it. She declared her astonishment thirty minutes into our trek.

"You're amazing, Teacher."

Hahaha. Right?

"Yeah."

So, what should we do now? Any ideas?

"Hmm. There's a town nearby."

Around here?

"That way."

Uh… Do you know how far it is from here?

"No."

She had overheard the slavers mention stopping in a town as they headed

east. Thanks to her Sense of Direction, she was able to tell the location of a town, so long as she had a general idea of where it was.

Let's get going then.

Now it began feeling like a real adventure.

Something had occurred to me on the way to the nearest town. There were some updates to my status screen as a result of leveling up Identify, first being the mysterious header of Mana Conductivity. I asked Fran if she knew anything about it and she shook her head "no." Did it affect my ability to conduct mana? What did that even mean? It was listed at A, in any case, and I had no idea whether that was good or bad at the moment.

Next came the changes to my skill menu. I was now able to sort my skills according to their categories, which made it much less confusing when I had to rifle through them. It also seemed I'd triggered the Superior Skills option when I maxed out Fire Magic to Level 10. Superior Skills were unlocked as a reward for leveling certain skills to Level 10. In exchange, I would no longer be able to share the skill and had to unequip it from Fran. It took up 10 EP, so I had to be careful about my choices there.

Along the road, I began telling Fran about myself. We had to get our stories straight to avoid people finding us out. I told her about how I used to be human, and about how I grew stronger by consuming magic crystals, Skill Sharing, and the effects I had on the stats of my User.

"Crystals…"

Yeah. But I just ranked up, so the next one's gonna be a while.

"Mm."

Wha—hey, what are you doing?

"Hm."

She took the crystal of the Fanged Rat we had just killed and was knocking it against the flat of my blade. She was trying to feed me, I guessed, though her method was quite violent.

Wait, hold on! I have to cut through it! Hit it against the edge of my blade.

“Like this?”

That’s it.

“You really absorbed it.”

And that’s how I grow stronger. We should hunt every monster we see and sell the parts for money.

“Got it.”

Then we tried experimenting with Telepathy. I had only begun using it the day I met Fran, so there was still so much I didn’t know about the skill. It apparently made a field which allowed the user to have a two-way conversation. If I connected it with Fran, we would be able to have a private conversation, kinda like the old tin can telephones back home. If I widened the area of effect, I would be able to broadcast my voice to everyone who was within range. We tried it out with a rabbit we caught, and both the rabbit and Fran were able to hear my voice when I set it on broadcast. However, it didn’t look like the rabbit was able to hear Fran’s side of the conversation. Telepathy didn’t turn me into a conduit that allowed multiple people in the same area to talk to each other through me; instead, I did all of the talking and listening.

We hadn’t run into any tough encounters so far. The grasslands must’ve been a special environment given how the monsters became stronger the further I went. But the monsters outside the woods weren’t that strong; at best, they were at Area 2 levels.

I took care of the cooking. The Cooking skill I maxed out during my lapse into madness came in handy in the end. I could manipulate cooking utensils and ingredients with Telekinesis no problem. My blade made quick work of slicing and dicing, and fire and water were just a matter of casting a few spells.

Fran should have the same Cooking skill I had, but I decided against it. Nourishment was a guardian’s responsibility. I had her equip Poison Resistance, Enhanced Absorption, Enhanced Digestion, and Predator just in case. Predator allowed you to gain certain abilities based on what you ate. I didn’t know how much of an effect it had, but leaving it on her couldn’t hurt. This was Fran’s current status, aside from the skills we shared: Name: Fran Age: 12

Race: Beastman; Black Cat Tribe Class: None LV: 3

HP: 39; Magic: 25; Strength: 24; Agility: 46

Skills: Sword Mastery 1; Night Vision; Expert Carver; Sense of Direction Titles: Disassembly Expert; Skill Collector; Fire Mage; Master Chef She was much stronger than a goblin now. Her numbers were boosted by the Status+ (Medium) I acquired a short while ago, which stacked with my own Attack+ (Small). It made her very strong for someone who was still at Level 3, and she could stomp every low-rank monster that came her way.

I would swap out her skills depending on the circumstances, but Sword Mastery, Fire Magic, and Status+ were mainstays. I was getting so used to swapping out skills that I could do them on the fly now, too.

The problem was money. The main currency of this world was Gold, and it was accepted everywhere. We had gotten two silver coins and twenty-four copper coins from the slaver earlier, which amounted to 224G in total. It was dubious whether we could even stay a night at an inn with this little money.

I did have a solution though, and it involved the pile of monster corpses I had been storing up in my Pocket Dimension. Fran had told me that adventurers hunted down monsters, carved up their parts, and sold them for money. Selling monster materials was their main source of income. My solution was to carve up the monster remains and pick the parts which looked viable to sell. It would look suspicious if a little girl like Fran began selling high-rank monster parts though, so we'd have to start with the cheaper stuff. We'd start actually worrying about it when we got to town.

And we're done.

We were in the middle of camping out. Fran was currently harvesting monsters for materials. Apparently, Skill Sharing was still in effect, even if there was some distance between us. Fran still got her stat bonuses and she was able to use the Disassembly skill.

Fran laid out a monster's remains and carved it up with a knife. The smell of blood would've attracted nearby monsters, so she had to set up a barrier using concealment magic. She cast this one by herself too. She was getting used to

her newfound abilities.

Meanwhile, I cooked her up something to eat. I used the pot we got from the slaver cart to make a stew out of the monster meat we had. I made sure to use any medicinal herbs I found along the way to make it extra nutritious. It should taste amazing too, thanks to my Level 10 Cooking skill; not that I had any way of making sure. It was a shame I couldn't taste my own cooking.

This was the basic division of labor we had between us. I would set up camp and be on lookout while Fran carved up the monsters we had killed. I would absorb the crystals she found, and we could sell or eat the rest of the beast.

Food's ready, Fran.

"Okay."

Go wash your hands first.

"Create Water."

She conjured a spout of water with magic to wash her hands. She didn't have any problems casting magic. As my User, she could draw from my Mana Pool to cast any magic she needed, so she could conjure up all the water she wanted.

Are you done with the monster carving?

"For the most part. One of them was impossible to get through, though."

The turtle, huh?

Fran looked at the remains of the Blast Tortoise. Even with Disassembly 10, it was impossible to get through its thick shell with a knife. It was a high-rank monster after all. She had had trouble with the Tyrant Saber-Tooth the other day too. She needed better tools.

I guess I'm up today.

"Please."

You got it. Just sit back and enjoy your meal, Fran.

"I will. Thanks."

I should finish carving this thing before Fran finished her meal.

Three days had gone by since I first met Fran. We were walking in the general direction of the nearest town, and I was wrapped up in canvas and had to ask Fran to shoulder me. There was no good excuse for a floating sword, no matter how I spun it.



Is the town easy to get into?

"Hm?"

Do you need to show some identification, maybe pay a toll?

"I don't know." She shook her fluffy head and looked cute while doing so.

No, focus.

Fran used to be a slave, so she probably never had to enter a city by herself. No wonder she didn't know.

It'd be nice if we could ask someone.

But we hadn't seen a single soul in the last three days. I could understand not running into merchants or adventurers, but no bandits? Come on.

"This isn't the highway."

What do you mean?

"This is a detour."

The slavers had chosen to rush through a monster-infested region in the interest of time. The shortcut had cost them their lives, so I was glad they were dead, but the slaves themselves could have been spared.

So you're saying there's a highway?

The frequent appearance of monsters would explain why people wouldn't usually take this road.

Where is it?

"I think we'll find it eventually if we keep walking."

I hope you're right.

"It'll be fine. Maybe."

We continued walking for four hours, killing small animals like rabbits along the way and talking about what we should invest our EP in next. We talked about leveling up some of the skills we had or getting a status boost, but we decided to get Identity Protection and Skill Capacity Up (Medium) in the end.

As the name implied, Identity Protection prevented others from using Identify on us. Fran told me that talking swords weren't something you saw every day in this world, so this would come in handy in the prevention of shenanigans.

Skill Capacity Up (Medium) allowed us to increase the number of skills we could equip. The more skills we could equip, the stronger we got. It was simple and straightforward.

As we continued our discussion of skill optimization, we stepped onto the city highway that we'd been looking for.

Finally, proper roads!

The highway was a stretch of road that was simply cleared of grass, but it was still better than the wild trail we were on. The road showed its long years of service in the ruts that had formed along the ground. We let Fran's Sense of Direction point us in the right way.

"Hm, I can feel some creatures around us."

They don't feel human, either.

We could tell the size and movements of the creatures around us with Sense. Their presence was something I'd felt many before. We were probably up against goblins.

"Should we kill them?"

May as well. We could carve them up for materials and absorb their crystals while we're at it.

"Got it."

Fran nodded and leapt away from the main road. She'd gotten used to the Strong Legs skill and was now jumping from tree to tree as fast as the wind blew.

"There."

The three goblins were hidden away in some bushes next to the highway. They were going to ambush whoever was unfortunate enough to pass them by. Fran concealed her presence, silently positioned herself behind one of them, and struck.

“Hurk.”

“Gi?”

One of them crumpled from a clean slash down their back.

“Ha!”

She proceeded to cut down the remaining two with upward slashes. Her movements were much more fluid now that she was getting accustomed to her skills. The goblins didn’t know what hit them; the battle was over before any of their dead bodies hit the ground.

“Teacher, take care of the rest.”

Sure thing.

I absorbed the goblins’ crystals and carved off their horns for later use. Apparently, Fran had heard somewhere that goblin horns were used for materials. I proceeded to toss their dead bodies into the Pocket Dimension. It would’ve been bad if their corpses attracted some big monster to the highway.

“Teacher, there’s a goblin there, too.”

There’s more of them?

“What should we do?”

They’re on the way, so let’s hunt them down.

“Okay.”

Fran leapt into action again, but what greeted her was something neither of us had expected.

“Damn it! Get away from me, you dirty goblins!”

“Giigigi!”

“Graaah!”

The goblins were terrorizing a horse carriage. There were six of them against the carriage’s sole driver.

That’s a lot of them.

“I’m going to help him.”

Go for it.

She concealed her presence again and positioned herself for an ambush. She cut through three of the little demons with Triple Thrust. Each individual stab wasn't that powerful, but they were enough to take down goblins.

"Y-you saved me!"

"Giii!"

"Quiet."

The rest of the goblins fell on Fran one after the other with a menacing cry, but Fran ruthlessly cut each of them down. One of them tried to get away, but Fran threw me at the little bastard to prevent his escape. I stabbed it clean through the stomach, a testament to the usefulness of Throwing Weapons.

"Th-thank you, little lady. You saved my life."

"Hm."

"You sure are strong, though. Are you alone?"

"…"

"Oh, you don't have to talk to me if you don't feel like it."

Fran was just the quiet type, but I could understand how the man would misunderstand given her response. I was glad she wasn't eager to give the man information though. I told her to keep up the charade for as long as she could.

"All right," she replied telepathically.

"If it's all the same with you, would you like a ride? You're headed to Alessa, aren't you?"

I guessed Alessa was the name of the city we were heading to. As kind as the man looked, he was quite shrewd as well. He would give us a ride to Alessa as payment for killing the goblins, but he would in effect be getting a bodyguard too.

We wanted information, so we were going to take him up on his offer. But I needed to remind him that saving his life wasn't cheap. I told Fran what to say to him.

“I guess I can guard you until we reach the town.”

“Ah. Yes, of course.”

The man could only let out a wry smile.

“I’ll waive my protection fees if you tell me what I need to know.”

“Hahaha! Very interesting, young lady. All right! Hop in!”

“Hm.”

“My name is Randell. What’s yours?”

“Fran.”

“Then my life is in your hands, Young Fran.”

I made sure to take out the goblin horns before we got on the carriage. We were itching to ask questions, though Fran was going to do all the talking.

“Do people buy goblin horns?”

“Goblin horns? I guess, but they’re cheap. They’re used as catalysts, but they’re of the lowest quality.”

Really? I felt like it was a waste of time collecting them now. But Randell continued his explanation.

“That said, the Adventurer Guild’s always looking to exterminate demonkind. If you took it to them as proof, I’m sure they’d reward you for it.”

The extra details in Identify did tell me to exterminate them on sight. It was somewhat arbitrary now that I thought about it. The explanation was clearly anti-goblin; and who wrote it anyway? God? It was a very biased explanation, even calling them straight up “evil.” Surely the goblins themselves thought they were in the right and us humans to be evil.

Then again, that explanation only showed up after I had already killed a bunch of them. If the explanation had described them as “a good, merry folk who happen to look horrifying,” then I would’ve immediately felt bad about killing them. I only felt justified in killing them because the Identify screen told me they were evil. You could say I had an obligation to hunt them down because of it.

But then, someone could have rigged the Identify descriptions to pit me against the whole of demonkind. Did God really write those descriptions? I had heard a voice when I came into this world. If that was God, then he sounded like a good enough guy. He didn't sound like he would take advantage of me. Or maybe that was what he wanted me to think? But, then again…

Okay, I should stop. Blindly doubting everything in the absence of evidence would drop me into a spiral of skepticism. Nothing bad had happened so far, so I shouldn't think about it too much.

"Goblins are G-Rank threats, but taking that many down at once was very impressive."

"Threat ranks?"

Never heard that one before. Was that a term people used to describe how dangerous a monster was?

"You don't know?" Randell proceeded to tell Fran about threat levels. It wasn't like we had anything else to talk about, so he gave a decent explanation about how they worked: Adventurer Ranks: G: Newbie with a provisional license. Not an actual adventurer.

F: Apprentice. Beginner adventurer.

E: Average adventurer who can proclaim themselves as such.

D: Mid-rank. Can be a party leader.

C: Veteran. Superhuman by civilian standards.

B: Top class. Usually the strongest member of a small guild.

A: Hero. Select few within a given country. Bards begin singing songs about you at this rank.

S: Legend. Only eight have ever existed. Kings bow before them, and they have the authority to command Guild Masters.

Monster Threat Levels: G: Trash mobs. An adult male can take them down no problem. (Goblins, Fanged Rats) F: Can take down a merchant caravan. (Giant Bear, Wolfpack) E: Can destroy a village. (Lesser Wyvern, Ogre) D: Can destroy a town. (Lesser Hydra, Blast

Tortoise) C: Can destroy a city. Knight Battalion dispatched. (Tyrant Saber-Tooth, Lesser Demons) B: Can destroy a country. Entire military force dispatched. (Greater Demons, Greater Dragons, Giant Kings) A: Can destroy a continent. (Demon Lord, Dragon Kings, Lich) S: Can destroy the world. The stuff of legends. (Fenrir, Legendary Dragons) It was standard practice for adventurers of the same rank to band together and take down monsters of an equal threat level. An adventurer could also even solo a monster who was a rank lower than him.

Goblins were the weakest of the bunch, but a pack of them could increase their threat level. A crew of five could bump their threat level from G to F. Considering Fran took care of them in no time flat, she was probably as strong as an E-Rank adventurer.

“Still, I never ran into goblins on this part of the highway before.”

“Really?”

“Yep. The adventurers would patrol these parts from time to time, you see.”

The adventurers. They had a guild too, by the sound of it. It was all very fantastical, and I couldn’t wait to check it out.

“I’m no spring chicken, but I can handle a goblin or two.”

I Identified Randell to see what his stats were like.

Name: Randell Age: 39

Race: Human Class: Merchant LV: 13

HP: 32; Magic: 15; Strength: 20; Agility: 22

Skills: Transport 3; Driver 2; Negotiate 2; Arithmetic 5; Trade 6; Spear Mastery 3; Conversation 2

Equipment: Iron Spear; Leather Breastplate; Spider Silk Mantle He wouldn’t lose in a one-on-one fight with a goblin, but he would have a rough time facing a whole gaggle of them. I noticed Fran’s stats far outpaced Randell’s at Level 4, which I found quite ridiculous.

“The monsters have been going a little crazy this past month.”

A month ago… That was when I had cleared Area 5.

“Why’s that?”

“I hear something happened in the Demon Wolf’s Garden.”

“The Demon Wolf’s Garden?”

“Never heard of it? It’s an A-Rank Haunt to the east of here.”

“Is it famous?”

“Of course. It’s not one of the Ten Haunts, but it’s still A-Rank.”

A Haunt referred to an area that was ruled by monsters; dungeons fell under this category. They were categorized from G-to S-Rank according to their threat level. A-Rank was the second-most dangerous level. It wasn’t quite as dangerous as the S-Rank spots dubbed the Ten Haunts, but it was up there.

So that’s where I hunted for a month. Now that I thought about it, the bosses were pretty tough. One thing was bothering me, though.

“Why is it called the Demon Wolf’s Garden?”

I didn’t run into any wolf monsters out in the grasslands. Most of the monsters in the western areas were feline even. There was no reason for it to be called the Demon Wolf’s Garden.

“Legend has it that it’s the resting place of the Great Wolf Fenrir, an S-Rank monster. Even now, Fenrir’s magical energy still emanates from the center of his garden. Funnily enough, the center is populated with weak monsters because of it. Such an odd phenomenon.”

So, I had this Fenrir to thank for setting up the barrier. Without it, starting out would’ve been much tougher. Shame to know he was already dead though. I wanted to thank him in person. But was there a reason I happened to wake up there too? I needed to know.

“There’s something that looks like an altar in the middle of the Garden, but no one knows who made it or what it’s for. Scholars are still researching it to this day.”

What about me? Do the legends say anything about a sword?

"Is there a sword on the altar?"

"A sword? Don't know anything about that."

And here I thought I'd find out about my origins. Guess it's not that easy.

Unfortunately, that was all Randell knew.

"The Demon Wolf's Garden is surrounded by the Withering Forest, so named because of its ability to drain mana from the creatures living inside it."

I had felt the pain of that forest firsthand. I never wanted to go back there if I could help it.

"The stronger monsters of the Wolf's Garden couldn't get out because of the forest, but it still affects the local wildlife. The stronger monsters will fight each other for territory once every couple of years."

I see. So there was something like a succession of area bosses.

"When that happens, the weaker monsters in the forest and the surrounding areas will get more aggressive out of fear. They'd flee from the stronger monster's presence and eventually wind up on this highway here. It's probably turf war season again."

This was completely my fault for killing all the area bosses. I didn't think it'd have this much of a ripple effect. Whoops.

Randell hadn't been sure whether to proceed or turn back with the recent monster sightings, but he decided to keep going so he could make the delivery date.

Hahaha, I'm so sorry for the trouble, Mr. Randell, sir. I'll waive the protection fees as a show of goodwill. Seriously though, sorry about that.

Two hours went by as we were carried along in Randell's cart.

"And there's Alessa now."

I could see a wall in the distant horizon, and it seemed to be surrounding a city. It was still far off in the distance, and it took another two hours before I could make out the finer points of the city of Alessa.

It was quite large. From Randell's explanation, it seemed to be the biggest town around here with a population of ten thousand people. It was also the only town that had a big enough Adventurer's Guild.

Now that the town was in sight, I remembered my earlier worry.

"How much is the entrance fee?"

"300G."

Goblin horns were cheap outside the Adventurer's Guild, so I was at a loss for what to do. I needed to ask him the price of food and lodging. Then we could start calculating a budget.

"How much for a night at an inn? The cheapest one will do."

"A cheap inn's about 200G a night. No meals, of course."

The average price of food was about 50G. Bread was 10G a pop, a cheap knife was 300G, and the baths were 20G per entry. I guessed that 1G was worth about 10 JPY back home.

A copper coin was worth 1G, and ten coins of the same value were worth one of the next value. In ascending order, the coinage went: copper, large copper, silver, large silver, gold, and large gold. Randell himself had never seen a large gold coin.

"How much would we get if we sold our goblin horns to the guild?"

"A set of two would net you 20G. A normal merchant would buy them off you for 5G."

They were worth next to nothing! We were going to have to hunt ten goblins a day just to stay one night at an inn. Should we just take our high-rank monster parts out of the Pocket Dimension and sell those? I was considering this option, but Randell refused to buy them.

"I mainly deal in food and weaponry. I know the price of common items like goblin horns, but I don't know enough about these items to give you a fair price for them."

Seriously? Should I just sell it to him cheap anyway? That'd be kind of a waste though…

I detected something in the distance as I mulled over this problem. We told Randell to slow down so we could scout ahead. Sure enough, there were my old friends, the goblins, lying in wait in the bushes. They must have thought they had a winning strategy, but Fran and I made quick work of them with our skills and magic. We carved off five sets of horns and noticed one of the goblins had been carrying a sword. A wooden club may not have been worth the wood it was carved out of, but a sword had to have been worth something.

Lucky us. We might just break 300G if we sell all this stuff to Randell.

We brought the sword back to Randell and he bought it for 100G, which was more than I expected.

“Is it really worth that much?”

“It’s made of bronze but it’s still in good condition. The greens must’ve filched it off an adventurer.”

Great. Now we could enter the city.

We hunted down a monster called the Black Bug along the way and sold its parts to Randell. It was a giant beetle about fifty centimeters long whose shell could be fashioned into armor for newbie adventurers. It was worth 20G.

These monsters sure were cheap though. 20G for armor materials? It may have been better to hunt goblins that had weapons on them. The goblins and I must have been fated to meet.

“Hey there, Randell. Good to see you in one piece.”

“Thanks. I ran into some trouble on my way here though.”

“Who’s that little lady with you?”

“Found her on the road. She’ll be coming with me too.”

“You got it. It’s a good thing you ran into old Randell here. He’s a good, strong man, ain’t he?”

Randell forced a wry grin at the gatekeeper’s comment; Fran was the one guarding Randell after all. We wanted to lay low though, which was why we asked him to tell the guard Fran was a normal girl on a journey.

“That’ll be 300G, and here are your temporary permits. They’re good for three days. You’ll have to pay an extension fee if you overstay, so be careful.”

Randell had also told us earlier that we needed an official identification card or an Adventurer’s card if we wanted to stay for free. We had to head to the guild immediately after this.

“Welcome to the city of Alessa.”

The Adventurer’s Guild didn’t have an age limit for its applicants, but it did have a placement test. We had to pass it to get our identification card.

“Well, I’ll be heading back to my shop. Are you going straight to the guild, Fran?”

“Hm.”

“My shop’s in the west along the main road. Can’t miss it. Do come by if you have time.”

And with that, Randell left. He never asked about Fran’s circumstances, about the girl who was as strong as she was ignorant. She clearly had her share of problems, but he was sensitive to it and kept his curiosity to himself. He was a good person.

We should visit him once we had some money. I remembered him telling us he mostly dealt with adventurers on our way here.

Let’s go.

“Yeah.”

We followed the directions Randell gave us to go to the Adventurer’s Guild, soaking in the sights of the city along the way. It was a beautiful city with the look of medieval Europe about it. It really felt like I was in a fantasy world. It was my first time seeing this many people in one place since I had come here. I was getting excited.

Adding to my excitement were the humanoid peoples mixed in among the regular humans. There was a man who had animal ears and a tail, a sexy elf, a bearded dwarf, and even a guy that had insect wings. The streets were as multiracial as it could get—literally.

I snuck a peek at some of the adventurers who happened to pass by. After checking out their stats, there didn't seem to be anyone weaker than Fran. A lot of them were just as strong as she was. But when it came down to skills, we won hands down in both quantity and quality. The highest I'd seen among the adventurers was one guy who had Level 5 Sword Mastery which made me appreciate how out of the ordinary our Sword Mastery was at Level 7. You could definitely win a fight against a stronger opponent by outpacing them with skills, the grasslands had taught me that much. You could say a difference in raw stats wasn't as important as the difference in skills. Fran would have no problems being an adventurer.

One thing did bother me, however. It was the strength of the gear the adventurers were wearing.

> ***Name: Tempered Steel Longsword Attack: 398; MP: 5; Durability: 600***
>
> ***Mana Conductivity: F***
>
> ***Skills: None A longsword, which I also was, had vastly greater attack power than me. It didn't matter that I was better in other fields, I had lost the raw damage contest which was the defining trait of a sword.***

The material it was made of added insult to injury. It was only tempered steel; not even mithril, or orichalcum, or some other legendary alloy. I had lost to ordinary tempered steel, and that hurt me deeply.

One high attack number after another passed by me as I saw the weapons the adventurers here wielded. It seemed that one in five weapons was stronger than me. The final blow to my ego was dealt by a simple dagger which hung from a man's belt strap.

> ***Name: Mithril Dagger Attack: 423; MP: 10; Durability: 700***
>
> ***Magic Conductivity: D+***
>
> ***Skills: None Heh. Heheheh…***

I laughed bitterly. I was nothing but a dull, decorative, talking sword who let his ego get to his head since he could kill monsters by himself.

“What is it?”

Fran, I’m no good.

“Huh?”

I explained how I was of little use as a sword if it weren’t for my skills. I was probably made by a rich man who wanted a pretty-looking sword he could show off to his friends. When I was done groveling, Fran began stroking me.

Fran…

“Hm.”

Are you trying to make me feel better?

“You have your skills, Teacher.”

What a good girl!

She was right. Even if my blade was as dull as a rock, my skills still played a supporting role. That may have been the only role I could play, but so what? That settled it! I was going to become a Skill Lord!

I wanted to get Fran a better sword, though. It’d be a shame if she kept wielding something as dull as I was. We’d do best to head on to the Adventurer’s Guild and sign up so we could start making money!

Right. Sorry for making you worry. I’m okay now. Let’s go to the guild.

“Hm.”

My groveling took up some travel time but we eventually made it to the Adventurer’s Guild.

This place is huge…

The Guild was bigger than the buildings surrounding it, an indication of how many adventurers there were in this place.

Excuse me! I shouted to no one in particular. I lacked vocal cords after all.

The inside was cleaner than I anticipated. I was expecting the decor to be more like a musty, intimidating tavern, but the place looked closer to a five-star hotel. I guessed it would’ve reflected poorly on the guild if they had gone with

the rustic decor. In any case, a twelve-year-old girl walking into an Adventurer's Guild by herself was bound to get attention. I could feel the other adventurers stare at us as Fran walked up to the receptionist.

"Uh, this is the Adventurer's Guild…"

"I know. I want to sign up."

"Oh, okay. Are you alone?"

"Yes."

A twelve-year-old who wanted to be an adventurer was an oddity in any world. It might help the hypothetical twelve-year-old to come in decked out in full gear, for at least then it would look like the child had been training all their life to be an adventurer. The child might even say something saucy, like, "I'll have you know, I'm considered the top hunter around these parts." Fran didn't have any armor to speak of, though. Her battered rags screamed "runaway slave." She didn't look like she had any business being here.

The receptionist did her best to hide her incredulity and carried on her explanation.

"Not everyone can be an adventurer. You have to pass a test."

"Sure."

"You'll have to go up against one of our members in a mock battle. Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"Are you absolutely sure about this? You might get hurt."

"Yes, I'm sure."

"The Guild will not be held responsible for any damages you might suffer."

"No problem."

"O-kay… Hang on."

The surrounding adventurers began buzzing when they saw Fran was serious about taking the test. No one got in our way, but they didn't sound very welcoming of the idea. They must've been taken aback at the gall this kid had

for wanting to become an adventurer. It was understandable enough; I would've felt the same in their shoes.

Are you okay, Fran?

"What?"

Nothing, don't worry about it.

It took a while for the receptionist to come back.

"Sorry to keep you waiting. Right this way."

"Hm."

She led us to a wide enclosure surrounded by four walls in the back of the guild. This looked like the guild's training grounds. A grim-looking man was standing in the middle of it.

The man was over two meters tall. He wore black, spiked armor which looked like it came right out of the Middle Ages. His gigantic battleaxe rested beside him, only adding to the intimidation factor. You could almost hear the earth rumble when you saw his face; a child would probably cry upon seeing it. As used to fighting monsters as I was, he managed to make me nervous.

"You're the newbie?"

"Yeah." Fran nodded, not seeming fazed at all. My little girl might grow up to be more terrifying than this man!

"The name's Donadrond. I'm the examiner here."

That was a lot of Ds for a man to have in his name.

"Your test is simple: Fight me. Fall too early, and you fail!"

"Okay."

"I'll have you know that I'm terrible at holding back. I'm giving you one last chance to leave if you don't want to get hurt!"

We felt an immense pressure as Donadrond shouted his warning. Was his Intimidation skill kicking in? I guess we were in for a fight.

Let's do this!

“Mm!”

We were about to throw down with a man named Donadrond in the guild’s training area. The air was tense to the point that I might have fallen on my face to beg for mercy if I had a human body. Good thing I was a sword now.

Now, let’s see what your stats are like…

Name: Donadrond Age: 46

Race: Ogre Class: Warrior LV: 38

HP: 246; Magic: 133; Strength: 198; Agility: 131

Skills: Intimidation 4; Transport 3; Increased Health Regen 5; Danger Sense 4; Instruct 4; Regeneration 5; Explosive Force 6; Earth Magic 2; Throwing Weapons 4; Poison Resistance 7; Lumberjack 3; Axe Arts 6; Axe Mastery 7; Roar 3; Revive; Spirit Manipulation; Steel Body; Healing Factor; Strength Up (Small) Equipment: Blacksteel Battleaxe; Blacksteel Tortoise Armor; Saber-Tooth Mantle; Stone Dragon Boots; Armband of Sacrifice.

Holy moly, he’s strong! Our stats were no match against his; he could easily outmuscle a Lesser Wyvern. He had so many skills, his level was high, and his gear was top-notch.

Name: Blacksteel Axe Attack: 650; MP: 3; Durability 650

Magic Conductivity: E+

650 attack power? That’s ridiculous! But it’s not like I’m jealous or anything!

He also belonged to the Ogre race, which I thought sounded cool. None of the adventurers I had scanned were anything compared to Donadrond. Was he really serious about not holding back? Wasn’t this an examination for beginners? How was anyone supposed to pass this test? Well, only one way to find out… Maybe we didn’t have to beat him and only had to show him how strong we were.

Are you ready, Fran?

“Yep.”

“Begin!”

Donadrond disappeared the very next second and blinked to Fran’s side. As if his ridiculous speed wasn’t enough, he swung his giant axe and split the ground of the training area. The impact was so hard that it produced a puff of smoke.

“Good dodge!”

That was close!

His axe was stuck to the ground beside us, taking out a huge chunk in a display of its power. He grunted to pull the axe out of the ground, breaking more of the floor in the process. Fran’s hair fluttered from the wind pressure.

That attack was insane. Just being grazed by it would’ve probably injured us! Could anyone actually pass this test?

We can’t just keep running. We have to attack!

We couldn’t just wait and see. We had to get him with our hardest hitting attack before he obliterated us. We didn’t have to worry about killing him. He was clearly strong; plus, he had the Armband of Sacrifice on. It was an item which took would-be fatal damage on behalf of its user.

“Ha!”

“Oh, you’re a fast one!”

He easily blocked Fran’s slash with his axe. Impressive, considering I had slightly boosted her speed and strength with a bit of magic. But that wasn’t the main aim of our plan.

As Fran kept Donadrond busy with her sword swings, tentacles began sprouting from the ground at his feet to bind his legs.

“You can cast spells without incantations?!”

Heh. Surprised? I couldn’t fault him. Fran hadn’t made any incantations after all. I had begun casting Earth Magic around his feet knowing he would be preoccupied with keeping Fran at bay. If he had noticed the spell, Fran would’ve cut him down on the spot. Unable to move, Donadrond was forced to fend off Fran with only his upper body. He was doing quite well actually, but not for long.

“Tri Explosion.”

“Aargh!”

Donadrond took a Level 10 fire spell to the face. Three bolts of fire exploded around him. The spell was difficult to dodge, and it took away your vision. I had told Fran to chant the name of the spell to make it seem like she was the one casting it. In effect, Fran was free to use her Sword Arts while I took care of spellcasting.

“Huff… Dragon Fang!”

It was a Level 7 Sword Art, and I had buffed it with Vibrofang to boot. Fran charged at Donadrond’s large frame while he was still trying to regain the footing he’d lost from the chain explosion. He must have recognized the nature of Fran’s skill, for his eyes widened in a look of astonishment.

“This girl can chain fire magic and Sword Art one after another?!”

Donadrond was helpless to dodge the attack.

“Aargh!”

I penetrated his side and sent his giant form flying. His 200-kilogram body flew ten meters before slamming into the wall with a loud crash. There was a crater in it when the dust settled.

This was my first time using it on an actual person who wasn’t a monster. It looked to be a bit much, though. Not that I thought it would’ve been enough to kill this giant of a man.

“Oof…”

Oh thank God he’s still alive.

He was coughing up blood but was otherwise conscious. Fran slowly approached him. Was she going to use healing magic on him? Just as I began to wonder, Fran pointed the tip of my blade at Donadrond and asked him.

“Do I pass?”

A very reasonable question. I had completely forgotten this was supposed to be a test.

“Heh… Yeah. You pass.”

“I see.”

This guy could still move? How tough was he? I stabbed him in the side!

Donadrond proceeded to surprise me even further as he plucked himself out of the wall and exploded into a bellow of laughter. The wound in his side was already healing.

It seemed he really was holding back. If the man had been serious, he would’ve chopped us into small pieces with his axe and we wouldn’t have been able to get a cut in. Fitting, considering it was just a test.

“Hahahaha! You’re the first newbie to mess me up this bad, little lady!”

This guy was a monster. Was there anything that could kill him?

“Donadrond, sir!” The receptionist rushed in, no doubt attracted by the loud noise she’d been hearing. “Could you please refrain from—huh?”

Oh, I see. She must’ve expected to see the newbie all beat up and bloody. She didn’t think Fran would blow her examiner away.

“Uh, what?”

The receptionist was shocked as she looked upon a bloody Donadrond laughing among the rubble.

With the examination over, Donadrond took us to the highest floor of the guild where a blond gentleman sat waiting for us.

“Hahaha, she beat me good!”

“This is no laughing matter, Donadrond.”

Judging by his ears, he was an elf. At a glance, he seemed weak, but…

Name: Klimt Age: 136

Race: Wood Elf Class: Sorcerer LV: 67

HP: 180; Magic: 616; Strength: 87; Agility: 158

Skills: Speed Casting 7; Identify 5; Bow Mastery 3; Harvesting 5; Wood Magic 7; Spirit Magic 8; Greater Earth Magic 6;

Compounding 5; Earth Magic 10; Poison Resistance 3; Paralysis Resistance 4; Water Magic 5; Herbology 7; Cooking 4; Mana Manipulation; Child of the Forest Unique Skill: Favor of the Spirits Titles: Guildmaster; Guardian of Alessa; Wood Mage; Earth Mage Equipment: Ancient Cherry Staff; Doppel Snake Robe; Wind Drake Wing Mantle; Lunar Hare Jump Boots; Armband of Sacrifice He was stronger than Donadrond. He had too many magic skills to even count. I'd never seen the Sorcerer Class, either; I expected nothing less from a Guildmaster.

"Let's get your name to start."

"Fran."

"Age?"

"Twelve."

Donadrond was taken aback at this statement. "What? So you really are as young as you look!"

So that was it. Fran was so strong he'd thought her a member of a long-lived race. It was unthinkable that she wasn't part of one, given how strong she was.

"Donadrond."

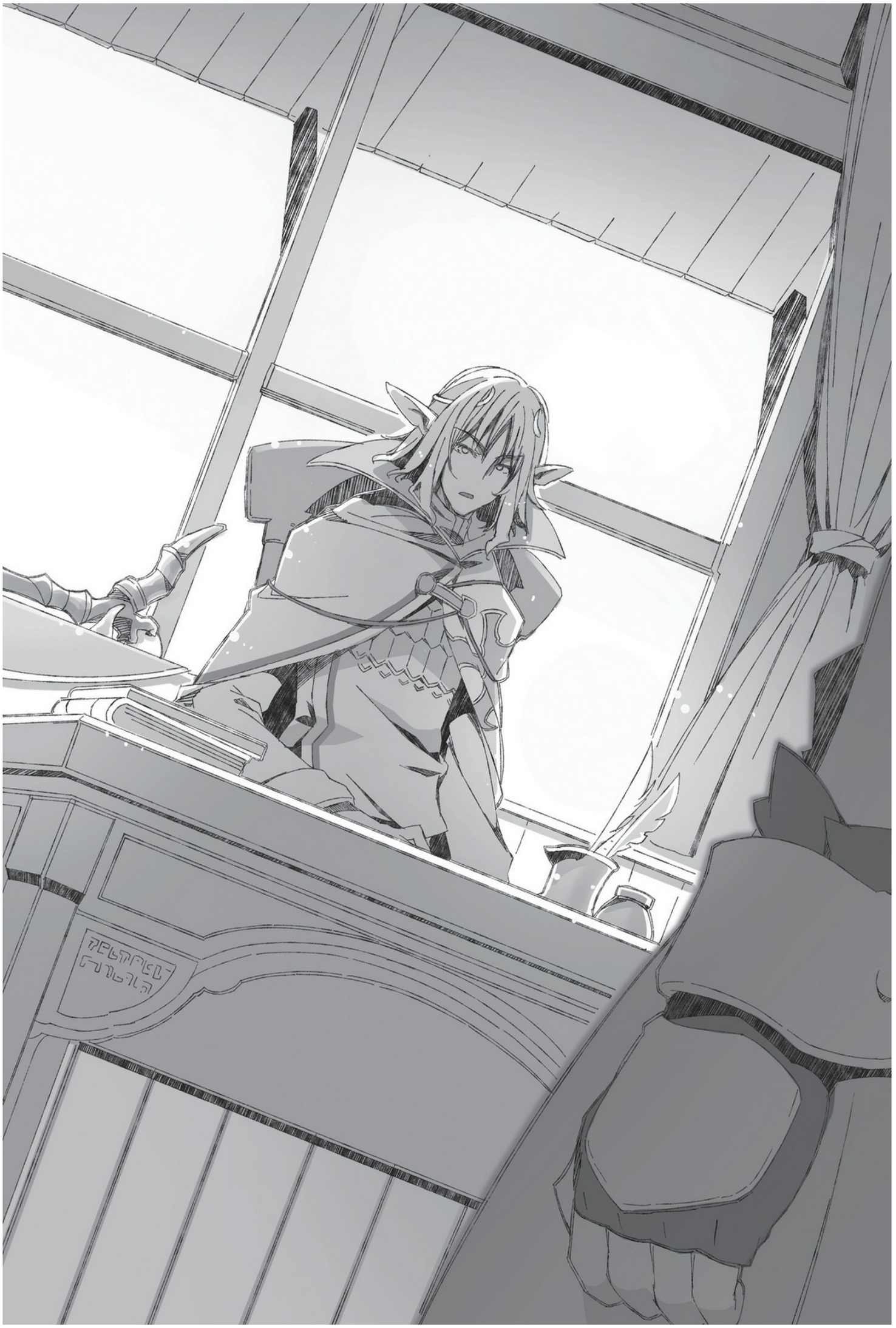
"Excuse me."

Donadrond bowed his head after the Guildmaster's reprimand. He wasn't cute at all. Still, Donadrond acted nothing like he had before the examination. I thought he was an intense drill sergeant then, but now he just seemed like a good-natured old man.

"I understand his sentiments though. Do you mean to tell me you have Fire Magic 10 when you're only twelve? Is this some sort of joke?"

The Guildmaster furrowed his eyebrows. His gaze looked like it was trying to see to Fran's core.

"And I see you have Identity Protection as well."



He had Identify among his myriad of skills too. He must have used it on Fran to see whether she was lying. Fortunately, my Identity Protection prevented that from happening. Equipping me was enough for the skill to transfer to Fran, so it was a good thing we invested our EP in it. Though, we were being needlessly suspected in exchange.

“Let’s assume you really are twelve. Where did you come from?”

“That’s a secret.”

He frowned some more. “Do you think I’ll be satisfied with that?”

“My lips are sealed.”

“Good grief…”

Well, this was worrying. I’d have to tell Fran to begin probing.

“Do I pass or not?”

“You evenly matched Donadrond. Of course you pass.”

“Then give me a Guild Card.”

“All right. We’re preparing it right now. Fill out these documents, please. I could fill them out for you if you have trouble of course.”

“I’m fine.”

It seemed Fran was literate, though I wasn’t sure whether her parents had raised her that way or the slavers had taught her to give her more value as a slave.

“Always good to welcome a skilled adventurer on board, eh, Guildmaster?”

“Yes, I suppose it is. The spirits aren’t going into a frenzy either.”

“Spirits? Where?”

“You won’t be able to see them unless you’re a Sorcerer.”

“What do the spirits do?”

“The spirits are very sensitive to the state of one’s emotions. They can immediately tell if you harbor any ill intentions.”

That sounded useful. I wanted some spirits for myself. But were there monsters that could use Spirit Magic?

“Can monsters use Spirit Magic?”

“There are evil spirits which feed on evil intentions, so there are those rare monsters who could use Spirit Magic. Very unfortunate.”

I see. That was good news. They might be worth looking out for.

“The preparations are complete, Guildmaster.”

“I see. Well, shall we?”

The Guildmaster led us to a small room next to the counter. In it was a crystal ball set on top of an altar.

“Lay your hand on this. It’ll be over in a second.”

“Hm.”

It really was over in a second. It looked like the crystal ball had registered Fran’s magic signature. The receptionist was fiddling with the ball from the side, then she touched a card to it, which seemed to complete the process.

“Now, you’ll have to pick out your Class.”

“Class?”

“Yes. As everyone has different aptitudes, there are different benefits to picking each Class.”

Now that he mentioned it, Randell had been a Merchant. The Guildmaster was a Sorcerer, which sounded just as strong as Donadrond’s Warrior.

“Which Class will you choose, Fran… Huh?”

“What is it, Nell?”

“Well, her Class options are quite incredible.”

“Oh?”

We peeked from behind the Guildmaster.

Fighter; Swordsman; Pugilist; Spellsword; Duelist; Mage; Flame Mage; White Mage; Summoner; Beastmaster; Assassin; Chemist;

Demolitionist; Chef.

That's a lot.

It looked like the Class options were affected by the skills Fran could use. She could even pick Demolitionist and Chef. Although I had Spear Mastery and Spear Arts, I had left them unequipped, which was why the related Classes weren't up for selection.

"Oh my…"

The Guildmaster was at a loss for words. He didn't look too pleased either.

"In any case, judging from how your match with Donadrond went, you seem to have a knack for either Spellsword or Mage."

I guess we were okay. He was probably getting used to all these surprises at this point.

"So, which one will you choose?"

Ask him for a recommendation.

"What do you recommend?"

"Well, the Spellsword, Duelist, and Flame Mage Classes are all intermediate Classes that are quite rare. If you want to use both magic and your sword, go with Spellsword. If you want to focus only on your sword, choose Duelist. And if you want to focus on your spells, choose Flame Mage."

I see… Which one do you want, Fran?

"Spellsword sounds cool."

Let's go with that then.

The Spellsword Class seemed to be the one with the most beneficial Effects anyway.

Spellsword: Intermediate Class. Unlocked when a Sword skill and a Magic skill are at Level 6 or above.

Effects: Gain additional Strength and Magic upon leveling up. Increases the chances of learning new Sword and Magic skills. Increases the strength of Sword and Magic skills.

There was one more thing I had to clear:

“Can I change Classes again later?”

“Yes. You can come to the guild at any time to change your Class. However, you can only get the Effects of your equipped Class. For example, your stats will change significantly should you job change to Duelist from Spellsword. As well, job changing to a lower Class would significantly reduce your stats. You would also lose access to skills unique to specific Classes.”

That was about how I expected the Class system to work, so I was okay with it. We might as well pick Spellsword for now, since we’d confirmed we could change Classes down the road if we wanted to.

“I’ll take Spellsword.”

“Then here is your Guild Card.”

The card appeared to be an ordinary bronze card. Fran’s name was listed on it along with her guild affiliation, Class, and adventurer rank.

“The Guild Card will act as your ID. A reissue costs 5000G. The card only responds to its owner’s magic signature, but do your best not to lose it regardless.”

The Guildmaster proceeded to tell us about basic guild procedure. It was an explanation usually given by the guild receptionist, but we had gained his attention, for better or worse. Here were the bullet points of his talk:

You could only take up Guild Quests that corresponded with your Adventurer Rank, plus or minus one. There were also Rank Up Quests when you wanted to move up. G-and F-Rank cards were bronze, E and D were black, B was silver, A was gold, and S was platinum. You could sell any materials regardless of your rank.

There was no annual fee, but if you didn’t take any quests after a set amount of time, you would get demoted and eventually removed from the guild. Any acts of betraying the guild would also get you kicked out.

The guild wasn’t responsible for any fights you got into with your fellow adventurers.

The last point was likely personally directed at Fran. She was raising too many flags.

“And now, you are an adventurer.”

“’Kay.”

“Is there anything else you want to ask?”

It wasn’t a question so much as it was a request.

“Are you going to announce the results of my examination?”

“No. The guild does not circulate the abilities of individual adventurers.”

“Good.”

“You don’t want to stand out?”

“Not in a bad way.”

“Let’s make a deal. I, Donadrond, and the receptionist will keep quiet about you. It is much more convenient for us anyway. Donadrond oversees assembling the adventurers in case of emergency, and it would trouble us if people began questioning his authority.”

“I think it’d be a crying shame. But if you want us to keep quiet for you, little lady, I’ll oblige.”

“Not that you could lay low for long considering how strong you are…”

Ugh, I couldn’t deny that. But I guess this meeting turned out okay.

We spoke to the receptionist, Nell, after receiving our guild card.

“Do you want to take on a quest?”

Her question reminded me that we had to sell off our materials if we wanted to stay the night at an inn. I had almost forgotten following the barrage of information we got after receiving our guild card.

“I have some goblin horns.”

“You’ll want the Quest Report counter then. Right this way.”

Now that Fran was a proper adventurer, Nell the receptionist politely responded to her needs. As the face of the guild, her manners were impeccable.

“I have some materials I want to sell.”

“Then please head to the trading counter and wait for me there. I’ll just count the number of goblin horns you’re turning in.”

“’Kay.”

“Eight pairs makes for 160G. Would that be all right?”

That wasn’t enough for a night’s stay. We needed 300G at the very least, and I’d like to stay at a decent inn if possible.

We made our way to the trading counter.

“Will you be selling individual parts? There’s a special area to the side in case the parts you’re selling are too big or aren’t carved yet. If it’s still too big, we have a special room where we can properly assess its value,” Nell explained.

If the goblin horns were any indication, the low-rank monster parts would only sell as much as the Black Bug parts I had sold to Randell on the way into the city. They were just way too cheap. They were going to be a bit bigger, but I was going to have to take out the mid-rank monster parts.

“They’re a little big.”

“Then you can have them delivered to that spot over there. Where do you have them stored? High-quality materials will need careful handling.”

Oh yeah, I guess we didn’t look like we had anything on hand.

Judging by the many people in town who had Item Pouches on their belts when I Identified them, Storage Space wasn’t that rare of a skill. It should be safe for me to use it here.

“I’ll take it out now.”

I’d be the one in charge of inventory of course. This was one of the drawbacks of Skill Sharing. Although Fran could use Pocket Dimension, she didn’t have access to my inventory, and I didn’t have access to hers.

I had Fran pretend to take things out of her own inventory and leave it on the trading area. I began by clearing out my low-rank materials, with the first monster Fran had ever killed coming first. Specifically, the Twin-Headed Bear’s

claws and fur. The bear's guts were apparently used in making medicines, but I shoved it back inside the Pocket Dimension until I could find containers for it; it would stink up the place all by itself. Next came two sets of pelts and fangs from the Poison Fang Rats.

"How did you find these?"

"I killed them on the way here."

"And you carved them by yourself?"

"Yeah."

We were getting unwanted attention from the surrounding adventurers, stealing glances at us and smirking. Were they implying we shouldn't be selling such low-rank materials? All right, let's up the ante a little bit.

Next, I took out the materials from the monsters in Areas 2 and 3 of the grasslands. From the Giant Bat, we had its wing membrane, venom fang, and hollow bone. From the Crush Boar, we had its tusk, pelt, and skull. From the Rock Bison, we had its shell and horns. They weren't that strong, but these should be enough to buy us a few nights' lodgings and some basic armor.

We definitely would've had enough if we sold the Tyrant Saber-Tooth and Doppel Snake materials, but I decided against it. They might come in handy as material for Fran's equipment, and we risked standing out too much. One look at the Guildmaster's Doppel Snake Robe and Donadrond's Saber-Tooth Mantle was enough to tell me that these were good enough for high-rank adventurers to wear. Selling them here would only cause an upset.

Nell frowned.

Were the monsters too strong for someone as young as Fran to have beaten? They were among the monsters that gave low-rank adventurers a tough time after all. We didn't have much choice considering the low-rank materials didn't sell for much. We could stand out just this once and get it over with. Should we sell all our low and mid-rank materials?

What do you think?

"We may as well get it over with in one go."

You're right! Okay, I'm gonna bring out the rest of the stuff now.

I took out the Stone Spider's silk sac, fangs, and shell; the Tunnel Mole's claws and pelt; the Paralysis Cat's pelt and claws; and left them on the trading floor. We didn't sell the meat since I wanted to keep it for Fran's meals.

"This is all of it."

"O…kay… Please wait while I assess them."

It looked like Nell had Identify and Connoisseur on her. She must've been a genius. She called three other receptionists and they proceeded to assess our loot. It took ten minutes of non-stop Identify until they finished.

"Thank you for waiting."

"Hm."

"That'll be 195,000G in total. Will that be all right?"

Excuse me? 195,000G? Seriously?! Wasn't that too much? I would've been all right with 30,000G to be honest.

"That's a lot of money."

"I assure you, it's reasonably priced. There were F-Rank monster materials thrown in there, and the condition of the material is impeccable. That's why we threw in a bonus."

I don't remember us being too careful when we were carving them, but I guess it made sense that a damaged pelt wouldn't sell as much as one that was in fine condition.

"Take the Twin-Headed Bear's pelt, for example. It usually sells for 6,000G. But the pelt you brought in was spotless. Also, not only did you skin it beautifully, you carved up the entire bear to boot. That's why we're buying it for 18,000G."

Three times? Wow. I guess the other materials were in a similar condition and the profits just stacked on top of the other. I'd take whatever I could so I wasn't complaining.

"Here is your pay. Please make sure you have the correct amount."

“Thanks.”

Fran shoved the money into her Pocket Dimension. It’d be a mess if it fell to the floor; it was also the best anti-pickpocket measure.

“Bye.”

With our money secured, Fran turned around to leave the guild.

“Now you wait just a minute!”

That was when one of the adventurers blocked her path.

“Hm.”

“Get back here, punk!”

Fran ignored the man and went past him. He didn’t expect this little girl to ignore him after such an intimidating display. The man turned around and reached his hand toward Fran, but she still didn’t stop.

“Hm.”

“I said get back here! Do you hear me?!”

“You’re in the way.”

“Just stop!”

Wow. Even the way she was calmly handling the situation was clichéd. Regardless, the man had blocked our way out of the building.

Fran, we’re gonna have to deal with this guy either way. Let’s hear him out.

“Hm? Fine.”

“As long as you understand.”

The rando smirked, thinking Fran was finally addressing him.

The man’s shoulder pads had spikes coming out of them that looked like they might stab him, a clear indication of style over function. He had black leather armor which I didn’t want to smell to save my life, and his chipped battleaxe was slung over his back. With his bald head and intense expression, he looked like someone who was cosplaying a bandit. His four friends looked more or less the same. They were really starting to annoy me, and they hadn’t even begun.

“Hey!”

“Yes?” Nell replied with a clear exasperation in her voice to the rando’s call.

“You’re clearly biased against us!”

“Excuse me? Biased?”

“Yeah! We turned in a Twin-Headed Bear the other day and only got 2,000G for it! What gives?!”

Nell sighed deeply at the accusation.

“Ah, yes. I remember. The Twin-Headed Bear whose pelt was all beat up, whose head was needlessly cracked, and whose entire carcass you brought to us, correct?”

“What, you didn’t like it? It was still the same Twin-Headed Bear!”

“No, it wasn’t. Yours was in such a terrible condition when you brought it to us that the materials were barely of any value upon assessment.”

“Assessment—what?”

“Ugh, this is the problem with these meatheads. They think their strength can carry them all the way to high ranks. Well, it won’t. They don’t know the slightest thing about being an adventurer. Ugh, just die.”

Nell, I know you’re whispering, but I can hear you loud and clear. I’ll have to make sure to tell Fran not to talk back to her. Even as a sword, I thought it was terrifying how she could curse someone with a smile on her face.

“You killed the Twin-Headed Bear by surrounding it then stabbing it to death, correct?”

“That’s right. It took our bait then all five of us piled on top of it. I don’t see why F-Rank monsters were supposed to be difficult for newcomers. We killed it in no time flat, so I guess those other adventurers were just weak.”

Oh, I get it. There was a subtle distinction in the word “difficulty.” Killing a given monster wasn’t necessarily “difficult,” but killing it in a way that preserved most of its carcass was. These schmucks must’ve thought it didn’t matter how they killed the monster so long as they got money for it.

I knew I wasn't one to talk, because I cheesed it with Disassemble, but this was why you needed it! Neatly carving monster pelts and preserving them was tough work! Even with the skill on we still had to physically carve the monsters we killed, and Fran did most of the hard work. Of course you'd get docked for bringing in a whole monster!

"Allow me to explain. The pelt was in such terrible condition when you brought it in that we couldn't craft anything out of it. At best, the products made with it would be of inferior quality. We were able to stuff only one of its heads, and even then it was heavily damaged, further reducing its value. The claws you brought in were cracked, making them worth considerably less. You even somehow managed to damage the creature's innards which we could've used to make medicine. I guess you waited a while before you brought the bear's carcass to us, because the meat was in such a decomposed state that we couldn't use it for food. Basically, you brought us garbage. It wouldn't be fair of us to pay you so much money for garbage, would it? Also, you brought it in one piece, which meant we had to carve it up for you. We took the liberty of deducting the carving fees, along with the disposal fees, from your total amount. You said we paid you 1,600G? You're right. That's far too much in your favor."

The man was dumbstruck with the speed and succinctness of Nell's words.

What she said sounded acceptable to me, but I knew these guys wouldn't concede. I wasn't sure if they understood what she was saying, but they didn't seem the type to back down from an argument.

"Shut up! You can talk fast and put up all the smokescreens you want. We know our rights and we have the right to get paid the same amount as that girl there!"

"Yeah, he's right!"

Well, this was horrible.

I understood then that these were the type of people who wouldn't listen to reason and would kick and scream until you gave in to their demands. They were an unpleasant bunch to begin with, but now I was beginning to get pissed off.

“We paid you exactly what the materials were worth.”

“Stop lying! No you didn’t!”

“Ugh. Maybe you need to reexamine your hunting procedure before you come complaining to us about it. Unlike soldiers whose sole duty is to fight, adventurers need to master other skills as well. Looking at you now, I don’t think you’re cut out for this adventuring business.”

“Whazzat? We’ve seen adventurers too scared to go out hunting! You think we can’t do their jobs better than them?!”

I was sure we weren’t the only ones who were getting upset over these punks’ behavior. I could feel the other adventurers around us glare at the group as their profession was being made a mockery of.

How stupid could these people be? Mocking adventurers while inside an Adventurer’s Guild?

And considering how much of a looker Nell was, she must’ve been quite popular. The adventurers must’ve been stewing with rage at how these bozos were picking on her. These guys were dead meat. Their stats weren’t even close to the rest of the adventurers in the lobby:

Name: Damun

Age: 27

Race: Beastman; Red Dog Tribe

Class: Fighter

Status: Enraged

LV: 13

HP: 48; Magic: 20; Strength: 33; Agility: 23

Skills: Transport 1; Sword Mastery 1; Steal 2; Intimidate 1; Axe Mastery 2

Title: Sore Loser

Equipment: Pig Iron Battleaxe; Pig Iron Breastplate; Scratched Deer Leather Armor; Armband of Strength (Fake)

Pitiful. And he was the strongest of the bunch. I could take him down in less than five seconds.

As I wondered what to do with them, the group turned their attention to us. They must've figured out blaming Nell was only making them look stupid.

"Look, it doesn't make sense that this kid could have so many materials to sell off!"

"So?"

"So, she must've stolen them or something!"

"So what? Let's say she *did* get them through dishonest means. What does that have to do with you?"

"Uh… W-well, here's the thing! That means you gave her money that you were supposed to pay us!"

Wha… How did that even make sense to these people? These guys were delusional!

"The girl is strong enough to take down mid-rank monsters and carve them for parts. Killing and neatly carving a Twin-Headed Bear must've been no problem for her."

"Pssh! You expect us to believe that?! You're a Black Cat, aren't you?"

"Hm."

"Black Cats are the weakest among the Beastman tribes. You expect me to believe a little girl from that tribe of weaklings could kill monsters that strong? There has to be some foul play here!"

"He's right!"

"Tell you what, kid. You pay us for damages and I'll let this incident slide. How does all the money you got just now sound?"

"Hehehe. The guild won't interfere in conflicts between adventurers, remember?"

"Wha—"

The brutes' audacity stunned Nell into silence.

He was right of course. The guild wouldn't interfere with fights between adventurers, but surely that applied only to small disputes? They wouldn't let just anything slide, especially not extortion. These guys were meatheads, but I doubted they had brains to begin with. I wouldn't be surprised if their heads were just stuffed full of Slime remains.

"What are you looking at us like that for?"

Fran stared at the man, but her expressionless face couldn't hide the anger that was burning in her eyes.



“You wanna have a go at this Red Dog, Black Cat?”

“Yeah, know your place, kitty!”

“You’re a disgrace to Beastmen everywhere! Why don’t you give us all your money as penance?”

They went too far when they said that Fran was a disgrace. If Fran, who was more furious than I was, hadn’t held me back at that point, I would’ve begun stabbing. I could hear Fran lose her patience, her last nerve breaking with a snap. She was carrying out her parents’ last wishes to evolve, to improve the standing of her tribe. The man’s insults went too far.

“Shut up.”

“What’s that?”

“Stop barking, dog.”

She said it! Good job, Fran! I’ll treat you to a nice dinner later.

“You bitch, I’ll kill you!”

I was getting bored of their clichés.

“You’re not strong enough to.”

“You talkin’ to me?”

“That’s rich coming from a Black Cat!”

“You have five seconds to get out of here. Or you could chase your own tails while barking ‘I’m sorry.’ Take your pick, little doggie.”

“We’ll have our way with you and sell you to a slaver, you little whore!”

Extortion, assaulting a minor, human trafficking—these guys were done for. Some of the adventurers had already left the building earlier. The city guard might walk in any minute now to arrest these fools.

We wanted to settle things before that happened.

“Your breath stinks, so stop talking.”

“You little punk!”

The man grabbed his axe and charged at Fran. His friends followed suit with their swords and spears, shouting at the top of their voices.

They attacked first. Therefore, whatever followed was purely self-defense.

“I’ll kill you!”

“I’d like to see you try without your legs.”

“Huh? Aaaaaargh! My legs!”

The man’s body toppled over after losing its balance; his feet were cut clean off at the ankles. Fran hadn’t even pulled me out, using Aura Blade 6 on him instead. The blade was made of mana and maintained for a mere instant. It wasn’t as strong as a conventional sword, but it could be turned invisible depending on how you focused your mana. It was also deadly when paired with a skill like Vibrofang, making it the ideal skill for assassins.

The man stared at the stumps where his feet used to be and squirmed like a maggot.

“Aaah! Eeek!”

The sounds he made were unbecoming of him. It creeped me out.

“You little… Aaah?”

“Heee… Ooowww!”

Another two fell on the floor after Fran fired ultrasonic bullets which crushed their feet from under them. As they fell, the bullets grazed their face, crushing their nose and all their front teeth. It might have gotten their eyes too.

The remaining two took in the situation and considered their options. They understood something terrible was happening and glared at Fran despite knowing that, deep down, they should be running away. They couldn’t stand the idea that this little girl was much stronger than they were, and unfortunately charged ahead.

They shouldn’t have thought about it. That decision might have cost them their lives.

Not that Fran had any intention of killing them. She didn’t want to be stuck

with clean-up.

Fran kicked the floor and instantly jumped in front of the two men. She pulled me out of cover and swung the flat of my blade against their faces. Now their faces were just as fractured as their feet. This wasn't something you could recover from with low-level spells and potions.

She kicked away the last one using Aura Kick, a Martial Arts skill (with additional Impact Force of course) He tried getting away, but he was too slow. His knees were broken and his muscles were twisted. As he was kneeling, Fran came down and smashed his elbow out with Impact Force to end the matter.

A hushed silence fell upon the lobby as the other adventurers looked upon the scene with quiet astonishment. The only sound left in the building came from the desperate men who were now crying out for help.

"Hey."

"Y-yes?"

"Can I go now?"

"Oh… Of course. Thank you for using our services. We look forward to serving you again." Nell beamed at us, giving us a thumbs-up when she thought no one else was looking. "As for you lot, I'll be turning you in to the City Guard."

"What?! Arrest that kid too! She started attacking us out of nowhere!"

"Excuse me, are you delirious? You scumbags assaulted the poor girl and she was forced to retaliate in self-defense. Isn't that right, everyone?"

"Y-yeah! She's right!"

"It was undeniably an act of self-defense."

Nice. Nell even got the other adventurers in on it.

"It hurts! Please just heal us!"

"You'll have to clean up the floor first. Blood is terribly difficult to remove, you know. Yes, you'll have to pay 10,000G in damages too. I'll think about healing you if you fork up the money."

Nell didn't even say she was going to heal them for sure. What a terrifying

woman!

We left the Guild just as Nell was making her demands to the crooks. The event took up more time than we thought, as the sun was already beginning to set.

We should look for some lodging. You don't wanna camp out after coming all the way to the city, do you?

"No."

An hour had passed since we left the guild. We were still wandering about on the streets.

I didn't think we'd get turned down at every inn.

"Yeah."

I guess a child can't rent a room even if she has a guild card.

That's what all the receptionists had said, but they were obviously worried about how Fran looked. She was in little more than a ragged piece of cloth and sandals which made her look either homeless or like a runaway slave. Granted, she did stink, but come on. I made sure she was clean by using some cleaning magic, but they couldn't have known that.

Let's get some equipment first to sharpen you up.

She looked puzzled.

I'll pick out your armor pieces for you, Fran. You have nothing to worry about.

We headed for the plaza that was next to the Adventurer's Guild. The place was bustling with adventurers buying gear from different stalls and stores. There were weaponsmiths, armorsmiths, weaver's cottages, drugstores, alchemy ateliers, pubs, kitchens, and so on.

I figured out the average price of goods here: A steel knife was 200G; a fifth-grade life potion 10,000G; and a fourth-grade antidote 20,000G. Fifth-grade was the lowest-quality potion, but it was still quite expensive. It could heal deep gashes instantly, so I guessed it was fair enough. The people of my Earth would've priced it about the same.

I got oddly excited by looking at all the strange new goods before me.

This is so much fun.

“Yeah.”

You think so too, Fran?

“So many weird things. It’s cool.”

That’s good to hear.

There was a glint in Fran’s eyes despite her usual, calm expression. It was nice seeing her excited for a change.

Now, where was that store I kept hearing about?

We had been keeping our ears sharp for any useful information as we walked the streets. There was a famous blacksmith currently living in Alessa. He was currently renting out a storefront in the area. My plan was to ask him to make a set of armor for Fran. We might not have enough money or material, but consultation was free.

Now where could he be…?

There were weapon and armor shops but none that seemed worthy of note. I thought people would’ve swarmed all over his smithy if he was as good as the rumors had said.

Has he closed up shop for the day?

If he was that popular, he just might have.

“Little lady, do you have a second?”

“Huh?”

“Yes, you.”

“Is this guy hitting on Fran?!” was my immediate reaction, but the source of the voice turned out to be an old dwarf. He still looked like a certain lecherous old man with a tortoise shell on his back, so I wasn’t about let my guard down. If he tried anything funny, I’d “accidentally” drop myself on his feet to warn him.

“Looks like you’re in the market for equipment. How about it?”

“How’d you know?”

“You learn a few tricks when you’ve been in business for as long as I have.”

Fran said nothing.

“No need to be so suspicious. It was easy enough. I could tell from your footwork that you’re quite a warrior. Despite that, you’re dressed in rags. And you’ve been looking at every weapon and armor shop you’ve passed by. You’re looking for gear, ain’t ya?”

This old man was smart! Who was he?

Name: Garrus Age: 82

Race: Dwarf Class: Arcane Blacksmith LV: 33

HP: 160; Magic: 173; Strength: 122; Agility: 46

Skills: Disassemble 2; Flame Resistance 7; Blacksmith 10; Smith Magic 9; Identify 7; Mining 3; Hammer Arts 2; Hammer Mastery 7; Poison Resistance 2; Leatherwork 6; Fire Magic 6; Tireless 6; Manasmith 7; Connoisseur 8; Fire God’s Protection; Spirit Manipulation Extra Skill: Godsight Titles: Wandering Blacksmith; Honorary Blacksmith of Cranzell; Smith King Equipment: Enchanted Steel Smith Hammer; Salamander Shirt; Firebird Sandals; Armband of Stamina Recovery Everything from his skills to his titles was amazing. Was this the great blacksmith we’d been hearing so much about? No wonder he could analyze us just by looking at us. We were certainly saved from the trouble of looking for him. How lucky.

“Wow.”

“Hehehe. As you can see, I’ve been around for a while. You wanna have a look at my shop?”

“Please.”

“Right this way.”

Garrus led us to his store, which was in a small alley leading off the plaza. We felt countless stares as we made our way there. The scrutiny was quite slimy, and it felt as if they were calculating our value.

Uh, why is everyone staring at us?

"Enemies?"

Not exactly, but…

The gazes coming from the merchants were so sharp that Fran mistook them for hostiles. What was going on?

"Oh, don't mind them. The merchants are just trying to pressure you into buying from them instead. Either that, or they're gonna 'offer' to buy some of my equipment from you. They're a hard-headed bunch."

That sounded like trouble.

"Don't you worry. You can leave by the back door when we're done. Now, what are you in the market for?"

I wasn't completely reassured, but worrying about it now wasn't going to help. We were fortunate enough to have the great blacksmith himself offer his services to us, so we had to make the best of it.

"You'll sell your stuff to me?"

"I only sell my gear to folks who deserve to use my gear, and you passed, little lady."

The blacksmith was in the habit of travelling from town to town selling weapons at an absurdly cheap rate. He'd travelled the entire country this way, and I had to admit I quite liked the stubborn old merchant.

Ask for his sword collection.

"I want a sword."

"What? But you already have a fine sword. It's the first time I've seen an Intelligent Weapon in person!"

Impossible! How did he find out? Did he use Identify on me? But I had Identity Protection on. He couldn't have bypassed that.

“Intelligent…Weapon?”

Fran tilted her head in response.

Good acting, Fran! That’ll throw him off the scent!

“Don’t worry, I won’t do anything to it you don’t want me to. I was just checking. My eyes are special, you see. They can Identify anything, even if it has Identity Protections. That goes double for weapons and armor.”

So that was how he did it! He did have Godsight on top of Identify and Connoisseur; I guessed that was the skill he used.

“I only got a look at its attack value, its Mana Conductivity, which was A, and the fact that it’s an Intelligent Weapon though. Do you have anything to add, Sword?”

Then you should know that I want this girl, Fran, to use a proper sword.

“What have we here? Was that Telepathy? You really are sapient! This is great!”

You’re acting like a child.

“You act that way too sometimes, Teacher.”

No way, really?

“Really.”

Oh… I guess hobbies make everyone get in touch with their inner child.

“Hm.”

I looked at old Garrus, who was acting like a kid in a candy store.

“So intelligent!”

So that’s what I look like.

I should exercise prudence in the future.

“Excuse me, I got a little excited there. In any case, you won’t need any of my weapons with your abilities.”

Whoa, whoa. You saw my stats, didn’t you? Your swords are much stronger. Like that one over there.

This old dwarf must've made the superior gear we saw in the city, seeing as there were weapons of similar design adorning his shop. All of them were about as strong as, or even stronger than, I was. Just talking about my terrible stats made me feel like hacking up blood.

"That's because you're only looking at its raw attack value. Don't tell me you don't understand what Mana Conductivity does?"

Mana Conductivity? I guess I do have that attribute.

"I figured you were clueless. Shame."

Is it that important an attribute?

"Important? It's the first thing you look at when you're out shopping for swords!"

What! I didn't know that…

"Shocked."

Explain further.

"Well sure. Mana Conductivity refers to a weapon's capacity to be modified by magical energy. Much of a weapon's power is derived from this attribute."

I see.

"Take this sword here." Garrus took down a short sword that was displayed on the wall. It was made of steel with a Mana Conductivity of E. "With a Mana Conductivity of E, it only has a 5% efficiency at using magic. For example, if you charged 100 mana, it will only increase your attack power by 5 points."

Then, he took down a mithril short sword. Its Mana Conductivity was C. It had 70% efficiency, which meant charging 100 mana would increase its attack power by 70.

That was quite significant. I could see how Mana Conductivity could cover the gap created by raw attack power.

"Better conductivity means higher efficiency, and that means you can charge your weapon with magic for longer."

By the way, is the mithril's C rating considered high in terms of conductivity?

“’Course it is! Mithril has especially high Mana Conductivity. C’s probably the highest available for commercial weapons. What usually happens is the raw attack power suffers from prioritizing Mana Conductivity.”

“So then A is amazing.”

“That’s right. Only enchanted swords have an A rating in Mana Conductivity. That means 200% mana efficiency. I’ll be honest with you, none of my weapons can come close.”

So, if Fran charged 100 mana, I could increase her Attack by 200?

I was really strong! It looked like my time had finally come.

Is there a limit to how much magic I can charge?

“Depends on what you’re made of. And in your case…I don’t know. Looks like you’re made of a Harmollium base along with some other magical alloys mixed in…”

Fran had handed me to Garrus for closer inspection, and he was now tapping my blade curiously.

“Doesn’t look like you’re made of anything less than orichalcum, so I’m sure you won’t have any problems going up to 1000. Not that anyone had that big of a mana pool. Why, the kingdom’s mages only go up to 500 on average!”

Garrus let out a big belly laugh while I broke into a cold sweat.

My MP was at 1000. Did that mean I had a 2000 attack boost this whole time? I thought it was kinda weird how I hadn’t run into any trouble with all the ferocious monsters I had faced. I thought I was just lucky to have landed a blow to their weak spots by sheer luck, or that Telekinesis had accelerated me fast enough…

I was likely charging myself with Mana while not noticing it.

“Material aside, an E-Rank charge lasts you five minutes. You get an additional two minutes for every successive rank.”

So A makes it…

“Thirty minutes thereabouts.”

“That’s pretty long.”

Enough for a short fight.

“Yeah.”

Then I’m not a decorative sword?

“If you were, I don’t know what that makes the rest of the swords in the world.”

I see. I’m… I’m so glad to hear that!

I was so happy, I would’ve started crying if I had eyes. I was so much a sword that I viewed other swords as competition. Being stronger than the lot of them made my day.

“You’re impeccable as an enchanted sword. In fact, you might be able to go up against a divine sword.”

“Enchanted? Divine?”

“Yep. Who made you? A Godsmith?”

I don’t know. I don’t have any memories of being crafted.

“I see.”

Do you know anything about me? Any little detail would help.

I was disgusted by how I didn’t know where I had come from. If this man had any information about me, then I’d like to know it.

“We blacksmiths have our own rankings, you see: Blacksmith, Great Blacksmith, Arcane Blacksmith, and Godsmith. There are derivations of the Smith Class but I won’t talk about them today. The Godsmiths are the greatest of the blacksmiths with legendary prowess. There have only been five of them in recorded history.”

The Legendary Five. Sounds cool.

“All blacksmiths long to become Godsmiths. They’re the only ones capable of crafting divine blades.”

So you’re saying a Godsmith crafted me?

“I think so, but there’s no way to be sure… You’re too weak for a divine sword, but, on the other hand, you’re too strong for an enchanted sword.”

What? Okay, maybe a really good Arcane Blacksmith made me.

“It’s possible.”

How strong is a divine sword?

Now I was curious. How strong was a sword that was better than me?

“A Divine Sword can split the heavens and crack the earth. It is the ultimate weapon. The last time it was used in a war, it claimed the lives of tens of thousands in a matter of minutes.”

A sword can do that?

“It doesn’t have to be a sword proper. Weapons crafted by Godsmiths are all called Divine Swords. That’s what I hear anyway.”

So, you’ve never seen one.

“Only the Flame Sword Ignis.”

And how strong was Mr. Ignis?

“My Identify wasn’t as strong as it is now so I couldn’t get a full scan, but…”

Name: Flame Sword Ignis Attack: 1800

Mana Conductivity: SS

Skills: Flame Magic; Flame God; Unknown “That’s the gist of it.”

Holy… I’m sorry for acting stuck up. I know now that I am no Divine Sword.

“Aww, don’t say that. You’re a fine sword yourself.”

You’re trying to cheer up this dull blade? You’re such a nice old man!

“Don’t worry about it. Not every day I get to meet a talking sword. You brought a bigger smile to my face than I did to your blade!”

Garrus!

“Sword!”

From the corner of my eye, I could see Fran browsing the store with a bored

look on her face. “Hm. This is a good breastplate.”

Ten minutes later…

“Ahahaha. Sorry for leaving you out of that discussion, little lady.”

“It’s okay.”

So I guess Fran can keep using me as her main weapon. Could you make me a scabbard, though?

“Sure! I’ll make the finest scabbard you’ve ever seen.”

We won’t be able to pay you much… But we want some armor too.

“All right, what’s your budget?”

We still need to get supplies and lodging, so… How does 150,000G sound?

We could settle for cheaper armor, but Garrus was a famous Arcane Blacksmith. I wondered what 150,000G would get us from his inventory.

“Let me see… You know what, I like you two so much I’ll throw the scabbard in along with the armor.”

Are you sure? That’s awful nice of you.

“Hey, don’t worry about it. So, what kinda armor you want? I may be a blacksmith, but I can do leatherwork too.”

What do you think?

“I want something light.”

“Leather it is. We’ll use metal to reinforce the protection of your vital areas.”

“I’ll go with that.”

“What about headgear?”

“I don’t like wearing anything. It gets in the way of my field of vision.”

“In that case, I’ll fit you with a Beastman Earband. You won’t have to get your ears pierced, either.”

“’Kay.”

“Now just sit tight.”

Garrus disappeared into his storage room and brought out an assortment of gear.

“Try these on for size.”

He took out four pieces of armor: Flame Bull Dress Armor, Paralysis Cat Gloves, Venom Wyvern Boots, and the Mithril Earband (Cat Type). Their defensive values weren’t half bad, and they came with decent buffs like Flame Resistance, Impact Resistance, Paralysis Resistance, Poison Resistance, and Magic Resistance. The armor was weak compared to the Guildmaster and Donadrond but was slightly stronger than the average adventurer on the street.

The set was colored white and black and looked quite good on Fran. The base of the dress armor was basically a white dress with black knee socks, but the breastplate was reinforced with metal and leather. The quality of the material drove the defensive value up further.

On top of that, Garrus had given Fran some ordinary clothes. They didn’t have any defensive value whatsoever, but they were finely-woven.

This is high-quality gear. Are you sure we can have all this?

“How many times do I gotta tell ya that it’s fine? Strong adventurers need strong gear. And god knows my gear ain’t nothing compared to an enchanted sword. Besides, I’m not making a loss here.”

Isn’t that nice of him, Fran?

“Thank you.”

“Just make sure you drop in from time to time, eh? I’ve always wanted a closer look at an Intelligent Weapon.”

Just don’t do anything weird to me.

“I’ll just use Identify and Connoisseur on you, at most.”

That sounds harmless enough.

“Oh, and if you bring me some materials, I could craft some gear for ya. On the cheap, of course.”

I immediately thought of the high-rank materials I had left in my Pocket

Dimension. Selling them to the Guild would make us stick out like a sore thumb. May as well solve the problem by having old Garrus make armor from them.

"We have materials."

Yeah, we want to keep our low profile, so could we bother you to make gear out of them?

"Oh? What materials do you have in mind?"

C-and D-Rank.

C-Rank was the point where it was normal for the government to get involved and dispatch its knight battalions if the monster was sighted near a city. They made B-Rank adventurers work for their keep.

Got an empty room?

"Right this way. Are you gonna bring it in later?"

"We have it right now."

"You have an item pouch? I don't see one on you…"

And he was right, Fran wasn't equipped with an item pouch. She only had a shirt, sandals, and sword on her.

It's in one of my skills.

"Interesting… Didn't think a sword could double as an item box."

I ignored Garrus's muttering and went inside the empty room. It must've been a storage room originally because of its lack of flooring and high ceiling.

Here goes.

I began extracting items from the Pocket Dimension. First were the Tyrant Saber-Tooth's fangs, claws, and pelt. Next came the Doppel Snake fangs and scales. Then came the Blast Tortoise shell and skin. They were all enough to fill the entire room.

I only told the old blacksmith about the Gluttonous Slimelord I had killed. I didn't want to take it out since that would leave the room sticky and covered in Slime. I'd save it until I found a barrel I could store the thing's remains in.

“Holy… Did you kill all these yourself? These are materials from C-and D-Rank monsters.”

Pretty much.

“And you did it alone?”

I did it by myself, to be precise. I just flew around with Telekinesis.

“Hahahaha! That’s ridiculous! Well, that’s one way to use that ability.”

I didn’t come equipped with many basic skills, so I figured I had to get creative.

“All right, I’ll be able to make plenty of good gear with these. Word of caution: The little lady’s not gonna be able to equip them until she levels up a bit.”

I expected no less from armor made of high-rank monster material.

“I won’t be able to handle this quality of leather by myself. I’ll have to enlist some help. Maybe—”

Uh, Garrus?

“Oh, excuse me. I was getting a bit excited there. Can’t remember the last time I had this much material to play with. Anything else you folks hiding up your sleeve?” The man was absolutely beaming.

“So you’ll make it for us?”

“’Course!”

But how much does a blacksmith of your stature charge for custom gear?

“Let’s see… You brought all the basic materials and all, but it’s going to cost at least 3,000,000G.”

Jeez, that’s a lot of money.

“Would you mind selling the leftover material to me?”

Sure, take it.

“That makes it easier. It won’t take much to craft the young lady’s armor, so I’ll buy the rest of the material from you and use that to cover the crafting fee. Deal?”

Deal.

“Then we’re in business.”

“When will it be ready?”

“It’s gonna take about a month.”

That’s longer than I expected…

“It’s plenty fast, I promise you. Besides, I can’t afford to be sloppy with such fine material! I’ll need some extra components too, so I’ll need to order them in.”

Can’t be helped. Are you okay with that, Fran?

“Yeah. I’m looking forward to it.”

“It’s gonna be great!”

We then diced the Slimelord’s remains into a steel barrel Garrus had prepared for us. The Slime had its different uses apparently.

“You don’t happen to have any crystals on you, do you?”

“No.”

“Ah, that’s a shame.”

Crystals can be used to make armor too?

“Yep. It adds to the buff of a particular piece of armor. Take this Doppel Snake fang, for example. Using it to craft armor will give you medium-level Poison Resistance, while crafting a weapon with it will give it Poison Fang. Now if you add a Doppel Snake Crystal to it, you get more Poison Resistance and Advanced Poison Fang instead. You could use some other crystal on a given material, but you get a greater effect if you pair a certain material with its corresponding crystal.”

I didn’t know you could use crystals that way. Unfortunately, I had absorbed every crystal we came across. I’d have to store the crystals of the monsters whose skills I already owned. I could always pop them out of storage for a quick bite anyway.

We’ll keep an eye out.

“That’d be for the best.”

I guess we'll be taking our leave for today.

"Bye-bye."

Sorry for all the trouble.

"Hahaha! Just wait until you see your gear! Also, I'll finish your scabbard in three days. Remember to come pick it up."

We will.

We took care of our material problem and got some great gear out of that meeting. It was a good thing we ran into him.

You look great in it too, Fran. You look like a real adventurer now.

"Thanks."

Let's see… Uh, do you need underwear?

"Not really."

A-are you sure?

I mean, she said she didn't need it, so…

No. That was no excuse. I know buying underwear was a difficult hurdle to overcome, but if I ran away from this problem now, I'd run away from it forever!

I didn't want Fran to lose her femininity. I had to go on the offense!

No. We…are going underwear shopping!

Ten minutes had passed after we left Garrus's shop.

And we're here.

"So frilly," Fran said as she looked through the store window. There were many frilly designs decorating the display.

It is *a specialty store for housewives.*

My heart was pounding in my metaphorical chest. Any man would've felt the same way. This was my first time going into this type of store in either of my lives so far.

“Welcome.”

“Hm.”

“What’s this? An adventurer?”

The store attendant was a young lady with short, blue hair that seemed more fitting in a cyberpunk setting than a fantasy one. Her tone of voice reminded me of a delinquent.

“So? Whaddya lookin’ for? We got underwear and lingerie fit for everythin’ from daily life to combat.”

“What should I get?”

Just repeat after me.

“Okay.”

“Five days’ worth of underwear. The easier to wash, the better.”

“Uh-huh.”

“And I want some undershirts I can wear beneath my armor.”

“Five days’ worth of that stuff too?”

“Yeah.”

“Our smallest size underwear is over there. Anythin’ ya like in particular?”

“Not really.”

“Nope, not havin’ it! You’re too cute for that answer, sweetie!”

The store attendant used to be an adventurer. She was unsatisfied with the lack of cute-yet-functional underwear, so she ended up having to make them herself. She had now teamed up with this store to sell specialty items for female adventurers.

“Ya’ve got white skin, black hair, black eyes, and black ears. This’ll look great on ya.”

Wh-what? Black shorts? And it came with the mythical tail slot?

That’s dirty. Too dirty! But that’s what makes it so good!

“This line was made with Beastmen in mind, which is why it has a hole for your tail. Whaddya think?”

I dunno. I thought it might be too mature for Fran. She wasn’t at the age where she should be worried about pheromones or seduction yet. She’d be more suited to something cute.

The next item the attendant showed us made it look like she had read my mind.

“We got other stuff too. How ‘bout this?”

The unmistakable striped panties. And they came with white and light blue stripes too!

“Or this one.”

Wow, she was good! These panties looked like ordinary cream-colored panties at a glance, but upon closer inspection one could see it was decorated with frills and ribbons. She kept showing us one set of underwear after another, but there was always a problem with either elasticity or breathability.

“We could cut a hole out in that one for ya. On the house.”

“Then I’ll take this one and that one.”



“All right. Anythin’ else?”

What else would a girl need? Facewash? Oh, I know—may as well get a skincare kit while we’re at it.

“A skincare kit? If you have it.”

“Sure do. We have an entire selection of it, in fact.”

“Just give me whichever.”

“Here ya go.”

It didn’t look like they sold bras here. Was it because we were in the sticks, or had civilization not advanced to that point yet? Fran was on the petit, flat side anyway, so it wasn’t like she needed one.

“So that’s five days’ worth of undies and undershirts… A pair of breathable shirts and shorts… Do ya need any nightgowns with that?”

“Give me two.”

“Will do. A bar of facial cleanser and a towel…”

They had soaps here. Were they the same as on Earth?

“This bar of soap was made with alchemy and is guaranteed to leave your skin soft and smooth. It’s also odorless which makes it perfect for an adventurin’ lady such as yourself.”

I see. That was really useful. Smelling like flowers on a hunt would make it easier for monsters to sniff us out. Being odorless was a great feature.

We bought clothes and all the basic necessities the attendant had recommended. She was grinning the entire time, which I took to mean that people didn’t usually buy this much in one go. She was even kind enough to see us off.

“Thanks for your patronage!”

I still had to teach Fran how to wash her clothes, however. She would tear through her entire wardrobe if she did a poor job of it. Why didn’t I just do it for her? Absolutely not. There were too many risks. She would have to do this one on her own. I’d die if I ever looked at Fran in a dirty way.

Thirty minutes later…

We stood in front of the inn the store attendant had recommended to us earlier. This inn was supposedly popular among female adventurers. It had a nice-looking façade, so I had a good feeling about it.

We went inside.

The reception area was also neatly kept. Cute flower pots casually decorated the tables. I brushed a spot with Telekinesis and found it spotless. This *was* a good inn.

“Teacher, you’re acting like an in-law.”

I’m sorry, but I’m doing this for you, Frannie!

“Welcome.”

A young lady of about twenty years old was sitting behind the reception counter.

“Do you have any rooms?”

“Will you be staying by yourself?”

“Yes.”

“Where’re your mom and dad?”

I guessed renting a room at her age was going to be tough.

Fran, show her your guild card.

“Here.”

“Wait, it’s real?”

“Yes.”

The girl marveled at the guild card for a while before confirming its authenticity.

“Well, you look like an adventurer, so I guess you’re okay. It’ll be 300G for a night. The 400G option comes with a meal. All our rooms are single rooms. Which will it be?”

Let’s get some food for tonight.

“I’d like the food option for one night.”

“All right. Here’s your room key. Please look after your belongings.”

“’Kay.”

She proceeded to tell us about the price of utilities, but we ignored it. We could use magic or skills to substitute lanterns and hot water. I was surprised they had toothbrushes, but we could just use cleansing magic to bypass it.

“You can exchange this coupon at the cafeteria for a free meal. Feel free to visit our cafeteria at any time.”

She gave us two meal tickets. It was nice that we could eat whenever the cafeteria was open. But we still had a ton of monster meat left, so that would’ve been more economical to eat. I’d have to prep our meals before we stayed at an inn the next time. I just needed to cook the whole lot beforehand and shove it into the Pocket Dimension. That way, we’d always have piping hot food ready to eat.

But where could I cook so much food? Fran would get bored if all she had was whole roast and stews. I wanted to expand my menu, but I was going to need a kitchen to do so.

We climbed up the stairs and headed to the room on the second floor. The number on our key was 204, a corner room.

“Here?”

Hey, it’s not half bad.

The fresh and clean room had a bed and a desk along with a small drawer. It also came installed with a wardrobe and some weapon mounts on the walls. It looked like the very picture of comfort. This inn was something else.

“Teacher, are you sure we’re in the right room?”

We are. Why do you ask?

“It’s such a nice room.”

Then I understood.

To Fran who had spent four years being a slave, this ordinary room was

luxurious. *Oh, you poor girl! I'll definitely make you happy!* But first, I needed to reassure her.

Not really. This is a standard room.

"Seriously?"

Yep. We'll be able to stay at rooms like this from now on.

"Whoaaa!" Fran exclaimed, pumping her fists in the air. "I'm so glad I came with you, Teacher."

Yeah?

"I feel like a winner already."

That's a little much.

"My time is now."

Fran was so happy that she brimmed with excitement, not that I could tell from her usual expression. Still, I was glad she was enjoying herself.

We wanted to chill at the inn the rest of the day, but I remembered that we still had a little bit of shopping to do.

Hey, you wanna do some shopping while there's still light out?

"What are we buying?"

Seasoning and cooking utensils. Remember how good the food was when we were out camping?

"Yeah."

Well, with some seasonings, you could have even tastier food.

"We need to buy these seasonings now."

We'll need to go to the general store. I'm sure the receptionist will tell us where it is.

"Okay."

We're not leaving any belongings in the room, but let's lock the door anyway.

"Sure."

We asked the receptionist if she had any general store recommendations. There was one right along the main road next to the inn.

And we're here.

The sign read "Saber-Tooth General Store."

"Saber-Tooth?"

That doesn't have a very "General Store" feel to it.

"But this is the only store here."

Fran was right—there were no other general stores in the vicinity. I sighed, braced myself, and we went in.

The welcoming bell rang.

"Hey there!"

The inside of the shop was otherwise normal if not for the immensely buff shopkeeper. His greeting had such a manly inflection, it almost had a musk to go with it.

"General store?"

"That's right. We're very much a general store despite what the signboard says."

I could imagine. Saber-Tooth wasn't a name you'd give to a general store. Not to mention the shopkeeper looked like he was more at home in a dungeon than behind a counter. I could tell from his moves that he didn't graduate from merchant school. I should Identify him to be sure.

Name: Rufus

Age: 41

Race: Human

Class: Merchant

LV: 30

HP: 188; Magic: 73; Strength: 150; Agility: 77

Skills: Transport 3; Disassemble 4; Harvesting 2; Arithmetic 1;

Trading 2; Warhammer Arts 4; Warhammer Mastery 6; Tracking 2; Frost Resistance 2; Cooking 1; Spirit Manipulation; Giant Killer

Title: Giant Slayer

Equipment: Merchant Apron; Arithmetic Earrings

He didn't have the stats of an ordinary merchant. He was a mid-rank adventurer with an avant-garde skill spread to boot. The fact that his Trading and Arithmetic skills were so low for a merchant felt incredibly out of place.

"Adventurer?"

"Used to be. I always had dreams of opening my own shop. I retired from adventuring three years ago and now, here I am."

"Why the name? It's not cute."

Fran! Be polite.

"Hahaha! Yeah, I get that a lot. When I first opened up shop, I thought I'd need something to liven the place up. So, I decided to put that baby up over there."

The shopkeeper pointed to the back of the store at the stuffed Saber-Tooth head. Its expression was frozen in a constant, intimidating roar.

"Cool."

"I know, right? Most of the ladies who come through don't think so, though. What a shame."

Was this store safe? I probably would've left by now if the receptionist at the inn hadn't recommended it.

I scanned the store as Fran carried on their conversation. The place did have a fine selection of goods, with everything from seasoning to basic necessities laid out in neat displays.

"Anyway, don't let me stop you from looking around. Take your time."

Let's get our stuff.

"'Kay."

It went without saying that we needed salt and pepper, but we picked up some sugar and spices while we were at it. We'd need some eating utensils like spoons and plates too.

Still, I couldn't help but worry about the store's lack of security. The merchandise was displayed all over the store like back in Japan. Considering the number of thieves this world had, you'd think the shopkeeper would've had a shoplifting problem…

Then again, the shopkeeper would've been able to handle minor thieves. The open display was probably his way of saying he was confident in his anti-theft measures.

In the end, we spent about 3,000G by the time we left the store. The shopkeeper liked us so much that he shouted, "Take care and come again" as we went out the door.

We have about 40,000G left.

"What should we get next?"

Some potions would be nice, but…

It was hard to justify their price.

"We have healing magic."

Which is still at a low level. The most you can get out of that is a slight soothing sensation.

"We could level it up."

I've been thinking about that.

We had 27 EP left. It took 2 EP to level up a skill, so we could max out a Level 1 skill if we wanted to. However, spending all our remaining EP made me feel uneasy.

We have other skills we could level up.

"Like what?"

Sword Arts, for example.

The Guildmaster had told us after our entrance exam that Dragon Fang was

an intermediate-level Sword Art. Our Sword Art was already at Level 7, so shouldn't bumping it to Level 10 take priority?

"Yeah, I think so too."

Right?

But the Sword Art's level could only go as high as our current level of Sword Mastery. If we wanted to max out Sword Art, we were going to need to max out Sword Mastery too. Spending our EP this way seemed like a bottleneck.

Our next candidate was Doppelganger. It was virtually useless in its current state, but what if we leveled it up? It might end up strong enough to fight like the Doppel Snake's version. It could also run errands and would come in handy to act as Fran's guardian for paperwork's sake. It'd make it easier to get a room at any inn too.

"That sounds good."

Right?

And there were the defensive skills: Instant Regen, Abnormal Status Resistance, and Physical Attack Resistance. They weren't anything fancy, but they'd definitely come in handy in a fight. These three were also high-rank skills which were difficult to get.

Fran's level was still low, so she wouldn't be able to survive a hit from any mid-rank monster. We should play it safe until she gained a few more levels.

"I never thought of that."

I don't think it'd hurt to put a few levels into Instant Regen.

It'd synergize well with Healing Magic. Of course, we'd be giving up the ability to cast healing spells on other people.

I thought it'd be best if we focused on leveling up one skill to the max instead of splitting our EP.

They're all good skills, to be honest.

We finally decided to level up Healing Magic after our discussion at the inn. It was quite useful as it also unlocked Remedy for all our status effect needs. I'd

also be able to heal Fran myself if she got into trouble.

We also unlocked Recover Magic as a result. It seemed to be the advanced form of Healing Magic, like Flame Magic was to Fire Magic. It came with Regenerate and Greater Heal, both at Level 1. Regenerate added a constant healing effect to a regular Heal, while Greater Heal was a much more powerful Heal that could restore broken body parts. Both were extremely useful.

Finally, we unlocked the Healing Mage title, which was probably the healing equivalent of our Fire Mage title.

Now we can heal ourselves out of any situation.

"Yeah."

So, what do you wanna do tomorrow? Should we go to the guild and take on some quests? We still have money left over, so we could just kick back if you want.

"I wanna go questing."

You sure? We'll have to leave town if we do.

"I'm sure."

Then we're going to the guild tomorrow.

"Yeah. Can't wait."

Yep. We'll have to level you up.

"Then what?"

What do you want to do, Fran? We can do anything you want.

"Anything…"

Anything come to mind?

"Hmm…?"

Hahaha. Well, think about it. Take your time.

"Yeah. I will."

Chapter 3:

A Deal with the Guild It was the first morning of our stay at the inn. I woke up staring at an unfamiliar ceiling. Not that I *could* wake up, because I didn't actually need sleep.

I woke Fran up and helped her change since she was always groggy in the morning. I cleaned her body with Cleansing Magic and washed her face with some conjured water. Fran's hair was cut short with the sides slightly long, and her cowlicks stuck out in all directions this morning, so I made sure to straighten her hair out with some water.

"Good morning."

Did you get a good night's sleep?

"Perfect."

We went to the cafeteria for breakfast.

"Here's your breakfast platter!"

Breakfast was served on a wooden plate. It had tough rye bread and fried eggs, two links of sausage, and some boiled carrots. It came with clam chowder on the side.

How is it?

"Good."

Fran, the former slave, was happily munching away at her large meal. *Eat up so you can grow big and strong, Fran.*

"Your cooking's still better, though."

Haha. Thanks for the compliment.

"It's true. I wanna eat your cooking again."

It was all thanks to maxing out my Cooking skill. Ironically enough, the greatest chef in the city of Alessa was a talking sword; I even had the title of Master Chef to prove it. But even without my Cooking skill, I'd still be better

than Fran at cooking since I had retained memories of my past life. In any case, no matter how high my Cooking level was, I couldn't cook anything that didn't exist in this world. I was going to need to do large amounts of meal preparation and storage since Fran liked my food so much.

I'll make you lunch since we're going out today.

"Can't wait. Let's go."

Let's go take on some quests then.

"Sure."

And so, we went to the Adventurer's Guild.

"Hi."

"Hello, looking to take on some quests?"

"Yeah."

"You'll find the quest board over there. G-Rank adventurers can only take on F-and G-Rank quests. They're the leftmost part of the board."

We began by browsing through the G-Rank quests.

No one was standing in front of the G-Rank quest board. Maybe we were too early, or maybe it was because there weren't enough G-Rank adventurers to begin with.

Medicinal Herb Gathering; Boar Hunting; Mansion Lawn Mowing… Clean the Garbage Off the Streets?

"Lame."

You're right. And the pay's cheap too.

What about the F-Rank quests?

They're slightly better…

Kill five goblins; Fanged Rat Extermination; Mushroom Collecting in the Forest.

But they were all dull too. We couldn't take on any other quests, so there was nothing we could do. Fran was still at a low level, so she would have to train

with the weak monsters to level up.

“I’ll take this one.”

Medicinal Herb Gathering? Doesn’t sound too bad for your first job.

The herbs were used to make Tier 5 potions and other such products. They mostly grew in the forest.

“Here.”

“All right. Are you sure you want to accept this quest?”

“Yes.”

“Do you know what a medicinal herb looks like? We have some samples if you want to take a look.”

“I’ll be fine.”

“Affirmative. Once you clear five quests, you can take on a Rank Up Quest to promote you to F-Rank.”

“Yeah. Thanks.”

“Don’t mention it.”

Nell the receptionist seemed to like us despite our making a huge scene the other day. This was good news.

All right, let’s go!

“Yeah.”

We showed our Guild Card at the gates and the gatekeeper let us pass through. He seemed to remember who Fran was though, and was thoroughly surprised when he saw she was an adventurer.

Where to?

“Hm… That way.”

Why?

“Just a feeling.”

Good answer. The quest didn’t have a due date, so we could take our time.

Let's pick up the ones that aren't healing herbs too. We'll be able to turn those quests in as well once we get back.

"You're so smart, Teacher."

Hahaha, thanks. Keep going.

"You're a genius."

We strolled through the forest in a relaxed mood. We'd already gathered up the healing herbs we needed for the quest, and we had collected other herbs, mushrooms, and berries along the way too. We were able to tell which of the plants had any use thanks to the Harvesting, Herbology, and Cooking skills; even Danger Sense had an effect when we got close to poisonous plants. As a result, we knew how to use each plant even if it happened to be poisonous. The Pocket Dimension allowed us to bring whatever we wanted with us, so anything that caught our fancy went right in.

"Teacher."

Yeah?

Suddenly, Fran stopped in her tracks. I wasn't surprised, because I could feel what she was feeling.

Goblins? And there're more than ten of them.

"Yeah."

That's a lot of goblins…

Fran had already gripped my handle and went into full alert. I didn't stop her—going up against a pack of goblins would make for perfect EXP. Not that I could recommend it to a normal beginner.

Are they ganging up on adventurers?

"Over there."

Three adventurers against…

"…thirteen goblins."

Even high-rank goblins are mixed in there.

There was a goblin soldier, thief, and archer among the goblin pack.

On the flip side, the adventurers were just starting out. Anyone could tell going by their cheap armor and weaponry, even their pale faces, as the goblins closed in on them.

A fighter, an archer, and a mage. That's good team composition, but it won't do them much good with this many enemies surrounding them.

They'd all taken damage already too. The mage in particular was in a critical state.

"I'm helping them."

All right.

"We'll break them up with magic and move in."

We both began casting our spells. I cast Stone Bullet, which shot out little pebbles that didn't usually do too much damage. But, if I charged it, each individual pebble could be made five times stronger. It didn't take much for the damage to add up, and against a stationary target it was enough to punch holes through them. I could only do this because I had the Mage skill. It didn't transfer over to Fran, so she had to make do with the normal version of the spell.

We could've razed all of them with a single fire spell, but I was worried about the possibility of a forest fire and decided against it.

"Stone Arrow."

Stone Bullet!

We targeted the Goblin Thief together. Fran's single projectile along with my five made for six consecutive shots into his body.

Fran is now Level 4.

That was enough to level her up. As weak as the goblin was, it was still a high-rank one.

Our ambush confused both parties and they all looked around to see what was going on. Fran used this opening to move in on the goblins.

Seven left.

“Huff.”

She cut two of them down as she passed by and slid through the adventurers and the goblin pack. I was on duty too. I had taken care of the ranged annoyance that was the Goblin Archer with a well-aimed Stone Arrow.

“What’s a little girl doing here?”

“She’s strong!”

The adventurers were astonished.

Some of the goblins had regained their footing and charged ahead, following the Goblin Soldier’s lead.

“Gya gyaooo!”

I see. They were smart enough to identify the most dangerous threat to them and decided to take her down first. Good thinking, for a bunch of goblins.

Too bad it’s not gonna work! Stone Bullet!

I was casting my spells throughout the battle. It was easy since I didn’t need to catch my breath for incantations. Stone Bullet shot out in a near instant with the two goblins on the right taking the hail head-on. They coughed up blood and soon died. Meanwhile, the two on the left were no match for Fran.

“Too slow.”

She used Double Slash to take down the last two in a flash. The adventurers just stood there, dumbstruck. The tide of battle had turned in their favor in under twenty seconds. I was sympathetic to their awe, but we might lose the injured mage if we didn’t do anything to help him.

Let’s put those healing spells to good use.

His health was terribly low when I looked at his stats. Fortunately, it didn’t look like he had any missing limbs or negative status effects.

Just use a normal Heal on him.

“Healing Light, Circle Heal.”

Circle Heal was a Level 7, area-of-effect healing spell. The other two adventurers were hurt too, so Fran must’ve wanted to heal their wounds while

she was at it. What a nice girl she was!

“This little girl can use Circle Heal?”

“Wha… But that’s an intermediate spell!”

The eyes of the fighter and archer bulged in surprise.

“And is that an enchanted sword?”

Oh, they noticed me. Well, I did look more elegant than your run of the mill factory sword, so it was hard not to be noticed, really. What’s a talking sword to do?

“N-never mind that. Eustace! Are you okay?”

“Are you still with us?”

“Huh? I’m…fully healed?”

The injured mage seemed fine now too.

If you ask Fran any weird questions or try to use her, I thought to myself, *I’m going to be very upset, understand?*

“You okay?”

“Y-yeah. You saved us.”

“Thank you. Come on, you too!”

“Huh? Uh, thanks?”

They weren’t like the idiots we had run into the other day.

“Are you…an adventurer?”

“Yeah.”

“Um, can I get your name?”

“Fran.”

The adventurers traded meaningful glances with each other.

“Ring any bells?”

“No. If I knew someone as strong as her, I’d remember.”

“Right?”

“Don’t look at me.”

That was probably the gist of their silent conversation.

“My name’s Crull. This is Lily, and that’s Eustace.”

The fighter introduced his crew politely, but Fran had already lost interest in them.

“Hi. Bye.”

She wanted to get the pleasantries over with so she could check her stats.

Are you sure? We could get a reward for saving them.

“Poor things.”

I suppose. These guys were just starting out too. We couldn’t expect much even if we asked them for money. We might as well be robbing them if we forced them.

But Crull, their leader, stopped Fran from disappearing into the woods.

“W-wait.”

“Huh?”

“You’re the one who killed these goblins.”

“What? This little girl? You’re talking crazy.”

“Will you just shut up!”

“You already saved our lives. We can’t accept any more charity than that.”

He had a good heart, this one. It’d be bad manners on our part to turn him down.

We’ll just take the materials of the high-rank ones.

“Okay. I’ll take the high-rank materials.”

“Huh? There were some high-rank goblins in there?!”

Come on, you couldn’t tell? I mean, sure, they all looked the same, but these ones had bigger bodies and horns, you know.

“Hm.”

Fran left the three to their stunned silence and calmly carved up her prize. The adventurers looked shocked upon confirming the existence of the soldier, thief, and archer.

Fran took their horns and proceeded to put them in her item bag. It was a front, of course—she was actually putting them in her Pocket Dimension.

“Three high ranks?”

“Wait, isn’t that supposed to be bad? We have to tell the guild…”

“Okay, let’s calm down. Are we sure they’re high ranks?”

“Pretty sure. Look at the size of those three.”

Something was amiss here.

“What is it?”

“Well, if there really are three high-rank goblins, then we have to inform the Adventurer’s Guild!”

“Why?”

“You mean you don’t know?”

“What?”

“If there are high-rank goblins here, that means a King’s not far behind.”

The adventurers proceeded to explain the situation.

The presence of a Goblin King increased the goblins’ fighting prowess by way of his majesty’s leadership. I was already aware of this fact.

The more this united front hunted together, the more likely they were to take down stronger monsters with fewer casualties on their side. This vicious cycle allowed them to multiply at a rapid rate. When the crew got big enough, it would produce a Queen, something the goblin crew in the grasslands lacked, likely due to the fact that they were surrounded by immensely strong monsters.

The crucial part of all this was that a Goblin King and Queen produced hobgoblins as offspring. Worse, a hobgoblin mating with a regular goblin would

produce nothing but hobgoblins.

Hobgoblins were F-Rank monsters, one rank higher than the goblins. A crew of goblins with a Goblin King would be at D-Rank. It didn't take an astounding leap of logic to deduce that a Goblin King leading a pack of hobgoblins would be a C-Rank threat.

"We wouldn't be able to manage them at that point. It'd be a monstrous disaster."

"I don't even want to think about how many villages would get wiped out."

I see. It was a matter of life and death to the local adventurers. We should take care of them as soon as we could.

"We'll go to the Adventurer's Guild to inform them of this matter."

They picked up the corpses of the high-rank goblins as they left. Even if they didn't have the parts we'd carved off, their carcasses should make for more than enough proof.

"Okay."

"If you'll excuse us."

"Thank you so much."

"It looks like you saved my life. Thanks!"

We got some goblin materials and helped some promising youngsters in the process. I'd call that a good day.

Let's absorb those crystals.

I began absorbing crystals once I was far enough from the newbie adventurers. I already had all the skills the goblins had to offer, but every crystal counted toward my evolution. Plus, they were really tasty.

"Could you show me my stats?"

All right, all right. I'm throwing it up now.

"'Kay."

Name: Fran Age: 12

Race: Beastman; Black Cat Tribe Class: Spellsword LV: 4

HP: 31; Magic: 29; Strength: 28; Agility: 49

Her stats had gone up quite a bit. Her Strength and Agility especially, which went up by four points per level up, thanks to her being a Spellsword. I relayed the information to Fran.

"Good."

Yeah. Let's keep at it and level up more.

"Yeah." Fran was so cute when she pumped her fists in the air with a blank expression on her face.

All right, time to go hunting!

It had been an hour since we parted ways with the newbie group.

We were now neck-deep in goblins.

"Double Slash!"

"Gyaah!"

"Gyoo!"

The skill produced quick diagonal slashes which cut through two goblins.

Fran is now Level 5.

"I leveled up again."

I know. We can check your stats later.

I kept blasting the goblins away with magic while Fran's Sword Arts cut them in two.

There was no end to the horde. I initially thought we would snuff out the goblins for some easy EXP, but they kept coming in one after another. There must've been more than a hundred of them. We never thought we'd be going up against this many goblins in one day. I might have underestimated the goblin horde through my greed for EXP.

Their cave must've been nearby. No matter how fast we cut them down they kept on getting reinforcements. There were even some high-rank goblins mixed

in.

Incoming!

“Got it!”

The goblins had taken position in the forest and unleashed a hail of rocks and splinters at Fran. They had us completely surrounded. We couldn’t possibly dodge all the projectiles.

“Teacher!”

I got it. Fire Wall!

A dome of fire covered Fran, protecting her from the rocks and splinters. But the goblins weren’t finished with their assault.

They’re coming!

“Right!”

Fran braced with me in hand, waiting for the flame barrier to dissipate.

“Graargh!”

“Gyogyoga!”

“Gyaroo!”

Ten goblins mobbed Fran all at the same time. Two of them jumped the gun, still on fire from charging through the Fire Wall.

“Heavy Slash!”

She dodged their attacks and swung me in a huge arc to cut through five goblins at once.

“Gyaha!”

“Guh…”

“Raargh!”

“Ow!”

She couldn’t keep dodging the goblins, however, and blood had begun seeping through her armor. A sword cut the tip of her shoulder and a spear had

pierced her back. Fran withstood the sharp pain and kept swinging her sword without missing a beat. I wanted to equip Painkiller, but it had the side-effect of dulling her sense of touch; she could end up being less nimble because of it.

"Hyaaaaaa!" Fran screamed as she killed her tenth goblin, a sound I didn't hear too often considering her quiet disposition. It joined the mound of forty-odd goblins that she'd slaughtered throughout this battle. Yet it didn't look like the number of the goblins surrounding Fran was decreasing.

Great Heal!

Fran panted heavily.

Fran! Talk to me!

"I'm fine," she huffed.

Let's get out of here. There're easier ways to farm for EXP.

We'd underestimated the fight with the goblins. I was all right since I couldn't feel pain. Even if something chipped my blade, a few moments of Self-Repair would put me back to normal. I could go up against anything except the strongest of monsters. But it also meant I had no real sense of danger, for better or worse. As much as I wanted to tell Fran something was too dangerous for her, I'd believed deep down that she'd be fine so long as she had me around.

Which is why we got into this mess with mere goblins. But it was too late for second thoughts. We had healing spells and self-regeneration skills at our disposal. We even had a skill that would prevent us from dying from a would-be fatal attack. We would win this fight if we kept going, but I didn't know how much pain Fran could put up with. She couldn't have been ready for such a difficult battle right out the gate. The last thing I wanted was for this fight to traumatize her.

They're coming in hot! There's still time to get out of here!

We could maneuver through the air using a combination of Float and Air Hop. Breaking through the goblin ranks should be easy.

"I'm not going anywhere."

Fran, you don't have to be a hero! We can go hunt some bigger monsters for better EXP! This fight is a lost cause!

Was she getting stubborn?

"It's not a lost cause," Fran muttered, bracing herself against me. She had a look of determination on her face.

"I won't die if you're with me, Teacher. I'll take on this pain. That's the only way I can get used to fighting. That's the only way I can get stronger."

Fran…

"The only way to get stronger is to fight to within an inch of my life. This battle is perfect that way."

Her lips curled in a savage smile. I had underestimated her. She'd been ready a long time ago; I was the one who wasn't ready. I didn't want to see her hurt.

Sure, I could make her stronger. All she had to do was wield me to gain a few levels. But could you call that real strength?

No, real strength was a matter of experience and mental fortitude. All the levels in the world were worthless if you'd never actually been in a real fight.

Fran understood that.

"Teacher, you're on support."

Her resolve was nothing like mine; I was the one who was raised in air-conditioned Japan.

But, all right. *I've got your back, Fran!* And I wouldn't romanticize this whole adventuring business anymore.

My User wasn't a weak kitten who needed taking care of. She was a savage cub whose fangs needed teething.

Leave the healing to me!

"Okay! Here I go!"

Fran charged right into the heart of the goblin horde.



“Haaa!”

“Gyogyaa!”

She immediately began swinging her sword. The force of her swing was so great that it split the goblins’ helmets along with their heads. The goblins didn’t expect such ferocity and speed, and she stabbed them in the hearts before they could react.

She was experimenting with her swordsmanship, the surrounding goblins her test subjects. She wanted to know her limits through this fight. It was more about the experience she gained than the number of goblins she killed.

She wanted to be stronger, faster, better.

Fran cut through every goblin, a picture of her ideal self in the back of her mind. Each kill was a step she took toward evolution.

The goblins got a few hits in on her at times, however. The pain slowed her down which created an opening for a goblin to stab her left arm with a spear. A short sword had also cut through her leg.

The goblins were just as prepared to die as she was. They bit her, and some even threw the innards of their fallen comrades at her as gruesome clubs.

But Fran stood her ground.

The goblins’ attacks became second nature to her. She’d figured out the methods of the goblin horde’s assault. She did her best not to be bested by the same tricks twice. No matter how many cuts or bruises they inflicted on her, she wouldn’t stop moving. Most importantly, she didn’t take her attention away from the horde for a second.

I could see the resolve in Fran’s eyes as I fought with her. I was going to play support until Fran had enough on-ground experience. I would help with her slashes until she adjusted to my weight.

But then I noticed something during the fight—

“Ha! Raah!”

Her movements were becoming quicker. She hadn’t used Triple Thrust, but

the speed was roughly equivalent.

Again, she launched an attack which was as fast as Double Slash—no, those slashes were even faster than Double Slash.

I thought she was getting used to using her Sword Arts, but it looked like she wasn't using them at all.

Was that even possible?

Her mind and body couldn't have adjusted to a high-level Sword Mastery in such a short period of time. She had only been fighting weak monsters, and most of the fights were over before they even started so the problem never actually came up.

In an all-out fight to the death, Skill and body became as one.

Up till now, her sword arm benefited from her instincts and speed. The enemies she faced before this had broadcast their attacks, which made them trivial to dodge.

But it was different now.

Every time she dodged a goblin's attack, the more precise her own attacks became. She was getting rid of the inefficiencies in her movements. Sword and body were now one. The battle showed me how much Fran had grown in both body and spirit in such a short time.

Two hours later…

"Huff… Huff…"

You did it, Fran!

"Yeah…"

Goblin corpses littered the ground. Blood and entrails soaked the earth. It looked like a scene straight from hell. Fran stood in the middle of it all, struggling to stay upright.

There wasn't a scratch on her, thanks to Healing Magic. Her exhaustion was so great that she heaved a heavy sigh. Her entire body was covered in blood and dirt; there wasn't a clean spot on her. Her newly-bought armor was now

tinted a reddish brown. Her dress armor was so beat up that we were going to need to fix it right after this.

I could've made the fight easier if I had gone on the offensive, but Fran needed this fight. She was only at Level 8 now, but the battlefield experience was invaluable. She had learned to target the goblins' weak points—their crystals—in the middle of the frenzied fight.

Stamina Heal.

I healed her stamina along with her physical wounds, though the spell didn't help much with her mental exhaustion.

Get some rest. I'll stay on lookout.

I needed to gather up materials and absorb those crystals anyway.

"I'll help."

Whoa, hey. Are you sure?

"The sooner we get out of here the better."

I guess you're right… We haven't run into the King yet. We should leave before reinforcements arrive.

"Yeah."

I'll leave the carving and looting to you. I'll take the crystals.

"Got it."

Thirty minutes later…

I think that's all of it.

"Big haul."

You can say that again. We got close to 200 crystals from that.

The high-rank goblins notwithstanding, we took down more than a hundred normal goblins.

Good thing the other monsters aren't getting in the way.

"Easy pickings."

Wild monsters should've been swarming the place with how much blood there was. They got close but turned tail when they saw the gory battlefield. They may have lacked intelligence, but they knew to steer clear of anything that could kill a goblin horde. It was nice to see Fran excited over our loot though.

We got some new skills too. They look interesting.

Fran was the big winner of this fight, no doubt about it. She had gained so many levels and got a ton of actual battle experience. But we got a huge amount of loot on the side too. There were about fifty cracked pieces of weapons made of either steel or bronze. We also got some armor pieces, but most of them stank to high heaven so we had to leave them behind. We got a bunch of magical items though. I'd have to research them later.

As for the new skills we got: Speedcasting; Acrobatics; Kick Arts; Necromancy; Absorb Poison; Poison Magic; Axe Mastery; Steadfast. The ones we got off of the four hobgoblins that led the pack: Hobgoblin Dark Mage; Hobgoblin Necromancer; Hobgoblin Grappler; Hobgoblin Gladiator…which posed a difficult problem.

There were hobgoblins in there.

"Yeah."

The four hobgoblins we had taken the skills from were about as strong as the Goblin King I killed once upon a time. So then, did they already have a Queen then? Had she already begun breeding?

How fast do goblins grow?

"They take about ten days to mature."

My God, they're like bugs. This may be bad.

There was a high likelihood the hobgoblins had begun breeding.

We should head back to the guild to report this. We can't hunt them all by ourselves, and this might become a terrible disaster if left unchecked.

"Okay."

Let's just collect all the hobgoblin corpses for now—

That’s when I felt the presence of an outsider in the vicinity.

Fran!

“Got it.”

A floating sword would raise some eyebrows, so I wasted no time in floating back into Fran’s hands. She calmly gripped my handle.

Soon, we saw a group of adventurers come out of the forest; a dwarf was leading them. He was unimaginably fast given his short limbs. The team of newbie adventurers followed behind him.

“There!”

“Are these all goblins?”

“What the hell happened…?”

Cavalry’s here.

Crull and his crew had come with backup after letting the guild know about the goblin outbreak.

“Little lady, are you okay?!”

“Are you hurt?”

“I’m fine.”

“You… You killed all of them?”

“Yeah.” Fran nodded, shocking the ten adventurers who were present.

“You took down this many…alone? Really?”

“You must be an E-Rank… No, a D-Rank then. This wasn’t a small nest you took out—this was an entire army.”

“What?! D-Rank?!”

“Seriously?”

It looked like Fran was creating a stir among them. If I remembered correctly, an adventurer’s rank was determined by the threat level of the monsters they could handle on their own. Specifically, an adventurer would be able to solo monsters whose threat level were one lower than their current rank.

So, E-Rank adventurers banded together to take on E-Rank monsters. The same E-Rank adventurer could take on an F-Rank monster by himself.

Let's see… One goblin is G-Rank, 10 goblins is F-Rank, 100 goblins is E-Rank. I think…

Which meant Fran was a D-Rank adventurer at the very least. But her rank estimate was increased since there were some high-rank variations thrown into the mix.

At least that's what I could make out from the dwarf's explanation. It felt nice that they were complimenting Fran. *Feel free to lay it on thick,* I thought to myself.

Fran herself was less interested in how people thought of her. She ignored the dwarf's words and plopped the hobgoblin corpse in front of him.

"Here."

"Is this a hobgoblin?"

"There's some over there too."

"Four of them in all?"

"The hobgoblins are already leaving their nest!"

It was too little too late for preventative measures. A Goblin Stampede was upon us in ten days.

"Sorry, I forgot to introduce myself. The name's Elevent. I'm a D-Rank adventurer from Alessa. What's your name?"

"Fran."

"You a drifter? Thanks for taking care of the goblins for us."

"No? I'm an adventurer from Alessa too."

"What? I don't remember ever seeing you in all my ten years of adventuring in Alessa…"

He didn't think it was possible for a small, cute girl like Fran to be such a powerhouse. The three men in Elevent's group nodded in agreement. The other beastman seemed to feel the same way.

“I just signed up yesterday.”

“What?”

“No way! What’s your rank?”

“G.”

“G-Rank? Impossible!”

“Rank and actual strength have poor correlation with each other. You remember the elf who signed up to our guild? He’d been living off the forest a long time before he came to a human settlement. The guy was a G-Rank, but he was just as strong as a D-Rank.”

“I-I see.”

“I knew it.”

“Oh, you’re such a kidder, Fran.”

They had reached the conclusion that Fran belonged to a race with a long lifespan. It made more sense to believe that she was older, and therefore stronger, than her childish looks suggested.

They look satisfied with their explanation, but are you okay with this, Fran? They probably think you’re older than you look.

“I don’t mind.”

She didn’t seem to care what the others thought of her. It was too bad; I wanted to see the looks on their faces when she told them the truth.

Explaining ourselves would take up more time anyway.

“A-anyway, we won’t be able to raid the Queen’s cave on our own. Back to the guild!”

“He’s right. We’ll need you to come with us too, Fran.”

“All right.”

“Thanks. Let’s go, boys and girls. We don’t have a moment to lose!”

“Yeah!”

Name: Fran

Age: 12

Race: Beastman; Black Cat Tribe

Class: Spellsword

LV: 12

HP: 113; Magic: 66; Strength: 89; Agility: 91

Titles: Disassembly Expert; Healing Mage; Skill Collector; Fire Mage; Master Chef

[NEW] Veteran; Goblin Killer; Butcher

Fran had received so many extra points into her stats from all those level ups. She even got three extra titles!

Veteran: Defeat more than 100 enemies in a single battle. Effects: Life +40; Strength +20; unlocks the Determination skill.

Goblin Killer: Kill more than 100 goblins in a single battle. Effects: Unlocks the Goblin Killer skill.

Butcher: Kill more than 100 enemies in a single battle. Effects: Agility +10; unlocks the Calm Mind skill.

Skills

Determination: Grants immunity to Fear; greatly increases Recovery Rate.

Goblin Killer: Increases damage dealt toward goblins.

Calm Mind: Grants a calm mind by lowering psychological inhibitions to killing.

I wished I could get titles. They looked so cool. I guessed swords couldn't get titles for themselves.

The Veteran title was particularly great. It was difficult to unlock, so it gave appropriately strong buffs. So strong that I thought it'd make the rest of our travels a cakewalk.

And there was something else I noticed…

The skills Fran had gained for herself weren't counted toward my equipped skills. This meant she didn't have to equip the skills I already had, allowing us to mix and match easier.

"Veteran? That's super rare!"

Yeah?

"Only war heroes get that!"

It was nice seeing Fran get excited for her new titles.

"So, where's the rest of your party?"

"I don't have one."

"You don't? In that case, do you wanna team up with me?" Elevent extended his invitation. He sounded serious about it too.

"Hold on a minute, *we* were going to ask her to join *our* party."

"Of course you were. Everyone wants a skilled adventurer on their team. But you're much too inexperienced for her. She'll throw off your team balance."

The other parties began offering their invitations. They were finally taking Fran seriously now.

What do you think?

“You’re the only one I need on my team, Teacher.”

You could still join another party. Just don’t tell them about me.

“No thanks. You’re enough.”

All right then.

Working with a party would be difficult, since she wouldn’t be able to use me to my fullest extent. We’d give up on joining one, at least for now.

We hurried back to Alessa after the goblin skirmish.

We had wanted to go to the blacksmith to get Fran’s armor repaired, but we had to report to the guild first. I cast Cleansing Magic on her as a matter of etiquette, but it didn’t quite help with the bloodstains and battered armor. Fortunately, the other adventurers didn’t seem to mind.

“How can I help you, Elevent?”

“I’d like to make a report to the GM.”

“Of course.”

Nell hurried to the back of the room. She understood how grave the situation was by the look on Elevent’s face. She came back a few minutes later to call us in.

“The Guildmaster will see you now. Right this way.”

We entered the Guildmaster’s office to find the GM and Donadrond waiting for us.

“Report.”

“Sir. We went to the site of the goblin sightings with Crull’s party. Fran was already on location when we got there.”

“And the battle was already over.”

“I see… Fran, I would like to ask for further details but…” The GM sighed. He knew how quiet Fran tended to be. He scrunched his face, trying to figure out a way to make her talk. I should throw him a bone here; the situation was looking

dire. “Is there anything you’d like to share with us?”

Fran, show him the horns.

“Yeah. Here.”

Fran took the hobgoblin horns out of the Pocket Dimension.

“Are these…hobgoblin horns?”

The GM picked up the horns and cast Identify on them. A grim look of realization dawned on his face when he affirmed their authenticity.

“You mean you fought goblins *and* hobgoblins?! How many of them were there?” Donadrond shouted after looking at the horns.

“Lots.”

“Could you be more specific?”

About a hundred and thirty.

“About a hundred and thirty.”

Four hobgoblins. About twenty high-rank goblins.

“Four hobgoblins. About twenty high-rank goblins.”

“What?!” Donadrond sat up. “We’ve got the beginnings of a Goblin Stampede on our hands!”

“Calm down, Donadrond.”

“E-excuse me, sir…”

“Another question then, Fran. What happened to the goblins? Did they retreat?”

“I killed them all.”

“I see. So you killed them as they came.”

“Every last one.”

“That’s no good.”

How was that bad?

The GM proceeded to explain that the goblins Fran had fought were sent out

of the goblin cave due to overpopulation. The goblins were breeding swimmingly, and the low-rank goblins were simply pushed out of house and home because of it. It accounted for their desperate ferocity in facing Fran. The fact that hobgoblins and high-ranks were mixed in their exiled horde meant the cave was already brimming with hobgoblins.

“Looks like we’re in for one hell of a Goblin Stampede this year.”

“Put out an emergency call to all our adventurers.”

“We’ll make preparations today and tomorrow. We’ll attempt to destroy the cave the day after that. Sound good?”

“Yes. We’ll get the Thief Class adventurers to scout ahead to locate the cave. We’ll put it up in the Special Requests board.”

“All right, I’ll get to rationing potions.”

It got busy all of a sudden. Even Nell called out to the other receptionists and began giving them orders.

“Elevent, we have another favor to ask of you, if you don’t mind.”

“You want me to take you to the location of the sighting?”

“Yes, and take some Thieves with you.”

“Got it. The very fate of Alessa hangs in the balance. I’ll pitch in what I can.”

The other adventurers nodded in agreement.

Fran looked like she wanted to go too, but I wasn’t going to allow it. We were going to get her armor fixed, and then, to bed. And that was that.

“Fran…please take the rest of the day off. I doubt that armor of yours could take any more punishment.”

“…’Kay.” Fran gave a disappointed nod. Thanks, GM!

They sorted out all the loose ends with Elevent’s team before they headed out.

“See you, I guess.”

“Oh, hold on. Please go to reception before you leave. You are now eligible

for a promotion to F-Rank."

"But I haven't cleared five quests yet."

"It's silly to think an adventurer who could take on an entire army of goblins would still be in G-Rank. Also, G-Ranks won't be able to participate in the Goblin Stampede raid. It's much more convenient for us if we just give you a promotion."

"Heh, yeah, we'll need all the able-bodied adventurers we can get."

"It's an emergency request after all. We don't know how many adventurers can join us. The more people who can contribute to our firepower the better."

"We'll put up the raid request tomorrow. Make sure to sign up for it."

"I will."

"Thank you."

"Bye."

We stopped by reception to get our Rank Up, per the GM's instructions. The process was simple, and it only took a few minutes to complete. By the time we were done, Fran had an "F" on her Guild Card.

"It went up!" Fran exclaimed. She didn't care what others thought of her, but was very particular about her own level and rank. It was a convenient way to measure her strength.

Okay. Now that that's settled, let's get your armor fixed. Do we have enough money for repairs?

"We'll sell our weapons."

Can we sell them to the guild?

The answer to that question was "no." The guild only bought materials and produce from adventurers.

I guess we'll take them to Garrus. What a blacksmith of Garrus's caliber would do with such shoddy weapons, I had no idea.

Wait a second… We have another merchant friend we can go to!

“Who?”

Come on, I know he didn’t make much of an impression, but you remember Randell, right?

“Oh.”

I felt bad for Randell that Fran had almost forgotten about him, but I was guilty of the same thing.

He said his shop was along the west avenue.

“On it.”

I was worried how we were going to find his shop in the big city of Alessa, but we got there after a bit of searching. Randell’s store was near the entrance of the street, and he stood outside.

“Why hello, Fran! Fancy meeting you here. Decided to drop in?”

“Yeah. There’s some stuff I wanna sell.”

“Wonderful! Come in, please.” Randell opened the door to let us in.

The place is more of a mess than I expected. Goods were scattered about the cramped interior. There was an entire assortment of goods from honey and antidotes, to necessities and weapons.

“What a mess.”

Come on, I was trying to be nice!

Randell smiled wryly. “Haha. We get that a lot. I try to display whatever merchandise people might want to buy.”

Fair enough, but wasn’t there too much variety in the catalog? I wasn’t one to complain, but it’d be difficult for a guy off the streets to take an interest in most of these items.

“Buy these off me.”

“Why, you have an item bag now!”

“Kinda.”

With every item she pulled out of her bag, Randell became more and more

nervous.

“That’s…a lot of stuff you have there.”

“There’s more.”

“What? Okay, hold on. Could you put those on the floor?”

“Okay.”

“That is a fine item bag you have there. I didn’t think it could fit so many items. Mine’s on the smaller side, so I’m quite jealous.” Randell talked to us while examining each and every weapon with a keen eye. It was the mark of a true merchant.

“Hmm, these aren’t in very good condition…”

“I got them off goblins.”

“Aah, that explains it. Some of these are made of steel, so it’s not as bad as it could be… How does 13,000G sound?”

“Well?”

That’s about 200G per weapon… I think it’s pretty good considering how beat up the weapons are.

“Okay, deal.”

“Right this way.”

“Hm.”

We stowed all the money away in the Pocket Dimension. Withdrawing items was a cinch, making it the ideal wallet.

“Pleasure doing business with you. Thank you, and come again!”

I was sure we’d be visiting Randell soon enough. He had many interesting items on display; we’d certainly buy something from him next time.

Now that we had our money, we were off to Garrus’s.

We hurried to the marketplace where his shop was located.

“There’re a lot of merchants around.”

The bustling bazaar was filled with merchants, many of them with sour looks on their faces. I wondered if they had ever lodged complaints against the old blacksmith.

We entered his shop through the back door.

Hello.

“Aah, you two! What’s up? Your scabbard’s not done yet, if that’s what you’re here for.”

“That’s not why we’re here.”

We want you to fix her armor…

Garrus turned around, got one look at Fran and boomed, “WHAT HAPPENED?! It’s only been a day! What have you been up to?!”

“We fought some goblins.”

“Goblins?”

A goblin horde, to be precise. There were at least a hundred of them.

“Hobgoblins too.”

“What?! That’s terrible news! We’re about to have a Goblin Stampede on our hands!”

The Adventurer’s Guild has been informed.

“That’s good. Still, I’m impressed you made it out in one piece.”

“It’s all thanks to Teacher.”

“Teacher?”

That’s my name.

It occurred to me that I had never introduced myself to him. I had a bad feeling at the pit of my hilt.

“What kinda stupid na—”

It’s the best name ever, isn’t it?! Fran thought it up herself! Very fitting. You think so too, right, Garrus?

Work with me, old man!

“Y-yeah… I-It’s a fine name! It really is…something else…”

I know! It’s the best!

“A mighty name for a mighty sword! Yes indeed!”

Phew. That was close. Garrus got the point after my metaphorical wink and was now singing praises of my name, awkward as it was.

“A-anyway. You wanted your armor fixed?”

Yeah! Can you do it? We need it by the day after tomorrow for the goblin raid.

“No problem. Repairs take no time at all.”

“How much?”

Fran hadn’t noticed the slight to her naming sensibilities. Good.

“Let’s see… 10,000G.”

That’s pretty cheap.

“It’s the cost of a mana sphere.”

Mana sphere?

“Unlike crystals, mana spheres are a type of ore you can mine from the earth. They can store magical energy and are used as catalysts in rituals and the like.”

Never heard of ’em.

“To fix your armor, I’ll need a mana sphere as a catalyst for my Repair skill.”

So, you’re fixing it with magic?

“Yep. You wanna watch?”

If you’ll have us, sure.

We went with Garrus to see him work his reparation magic.

He placed the damaged armor on his workbench, which had a magic circle drawn on it. Then he took a yellow mana sphere from one of his stands. The rest of the procedure was no different from a spell with a long incantation.

“Repair!”

The magic circle glowed as if responding to Garrus's booming voice. The light enveloped Fran's armor, taking away the nicks and grime that had accrued from today's battle. When the light settled, it was as good as new.

"Wow."

Wow indeed. It looks just as good as the day we got it.

"I'll stop you there and remind you that the spell's not perfect. The more often you fix a piece of equipment, the more difficult it gets to restore it to its original splendor. A small mana sphere was enough to do the job today, but you'll need a bigger one if it gets beat up again. It's gonna cost you about 30,000G too."

It might be cheaper if we got a new set of armor at that point. We would have to consult him when the time came.

"Thanks."

"Don't mention it. Can't have you go up against hobgoblins in broken armor!"

"Leave them to me."

We'll kill the King and Queen while we're at it!

"Yeah. They're ours."

"Hahaha. Knock 'em dead!"

Night had fallen on the day we fought the goblin horde.

I was at the inn.

The moons are so pretty here…

The night sky was graced by a great silver half-moon. Two smaller moons appeared to be following alongside it. There were six smaller moons orbiting the great lunar orb, and while they didn't appear to have moon phases, their number would change according to the day. Tomorrow night there would be three little moons surrounding the great one, then four, then five, then six. After that it would go back to zero. This was how you accounted for an entire week in this world. It was such a fantastical sight that I never got tired of it.

I could spend the entire night just looking at them. I should stop and look at

the new skills we just got.

Fran was in the bath. Seeing that I was bored out of my blade, I could think of no better use of my time than examining my newly-acquired skills.

Speaking of baths, I'd been quite surprised to hear that Fran liked them. I mean, she was supposed to be a cat. I couldn't help blurting out, "But you're a cat," when she told me, but it seemed not liking baths was a quality unique to cats of my Earth.

Fran had never even seen a "cat" despite being a black cat herself. She told me only nobles owned such strange creatures. Those cats may be living better lives than the people of the Black Cat tribe who were sold into slavery.

We moved out of the inn we'd stayed in yesterday and were now staying at a slightly better one at the Guild's recommendation. It was more expensive at 600G a night, but it came with a great bathhouse and copious portions of food.

I began examining the skills I got from the goblin fight: Speedcasting; Acrobatics; Kick Arts; Kick Mastery; Necromancy; Absorb Poison; Poison Magic; Axe Mastery; and Indomitable.

I was unable to use Kick Arts, Kick Mastery, and Axe Mastery, so they would have to wait until Fran came back. Indomitable seemed to give you a cool mind during battle, so I couldn't test it here either.

Let's see… I guess I could start with Acrobatics. It said it added bonuses to my balance and jumping ability. I flew about the room to experiment but found no substantial difference. Unfortunate. Still, I was sure Fran would be able to put it to good use.

Next came Poison Magic. Poison Arrow and Create Poison were its Level 1 spells. The poison effects were still quite weak, and a strong enemy would be able to brush it off. Casting it on a civilian would probably give them little more than a stomachache.

I absorbed the toxins I had created with Create Poison using Absorb Poison but didn't feel anything. It was supposed to restore its user's Health and was of no use to me, seeing as I had nothing resembling Health. I conjectured that we'd really be able to use Absorb Poison to traverse areas with toxic gas.

Speedcasting was next. The one-second reduction in casting time didn't seem substantial, but a second could mean the difference between life and death in a battle. A few extra levels and it might prove useful.

And so we came to the last skill: Necromancy.

Let's see what we can do with this.

It had two spells at Level 1: Raise Zombie and Search Undead. I pulled a goblin corpse out of the Pocket Dimension to experiment, making sure to cast a barrier of cleansing magic around it so as not to dirty the floor. I didn't want to trouble the inn staff with cleaning up after a goblin corpse.

Raise Zombie!

The goblin corpse groaned to life.

Whoa…

The affront to God looked disgusting. It somehow looked more grotesque than when it was just an ordinary corpse. Good thing I didn't have a nose, or I'd be throwing up by now.

Stay.

"Wurgghh."

Looks like it can take orders.

The zombie stood and swayed in place.

I used Search Undead next. It was similar to all the other Sense skills and registered the zombie that was in front of me.

Now that I'd used both skills…

What was I going to do with this guy? Oh God, I had Goblin Zombie in my list of minions now. Couldn't I unsummon him somehow?

I'm so sorry.

"Hurgh?"

I uttered an apology before cutting the zombie down. It didn't produce a crystal, though I didn't know if dungeon zombies shared this trait. I got rid of

the zombie's remains with the Cleansing Magic spell called Undead Return. Appropriately, the zombie was also removed from my minion list.

Rest in peace, buddy.

Practice responsible necromancy. Cease the desecration of goblin corpses! Not that I thought they'd mind, since they were already dead.

Moving on…

I looked at the enchanted items we had retrieved from the horde.

There's seven of them. I wonder what they do.

Two weapons: a steel knife and steel hammer. They both came equipped with Knife Mastery and Hammer Mastery skill increases. The knife would come in handy for carving, but I left the hammer in the Pocket Dimension since I didn't know what to do with it.

Next, we had an accessory. It increased your Strength at the cost of reducing your Magic.

Strength +5 and Magic -8… It must be for the more tank-like Classes.

Fran wouldn't have any use for it, since she needed Magic. It could have been viable if the stat balance were even.

I then came to the three pieces of armor: Iron Armor of Rust Prevention; Leather Armor of Size Adjustment; and Enchanted Helm of Physical Resistance. All of them had low Defense values so they didn't seem useful. Even Garrus's armor far outclassed them.

Finally, I came to the Item Bag. However, only the registered user had access to it.

I guess it's one of those things you have to register for.

Kinda like how Fran had equipped me. The bag still functioned as a normal bag to everyone else. Inside were sticks and stones ideal for throwing at targets. The goblins were also using it to store miscellaneous items.

Overwrite previous user…? Do I have to use a Contract spell?

Let's give it a shot.

Contract!

Well, that didn't work. The spell only strengthened whatever contract was already in place. Rewriting a contract was possible, but only at Level 7 and above.

Man, so I have to level up my skills to open this mysterious item bag?

Disappointed, I stowed the item bag for later.

How much money do we have?

We got a total of 109 pairs of goblin horns from today's battle. Twenty of them were high-rank, which fetched 100G per pair. We also got 100G for completing the Herb Collection quest.

I gave Fran 10,000G, so I was now left with 37,000G.

Should we get some mana potions for the raid? Would it be a waste of money? Would we even have enough? *Which reminds me, we gathered a lot of herbs and plants today. I should sort them out.*

There were ten poison herbs, ten glowing mushrooms, ten anti-paralysis herbs, ten toxic herbs, and ten healing herbs. There were gathering quests which required us to collect five of each, which meant we could turn in ten quests' worth of rewards tomorrow. However, since we were already F-Rank, we wouldn't be able to rank up by turning in G-Rank quests.

Toxic Herb Collection was listed on the F-Rank quests, so we had eighteen quests left to go. There were rank restrictions on exploring dungeons, and I wanted to get our adventurer rank up as soon as possible.

We also had around thirty unidentified hazardous materials. I knew their names and the fact they were dangerous from using Identify on them, but they weren't listed in the Guild's delivery quests. I didn't know whether they were actually of any practical use.

I'll have to ask Randell about them.

I needed some information on hobgoblins too. Tomorrow was looking to be a busy day.

Chapter 4:
Our First Dungeon

The day of the Hobgoblin Raid was upon us.

We were at Garrus's smithy to pick up my scabbard.

"Took you long enough. Have a look at this."

Oooh! So this is my scabbard?

The scabbard was made of darkened leather with elegant coloring. Some would say it was on the plain side, but I thought Garrus's handiwork made the scabbard look tastefully understated.

"Teacher."

Right. Easy now…

Fran stood the scabbard up in front of her and slowly slid me inside. I reached the tip of my blade with a satisfying pop.

Ooh…

It felt super comfy. Almost as comfortable as my old pedestal. The pedestal was a kind of stationary scabbard after all.

Aah…

I couldn't help making sounds I reserved for when I entered a hot bath. The feeling was truly delightful. I never knew my blade longed to be encased within a scabbard. I really appreciated Garrus's workmanship because the fit was accurate to the inch. It was like sleeping in a fluffy bed that molded itself to your body. I was content to stay in my comfy scabbard forever.

You've outdone yourself, Garrus. I think this is your masterwork.

"Hahaha, I'm glad you like it."

"You look pleased, Teacher."

Of course! This is a fine scabbard, this is.



“It ain’t no ordinary scabbard either.” Garrus smiled a cheeky grin and put his hand on the scabbard. “Didn’t feel right to give an enchanted sword a regular scabbard, so I fitted this one with a bit of machinery.”

Really? You’re the best, Andre!

“Andre? Who’s that?”

Sorry, I got a little excited.

Machinery in the scabbard? I couldn’t see it from where I was sitting.

“You see this metal latch?”

“Yeah.”

“If you pop it right here—”

The scabbard snapped.

“It split down the middle.”

“That’s right. It’s a simple mechanism that’ll allow you to unsheathe yourself without the little lady having to reach for you.”

I see. That’s really useful. Sheathing myself is just as easy too.

I manipulated the latch with Telekinesis and the scabbard was back to its original shape.

Convenient.

“Ain’t it? Trust me, getting the mechanism to work while maintaining the scabbard’s integrity was a pain in the ass!”

Even Garrus’s scabbards were top-notch. I expected nothing less from a blacksmith of his caliber.

Thanks for the gear, Garrus.

“Of course. Now go out there and kick some ass! Oh, and bring back some good materials, if you find any. Kinda doubt it since it’s a newly-minted dungeon and all, but you never know.”

“Newly-minted dungeon?”

“I assume it’s new anyway. You didn’t know about this?”

Fran shook her head. I had no idea how dungeons were formed either.

“Dungeons spring up all over the place as trials for mankind created by the Chaos God.”

I have no idea what you’re talking about.

“Chaos God? Not Dark God?”

“I guess you’re not clear on that distinction either. Let me explain.”

And so Garrus began his lecture on the world’s mythology.

“Put simply, our world was created by eighty-eight gods. The strongest among them are called The Ten.”

The Ten were the gods of the sun, the silver moon, the ocean, earth, fire, storms, the forest, and beasts. They created the world and the life which inhabited it.

The god of the dead created the Great Wheel of Reincarnation, and upon it the world was built.

The seventy-eight children of the gods begat many things in the world their parents had built, and so the world grew.

“Children of the gods?”

“That’s right. The most famous ones being the Smith God and the Sword God. There’s the God of Darkness—not to be confused with the Dark God—and the God of Cooking.”

Finally, there was the God of Chaos, who threw the world into, well, chaos. But Garrus maintained that it was a necessary evil to keep balance in the world. Without chaos, stagnation would soon follow. The world needed to be kept on its toes to grow.

We understood that fact firsthand. Trials were necessary to grow stronger, like Fran did the other day with the goblins. The God of Chaos was a good god, then, difficult as it was to imagine.

“What about the Dark God?”

“The Dark God used to be the God of War. He attempted to take over the world in a clear abuse of his power, so the other gods had to step in and stop him. It’s said his remains are so filled with hatred that his corpse cursed the creatures around it. That’s how we got Demonkind.”

“I see.”

“People say that the God of Chaos creates dungeons as a trial for the people. In them are servants of the Chaos God called Dungeon Masters. Their entire purpose in life is to spread chaos.”

Dungeon Masters, of course. I wondered if they had crystals in them. They would certainly have a ton of useful skills.

“There’s a hypothesis going on that a dungeon is created from a gem called the Core. A Core will latch on the first organism it sees and turn that creature into a Dungeon Master.”

“So there are weak ones and strong ones?”

“Yeah. The difficulty level of a dungeon is determined by its Dungeon Master. The less intelligent a creature is, the easier the dungeon is to conquer.”

“Are there any weird Dungeon Masters?”

“Well, we’ve had dragons, orcs, wolves, and cockatrices. Anything could become a Dungeon Master as long as it was alive.”

“Even people?”

“’Course. We’ve had a few confirmed sightings of humanoid Dungeon Masters in the past.”

A manmade dungeon sounded dangerous.

“I’ll admit we all need trials to grow stronger, but at times I feel like they’re a bit much.”

People who lived near the dungeons died after all, and there probably weren’t enough adventurers willing to throw themselves into their depths.

“Anyway… Rare monsters roam the dungeons. They’d make a decent meal for any adventurer.”

The dungeons weren't all bad of course. Some adventurers saw them as a legitimate get-rich-quick scheme. Not surprising, since they usually contained a treasure hoard.

"Not to mention the enchanted gear you can find in some of those treasure chests."

I couldn't imagine what sort of magic the stuff we'd find there would have. I couldn't wait to head out!

"If they found weapons strong enough to wage war with in those dungeons, they'd put us blacksmiths out of business," old Garrus complained. "It doesn't look like I have to worry about that with this new dungeon though. The older a dungeon is, the stronger the stuff you find in them."

"'Kay."

We'd wasted enough time by now. We hurried to the guild to attend the raid briefing, after which we would head out to the dungeon en masse.

"Morning, Nell."

"Oh, good morning, Fran!" Nell replied to Fran's greeting with a chirpy voice. She was oddly friendly for some reason. Fran told me they had met in the bathhouse the other night and had gotten along. I could imagine Nell going on about her day at work and Fran silently nodding along to it. Still, I was happy to see Fran making friends when she was so reserved most of the time.

"Good luck out there, Frannie."

"You got it."

"I know Donadrond's going with you but be careful out there. Our usual roster of high-rank adventurers aren't here today. We had to send out our reserve squad."

"High-rank adventurers?"

"Yes. We have many A-to C-Rank adventurers, but they're out investigating a disturbance in the Demon Wolf's Garden. They'd be able to handle this type of situation in a jiffy, but you know the circumstances… The A-Rank in particular is in a whole other dimension. She'd be able to take care of a weak dungeon in no

time flat.”

“She?”

“That’s right. Amanda, A-Rank adventurer and ace of the Guild of Alessa.”

Interesting. Hitting A-Rank was difficult enough, but to think a woman could do it… I’d like to meet her one day.

“Not to mention the Knight Brigade ignored our request for aid.”

“Ignored?”

“You heard me. Ignored!”

“But they’re the Knight Brigade.”

“Right?! What are they even good for if they won’t lend us a hand in taking down a dungeon!”

So much for my expectation of pure and chivalrous knights…

“Their lieutenant is the worst! He’s the son of a nobleman and he’s as snotty, stingy, and mean as they get. I think he has a grudge against adventurers. I wouldn’t be surprised if he overrode the Knight Captain’s authority in this case.” Nell was getting angrier with the noble jerk with each passing moment. Her face twisted with murderous intent, and her low mutterings sounded like the incantation of a curse. She suddenly noticed Fran was still there and snapped back to her cheery smile.

“Ahahaha. Oh dear… The panic must be getting to me. Forget what I just said. Please?”

“Will do.”

“Thanks. You be careful about him though. He won’t be getting in the way of our raid today, but you’re going to have to deal with him eventually.”

“’Kay.”

Other adventurers had filtered into the guild hall as we spoke with Nell.

Didn’t know we had so many members.

There were more than fifty of them. I had never seen so many adventurers in

one spot since I got here.

“They’re not that strong.”

Donadrond’s the strongest of the bunch.

The C-Rank adventurer also acted as an instructor to the newbies. There were other C-Ranks in the mix, but no one objected to Donadrond’s leadership.

“What’s a kid doing here?”

Someone objected to Fran’s presence, however. She stuck out like a sore thumb in the hall filled with hardy adventurers, so I’d expected one of them to point out the little girl in the room.

“What do you think you’re doing with that sword?”

A short young man confronted us. His features were so boyish I wondered what a kid like himself was doing there. His armor was still in perfect condition, making the fact that he was new all the more obvious. He looked like a G-Rank, but everyone here was definitely F-Rank and above.

I doubted he’d give the goblins much of a fight. Sure, his stats were slightly better than your garden-variety goblin, but the difference was microscopic. He probably ranked up by doing delivery quests in town. His Sword Mastery 1 was a dead giveaway he’d never been in a real battle. The guild must be desperate if they were letting adventurers like him participate.

“I’m going to exterminate goblins with him.”

“The fate of Alessa hangs on this raid! Kids like you are just gonna get in the way, so go home! What is the guild thinking?”

The boy looked very upset. Fran maintained her cool and ignored him.

“Did you hear me?”

“What?”

“Come on. You’re not supposed to be here. This isn’t a game.”

The prospect of fighting actual hobgoblins in combat probably scared the boy. As it should—they were much stronger than he was. As such, he tried hiding this fact by lashing out at anyone who appeared weaker than he was.

The surrounding adventurers reacted to the scene in different ways. Some thought it was funny and looked on, while some ignored us completely, and other wished the boy would shut up. The argument, if you could call it that, must've looked like a schoolyard squabble.

"Hm."

"Damn it, stop moving!"

Fran avoided the boy's attempt to drag her out of the hall with a quick sidestep. I thought about telling her to give the kid a break, but none of the adventurers seemed to raise their voices. Many of them were probably seething on the inside, but their comrades held them back.

"Hey, stop!"

"What—"

"Is that the—"

Rumors of Fran's accomplishments against Donadrond and the goblin horde had been circulating around the guild. Unfortunately, not everyone understood the importance of information—like this boy, for example, and the adventurers who began yelling at us to stop.

"Pipe down, you brats! You're both getting in the way, so drop out! There's still time for you to do delivery quests!"

"I-I'm no delivery boy! I'm an F-Rank adventurer!"

"You're fresh out of G-Rank! You're just as weak!"

"I'm still an F-Rank. I have the right to participate in this raid!"

"I'm an F-Rank too."

"What?"

The man looked surprised and looked down on Fran. He hadn't expected her to be a legitimate adventurer.

"Gyahaha! If punks like you are F-Rank, that makes us S-Ranks!"

"Are you sure they're F-Rank? They'll promote anyone nowadays."

“What’d you expect from a bunch of Dungeon Scavengers?”

I understood from their tones that they were mocking adventurers in general, but I didn’t know if Dungeon Scavenger was meant to be an insult. Considering mercenaries were the hyenas of the battlefield, I guess it took one to know one.

“I only took this job to tide me over till my next one, but if it’s this easy to rank up, maybe I’ll keep at it!”

These guys were former mercenaries too. From what I’d heard, there’d been a war with a neighboring country which ended faster than expected. Many mercenaries were out of a job when that happened.

I looked at their stats and confirmed they were nothing to write home about. These guys were full of hot air.

“Hehehe. You got something nice on your back there.”

“Oh? That looks like an exquisite sword.”

“Give it here.”

I was so flattered they had noticed such a fine specimen as myself, and I’d fully expected one of them to reach out their hand. I didn’t expect them to lack all sense of the impending danger.

The boy who had picked a fight with Fran had fled, the hairs on his neck standing on end. That was a good reaction to Fran’s clear broadcast of her intent to kill.

On the other hand, the third-rate mercs were still reaching out their hands with a dirty look on their faces.

“Hm—”

“That’s enough!”

Donadrond stepped between Fran and the mercs just as she was about to make her first move. He gave all of them a good beating.

“What the hell do you morons think you’re doing?! We’re heading out soon!”

“W-we didn’t…” The men cowered as Donadrond’s intimidating presence bore down on them.

“Don’t think you can talk yourself out of this one. I saw every bit of what happened. If you kill enough goblins out there, I’ll think about letting you off!”

Fran lost all interest in the three men and backed off, dissipating her intent to kill. We’d better lay low the rest of the day.

The boy complained to Donadrond about Fran.

“Sir Donadrond, you saved that girl and she didn’t even thank you!”

“Hah! Why would she? It wasn’t her I was trying to save.”

“What?”

“Can’t afford to lose manpower before a big battle.”

“S-Sir?”

How dangerous did Donadrond think Fran was? She wouldn’t start chopping people up who were on her side just because they pissed her off. At least, I didn’t think she would. Besides, there was always Healing Magic.

Then again, they might be traumatized by the experience…

“Hm?”

Nothing. Let’s go whoop those goblins good.

“Of course.”

Donadrond assembled the adventurers for the briefing. It was an assembly in name only, since the adventurers just gathered around Donadrond in no actual order.

He proceeded to explain the mechanics of a dungeon. He began by explaining our roles and general battle strategy.

“I’ll give you the basics of how a dungeon works since this is going to be the first time for a lot of you. Veterans, consider it a review.”

There were many low-rank adventurers here, us included. None of us had ever set foot in a dungeon, so I at least was grateful for the basic lecture.

For starters, we were told not to destroy the dungeon core so we could use it again in the future. The Dungeon Core was the heart of the dungeon—destroy

it, and the dungeon died with it. That included everything in the dungeon, from normal monsters to Dungeon Masters. However, the Core was protected by a powerful barrier, so only an incredibly powerful attack would be able to destroy it in the first place.

The Dungeon Core was connected to the Dungeon Master. Killing the DM would result in the Core going dormant. Other than that, the result was the same as destroying the Core, so the monsters within the dungeon would die out too.

An injection of mana into a dormant Core would allow humans to use a dungeon for a limited amount of time. Items and monsters would begin populating the dungeon again, which was the chief use of dungeons to begin with. That was why it was crucial that we only killed the Dungeon Master while leaving the Core intact. The Guild would then maintain the dungeon by culling its population of monsters and killing the Dungeon Master whenever it spawned.

“However, we’re working under special circumstances this time. Worst comes to worst, you’re allowed to destroy the Core. Just remember we’re here to capture the dungeon.”

Two hours had gone by since the adventurers left the city of Alessa.

“The goblins are coming!” the guard cried out. The guildsmen were in the middle of building a simple encampment with the materials they had brought. The goblins paid no heed and came pouring out of the mouth of the dungeon. We, who were out on patrol, rushed back, and not a moment too soon.

“Teacher, look.”

They haven’t finished building the base yet. It’s an all-out melee.

The adventurers were caught in a fierce battle with the hobgoblins. I couldn’t even launch an explosive fire attack without causing casualties to our side. The adventurers had all rallied around Donadrond to defend themselves.

“Let’s go.”

Yeah. We should cull the hobgoblins here before heading into the dungeon. I won’t be able to sleep at night if the adventurers got annihilated.

“But Teacher, you don’t sleep.”

It’s a figure of speech!

Fran drew me and charged ahead. We needed to save the newbies before they were slaughtered. Fran cut down every goblin standing in her path. They couldn’t see us since we were coming in hot from behind them.

“Weak.”

Hobgoblins aren’t so tough by themselves.

The hobgoblin we had just killed had the following stats: Name: Hobgoblin Swordsman Race: Fiend LV: 8

HP: 69; Magic: 28; Strength: 39; Agility: 25

Skills: Intimidate 1; Evasion 1; Sword Arts 1; Sword Mastery 3; Command 1; Explosiveness 2; Cooperation 2; Spirit Manipulation
He was weaker than the Goblin King I took down some time ago. However, these guys had the Cooperation skill, which made them much more dangerous in large numbers.

The mercenaries who had been creeping on Fran before the raid lay motionless on the ground. The countless dents in their armor were a clear indication that they were beyond saving. That was what happened when you recklessly fought enemies without good coordination.

Fran never noticed the corpses. I wouldn’t be surprised if she had forgotten their faces by now.

“Haa!”

Take ’em down!

Fran slashed me through the air and launched an invisible Aura Blade toward the unaware Hobgoblins, killing an entire crew of them. The adventurers thanked her, their voices dripping with confusion and awe.

“Th-thanks!”

“That little girl is as cute as she is strong!”

“Huh? Who are you talking about?” The boy we had quarreled with earlier

was among them. “N-no way!”

He was actually putting up a decent fight. The shock of seeing Fran was so great that he almost got killed however. Fortunately, an older adventurer saved him.

Most of the C-and D-Rank adventurers were close to the cave entrance, creating a lack of strong adventurers at the base. The hobgoblins picked up on this and began ganging up on Fran since she was their biggest threat.

“Big haul.”

They’re laying off the newbies and coming right at us.

I held back on crystal absorption. People would start talking if they noticed all the hobgoblins Fran had killed were missing their crystals. I settled for absorbing the crystals of the ones whose skills I wanted. That shouldn’t raise any suspicion.

They should be all right now. You wanna go to the dungeon?

“Yeah.”

No one would be able to see me absorb crystals in the dungeon. Moreover, we’d be able to hide the evidence by stowing away bodies in the Pocket Dimension.

Hobgoblins were crowding the cave entrance by the time Fran got there.

“I guess the info was right.”

Dungeons came in many different variations, the Cave Type being one of them. They weren’t known for having many traps, but they had plenty of odd structures like anthills in exchange.

One of the mages had sent their familiars to scout the cave in advance, and they found no traps inside. Considering the goblin population, traps would’ve made it hard for them to get around. It didn’t have any trap rooms either.

Trap rooms came equipped with special force fields that prevented movement or healing. If you had the misfortune of walking into one, it could be the end of you. Fortunately, the scout mages had confirmed there were none in this dungeon.

It was great news for us. We were free to go berserk without worrying about traps.

Let's go!

"Yeah."

Woohoo!

Fran jumped over the towering meat wall that was the adventurers crowding in front of the cave. Donadrond couldn't believe his eyes when he saw her jump through the air. Or maybe he was looking up her skirt… He better not have.

"Is she using Air Hop?! That's a Sky Knight skill!"

Uhh, maybe we shouldn't have done that…

Sky Knight? That sounds like an advanced Class to me.

Sky Knight… The name itself told me it was strong, but how strong? We were going to have to hold back on our aerial maneuvers from now on.

"Too late for that, Teacher."

Yeah… It is, isn't it?

Fran had a point. This situation was bound to happen again, so there was little point in hiding it. We may as well use it to our heart's content.

"We need to kill goblins now."

Right. You're absolutely right.

"Use your magic, Teacher. I'll take care of the stragglers."

Got it.

Fran used Float to further increase her altitude. When we got high enough, I rained down Tri Explosion on our enemies. The explosion blew away most of the hobgoblins who were covering the entrance. The blast wasn't as impressive as the one I had used on Donadrond, but it was enough to kill the weaker hobgoblins.

Fran landed and began swinging at the stragglers.

"Sonic Wave!"

A Level 5 Sword Art, I unleashed a shockwave toward the horde of hobgoblins and blew them away.

“Now’s our chance.”

“Wait! It’s dangerous for anyone lower than D-Rank to enter the dungeon!”

We knew that, which was why we charged ahead, so that no one would get in our way. It was a good thing the hobgoblins were keeping Donadrond and his crew busy.

“Damn it! After her!”

“Yes sir! I don’t know if I’ll be able to sleep at night if that little girl died in there. I mean, she brought it upon herself, but—”

“That’s not what I’m talking about, you dumbass!”

“Sir?!”

“If we don’t go after her, there won’t be anything left for us to kill!”

“Sir, you’re kidding…”

“Did you see that Air Hop she pulled? You better get over her looks, kid. She’s an adventuring prodigy wearing the skin of a little girl!”

The guild’s policy on raid rewards were as follows: The guild would collect the materials from the fallen monsters and sell them off. They would then distribute the money equally to participating adventurers, after fees and profit of course.

However, any materials an adventurer put into his item bag was the property of said adventurer. The more monsters an adventurer killed, the more money he would ostensibly acquire. This incentive worked quite well. However, it came with the risk of an adventurer abandoning their position, like we were doing right now by charging right into the dungeon.

“Teacher.”

My God… LOOK AT ALL THE EXP!

The dungeon was a buffet of hobgoblins.

“Take care of it.”

Oooh, you can count on it! FLARE BLAST!

Level 1 Flame Magic, the spell shot out a concentrated ray of flame at a target. The area of effect wasn't particularly large, but its destructive capacity was much stronger than regular fire magic.

The spell whined before blasting its beam. It pierced through some of the hobgoblins, while the remainder were blown away by the explosion. It was very effective in the confines of a cave. Fran charged through the hobgoblin horde and pressed forward.

We had some money left over for a Return Feather, so let's see how far we can go!

"Haa!"

"Aaah!"

Fire Javelin!

I used the spells that were faster to cast to keep the hobgoblins at bay. Fran cut down the ones who were lucky enough to get close. We had great synergy.

We didn't keep all the goblin remains for ourselves, though. We left some for the guildsmen who would eventually make it through here. There was no need to be greedy and get on their bad side. Besides, I didn't want to hit the storage limit for my Pocket Dimension since that would suck.

But we made sure to keep the corpses of the ones whose crystals I had absorbed. If the monster had a useful skill, I would absorb its crystal, then quickly stow it away in the Pocket Dimension to hide the evidence.

We prioritized taking down the black-skinned High Hobgoblins on the occasions we ran into them. They had more or less the same skills as regular hobgoblins, but I got more crystals out of them. They were like bonus treats.

Singling out enemies while fighting them proved to be good practice for the Split Thinking skill since I was now able to cast two spells at once. Casting two spells at the same time required an enormous amount of concentration, so I was going to have to practice to get the most out of this powerful skill.

Hahaha! Fire Javelin!

Ten flaming spears pierced through the hobgoblin horde.

“That was amazing, Teacher.”

You can do it too, with some practice.

“My head hurts when I do.”

Split Thinking overuse caused migraines, it seemed. It put tremendous strain on one’s brain.

Really? Mine doesn’t. Oh, wait, I guess I don’t have one.

I couldn’t feel pain, so headaches were a thing of the past, and I got amazing mileage out of Split Thinking because of that. Having the Mage skill helped too.

“I’ll shoot for casting weaker spells when I’m fighting.”

And I’ll try to cast two different spells next time.

“Good luck.”

You got it.

We weren’t lacking for target dummies right now, that’s for sure.

Nothing stopped Fran’s charge to the heart of the dungeon. I used Echolocation to get an image of the lay of the land, but the image lacked detail since it was only at Level 1. We supplemented the information by using Presence Sense, Tremor Sense, and Thermal Vision to figure out the number of hobgoblins left.

“Teacher, there’re stairs here.”

I guess there’s a second floor.

The second floor looked akin to the first floor, the one difference being a greater population density of hobgoblins.

Nice. They made it easier for me to farm skills.

“Good training dummies.”

Fran was already in battle mode. She might have started seeing the hobgoblins as little more than walking EXP dispensers. At some point in our raid, the hobgoblins began running the second they saw her. News travelled fast in

the goblin cave. It was no use, however, since she chased after and cut them all down from behind.

I wondered how far this cave went on. The second floor seemed wider than the first.

There's an opening up ahead.

"Yeah. I'm picking up a lot of activity."

Is it a boss?

We inched closer until we came to what looked like a hall. There were actual floor tiles instead of dirt, and the interior changed significantly from the natural cave. We carefully peered in.

That's a big boy and a big girl…

The room was filled with close to fifty hobgoblins. In the center of them all were the two goblin rulers: the Goblin King and Goblin Queen.

They reminded me of the Goblin King I had killed in the Wolf's Garden. The goblins would huddle around their leaders in the event of an invasion. We were going to have to take down both King and Queen during this raid.

The Goblin Rulers weren't much different from kinsmen. Their stats were higher, and they had plenty more skills, but that was about it. They were as tough as the Area 3 monsters of the Garden. If we didn't get sloppy, we should be able to take them down in no time.

Let's go, Fran.

"Yeah!"

We'll start by thinning them out.

We shot our spells off before they could notice us.

Flare Blast!

"Flare Blast."

And another! Flare Blast!

We used our spells to open a way to the King and Queen. Fran lunged forward

and danced through the startled hobgoblins.

Keep going! Take the Rulers down!

Or so I thought…

Huh?

“They’re dead?”

We reached the center of the room after crossing the sea of hobgoblins to find the burnt remains of the King and Queen. Our distraction turned out to be a direct hit.

I…guess we won?

The surviving hobgoblins were scattering to save their lives. The battle was over before it had begun.

Does that mean the quest is over?

But there was still more to the cave.

Or not…

“There’s more ahead.”

Yeah. We haven’t seen the Dungeon Master yet.

Neither the King nor the Queen was the Dungeon Master. If one of them had been, all the remaining monsters would’ve died with them.

“Let’s keep going.”

Yeah!

We rushed to the end of the second floor where we found a door waiting for us. The door was made of metal and was an imposing three meters tall.

“Big door.”

Is this the Boss Room?

An aura of intimidation emanated from the door, repelling us from even opening it. There was something behind it for sure.

Have the Return Feather ready just in case.

“’Kay.”

I pushed the door open with Telekinesis and it made a heavy creaking noise. There was a wide opening in front of us, but was there nothing here…? No, I could feel the presence of a small monster. Maybe an insect type.

Stay on your guard.

“Of course.”

Suddenly, the door slammed shut. We would have to beat the boss before we could leave.

I thought there weren’t supposed to be any traps here.

“Are we locked in?”

Just stay calm, Fran.

“I know. I’ll just have to kill everything in sight. No problem.”

I had to hand it to her: She had nerves of steel.

“What’s that noise?”

Something’s coming.

The droning noise came from a blue-shelled ladybug monster. It had horns sprouting from its head and was the size of a baseball. Behind it were creatures that looked like giant isopods, which made for a disgusting bunch.

Name: Army Beetle Leader Race: Insect LV: 5

HP: 8; Magic: 18; Strength: 4; Agility: 22

Skills: Wind Magic 1; Summon Minion 5; Command 1; Cooperation 1; Acid Fang Name: Army Beetle Race: Insect LV: 2

HP: 6; Magic: 5; Strength: 3; Agility: 20

Skills: Harden 1; Acid Fang Name: Army Beetle Medic Race: Insect LV: 4

HP: 10; Magic: 10; Strength: 1; Agility: 20

Skills: Healing Magic 2; Acid Fang Name: Army Beetle Shooter Race: Insect LV: 4

HP: 3; Magic: 11; Strength: 2; Agility: 20

Skills: Wind Magic 3; Acid Fang They were weak but numerous. There must've been upwards of a hundred of them. The leader even had a summoning skill to boot. If we didn't kill it fast, they'd easily overwhelm us by a sheer force of numbers.

"This looks fun."

Fran was already on the road to becoming a Blood Knight. She lunged, taking as much pleasure in the fight with the disgusting bugs as if it were a dance. I used Telekinesis to slow the bugs down. I could hold them in place since they were small enough. If they had been bigger, it would've been much more economical to blow them all away with a well-placed spell.

"Haaa!" Fran pierced their crystals as I nailed them in place. I had never seen these monsters before, so I decided to keep about half of the materials we'd gained.

The Shooters were a real annoyance with their Wind Magic. Thankfully, they only had a limited amount of casts thanks to their low Magic value. They were more of a distraction than a real threat.

The Leaders kept summoning bug after bug which proved to be a boon for us. We were able to level up Wind Magic, Harden, Summon Minion, and Cooperation while getting my fill of crystals at the same time.

Thirty minutes later…

I felt the presence of a person from behind the door.

"Damn it! It's locked!"

I guess Donadrond was here.

Oh well, time to end this.

"Goodbye, bonus stage…"

I know. I'll miss it too.

"It was good while it lasted…"

It was time for extermination. We launched fire spells and Sword Arts one

after the other. It took no more than five minutes to wipe out the two-hundred-odd bugs that had spawned in. Our Wind Magic was now at Level 7 as a testament to how many bugs we'd killed.

Huh, the door's not opening.

The door remained shut as Donadrond kept banging on it. However, a door on the opposite side of the chamber opened.

"Such strong mana."

This is…a C-Rank monster… No, maybe higher.

The Gluttonous Slimelord had had the greatest mana signature I'd encountered up till now. Whatever was behind this door clearly outclassed it.

This is a new dungeon. What type of monster could produce such mana?

"I'm getting excited."

Wait. Whatever it is, this thing's going to be a legit threat. Let's get you ready before we go in there.

I buffed Fran with Regen to give her constant healing, along with a Resist All spell to increase her resistance to everything. I gave her some stat-increasing buffs too, just to be safe.

And we're good. Let's go.

"Yeah!"

What awaited us beyond the door was a well-furnished room which looked nothing like the cave we'd been spelunking in.

"Hello there, and welcome! You're our first guest since the opening of this dungeon! Come in, come in!"

A suspicious-looking man floated in the middle of the room. His skin was black like tar, and he had wings and horns. He looked intimidating, to say the least. The demon's cheerful attitude detracted from his fearsomeness however.

Let's get Identify out of the way…

Name: Daemon Race: Lesser Demon LV: 30

HP: 1,900; Magic: 2,409; Strength: 720; Agility: 675

Skills: Dig 3; Dark Magic 4; Intimidate 4; Transport 2; Fear 4; Sword Arts 5; Sword Mastery 5; Abnormal Status Resistance 7; Earth Magic 7; Climb 1; Poison Magic 7; Mana Barrier 6; Black Magic 10; Cooking 1; Dark Up; Dark Immunity; Night Vision; Mana Regeneration; Insubordination; Tough Hide; Magic Up (Small); Strength Up (Small) Extra Skill: Skill Taker 6

Title: Devil Count Equipment: Enchanted Steel Longsword Details: A monster unique to the Dungeon environment. Usually summoned by Dungeon Masters. A loyal subject of the Chaos God, it is immensely powerful. Has been granted additional powers by the Dungeon Master that summoned it.

Crystal Location: Heart A devil…

He's strong. I'd never seen a stat go above 1,000 before.

Dark Magic: An advanced form of Black Magic. Manipulates darkness, shadows, poison, and death.

Fear: Inflicts the Fear status on anyone who sees its form.

Mana Barrier: A barrier which absorbs physical and magical attacks in exchange for mana.

Skill Taker: Steal skills which meets its requirements.

Even his skills were nothing to be scoffed at.

Be careful, Fran. He'll kill you if you let your guard down!

"I know!"

I was full on mana from the earlier goblin and army beetle crystal buffet. I could use all my skills and spells with reckless abandon. Even then, I knew this was going to be a difficult fight. The demon was just that intimidating. I had Return Feather on the ready just in case of emergencies.

"Haha! What a motivated little girl! Wonderful! I won't have to hold back on you since you made it this far!"

“Stop talking and kill her, Daemon!”

Huh? Was that a goblin on the other side of the room? It seemed different from the goblins we’d encountered so far. It could talk, for one…

Name: Rare Goblin Race: Fiend LV: 11

HP: 25; Magic: 131; Strength: 12; Agility: 13

Skills: Dig 2; Summon Minion 5; Staff Mastery 2; Mind Reading 2; Trainer 2; Vigor 1

Title: Dungeon Master Equipment: Oak Staff; Leather Rope; Bracelet of Sacrifice He was weak, but he was definitely the Dungeon Master. Was the glowing thing in the wall behind him the Dungeon Core then? We had reached the final room of the dungeon it seemed.

I couldn’t get over how weak he was. Did he really summon that demon? I could understand if he summoned other goblins or army beetles, since they were weaker than he was. But a full-blown demon? Was it because he was a Dungeon Master? It would’ve made more sense if he had a Demonology skill or something but Identify showed he didn’t.

I also felt sorry for the fact that he didn’t have any skills to manipulate the dungeon, since the Core was responsible for Dungeon Creation.

“Shut it! I’ll take care of the intruder, so don’t get in my way!”

“Damn it. I thought I was lucky after using all my Goddess Points to summon an insanely strong Daemon, it gives me lip instead! And now it wants to play at being a Melee Class when it’s obviously a mage!”

That was a little ham-fisted, but thanks for the explanation. The Insubordination skill explained why the devil didn’t merely obey his summoner’s orders.

“How did this intruder pass through our elite guard?!”

“They were probably killed. They’re only goblins, you know.”

“You think the superior race of goblins would lose to a bunch of humans?!”

“That’s what I was hinting at, yes.”

“Shut up! Just kill them!”

“You don’t have to tell me. It looks like I’m in for a fun fight.” The Daemon drew his sword. “He won’t shut up till I kill you. Ready?”

He lunged toward Fran.

“Raaah!”

“Haa!”

Their swords clashed.

“Hah! What a fine sword! Didn’t think it’d last this long!”

> ***Name: Enchanted Steel Longsword Attack: 561+450; MP: 56; Durability: 1000***
>
> ***Mana Conductivity: C***
>
> ***Skill: Returning Shadow His sword’s Mana Conductivity was impressive; it pushed the sword’s attack power over 1,000. The skill Returning Shadow made it so his sword always returned to his hand, even if he threw it. It was a good thing I buffed our attack power to over 500 before the fight. I might have cracked during our first clash otherwise.***

“You have excellent swordsmanship! But how about this?”

“Huh?”

He disappeared the next moment before reappearing behind Fran.

“Ah!”

What…?

Oh no!

He lopped Fran’s left arm clean off. There was blood everywhere, and she almost bled out. I quickly reattached Fran’s amputated arm to her stump with Telekinesis and cast Greater Heal as fast as I could. Recovery Magic 1 had the ability to reattach limbs, so unwanted amputations were no problem.

“Oh? You have Telekinesis *and* Healing Magic?! Hah! That’s crazy! You a Spellsword?” The demon laughed as we stared at him in silence.

What was that?

He had disappeared and reappeared behind her again.

Fran, are you okay?!

“I’m…fine!”

“Look alive, little girl!” The demon disappeared once more and slashed from behind us.

“Ngh!” Fran anticipated the sneak attack but barely blocked in time.

“That was good! You’re a fast learner!”

He disappeared, that much was clear.

But how did he do it? Teleportation? He didn’t have anything like that in his skills. Which left either Black Magic or Shadow Magic…

“Raagh!”

“Ha!”

I was right. His shadow became charged with mana when he disappeared, then he’d reappear out of Fran’s shadow. The spell allowed him to move between shadows. Now that we knew what we were dealing with, we could formulate a counter. Should be easy enough considering how predictable the pattern was.

“Haha—gah!”

“You’re getting sloppy.”

“Urk… Good job! You saw through my tricks, eh?”

Damn it. I missed. My blade, charged with Vibrofang and Advanced Poison Fang, only grazed the demon’s side.

“What’s this? I’m poisoned? I didn’t think anything could get through my Status Resistances… Impressive!”

His chattering was annoying!

The poison only ticked away at his health. His resistances were too high for it to have a significant effect.

Fran, go for his weak spot.

“Yeah.”

He was still underestimating us, to our great advantage. He didn’t know about my sentience either. I had to lay low and not make any grand attacks; I was strictly on support duty.

“Haaa!”

“Hyahaha!”

Their swords clashed again, and I caught something glowing out of the corner of my eye. Hobgoblins were coming out of the light source, four of them in total.

“Go, my minions! Kill the intruders!”

It was the Dungeon Master. Having hobgoblins interfere now would be quite dangerous. However, the hobgoblins only looked at Fran and the demon, unsure of what to do.

“What are you doing?! Go!”

The Dungeon Master’s command forced the hobgoblins to march to the battlefield.

“Stay out of this!”

The demon cut two of them down with his sword, while Fran hacked through one of them.

“Wh-what are you doing?! They’re on your side!”

“I won’t let these idiots ruin my fun!”

He blew away the remaining hobgoblin with a sphere of dark energy. The Dungeon Master looked pitiful as he trembled with anger and humiliation.

Fran and the demon’s battle continued. The sound of their clashing swords rang through the room louder than before. Fran was clearly the better swordsman, but the demon brushed off most of her attacks and swung his

sword in a show of might. Agile speed clashed with brute strength, creating an odd stalemate.

But Fran was at a clear disadvantage. All the demon had to do was land one blow to kill her.

“I’m having so much fun! We’re evenly matched, that much is clear!” The demon disengaged his blade from mine and jumped back. What was he planning? “But we need to finish up at some point! I’ll start by taking your powers!”

“Huh?”

No! He’s using his Extra Skill!

“Hahaha! It’s over! Skill Taker!”

The demon laughed and thrust his hand forward.

Urgh! He got us!

The demon hadn’t used his skill-stealing skill so far, so I didn’t know what form it was going to take. I thought he needed to be in close quarters, or that it had a long cast time. The skill was too strong not to have a complicated requirement. I never expected it to be useable at a distance!

The skill seemed to have worked, judging by the loudness of his boasting. Did he steal Fran’s combat ability? He better not have stolen Sword Mastery or Sword Arts. I already maxed them out and I’d have to relearn them if he did! Worse, Fran wouldn’t be able to fight if she lost Sword Mastery!

Get ready to use Return Feather if you have to!

“Right!”

We kept our eyes trained on the demon for the slightest change in behavior. But the demon stood still with his hand thrust out. It didn’t look anything was happening to Fran though.

…

“…”

Huh?

So…Fran, how do you feel?

“Fine?”

“Damn it, it failed!”

I didn’t know how it failed but that was good to know. Were Fran and I a special case? I supplied most of her skills, meaning most of her skills came from her equipment. Maybe that was why Skill Taker was ineffective against her. If anything, he should’ve cast Skill Taker on me.

“I failed to take your skills, so take this from me instead! Dark Bolt!”

The demon regained his posture and shot a Dark Spell at us. It took the form of a swirling vortex which left fissures in the ground, like a drill. His stats were more suited for ranged magical combat, so he was getting serious now.

“Ha!”

It missed Fran completely.

“Take this!”

“Whoops.”

“Damn it!”

The spell was as destructive as it was predictable, especially for someone like Fran who had gone toe-to-toe with several hordes of goblins by now. For all his might, the demon lacked combat experience. It was understandable since the Dungeon Master had only summoned recently.

“Dark Spear!”

Fire Wall!

“Dark Blast!”

“Too easy.”

“What?!”

I expected underhanded spells from the Dark Magic spellbook, but the demon opted for one-hit kills instead. Fran was still at a disadvantage because of the power difference though. She was barely able to scratch him, while one hit

from him was all it would take to kill her.

Fran became quieter than usual. She knew she had to focus to take this menace down.

Should we escape? No, it was too early to call it quits. Granted, we had done enough to prune the population of goblins to stop them from invading the city. The C-and D-Ranks would take care of the cleanup. But what should we do about this demon? It was the one thing standing between us and capturing the dungeon. Even if we were to escape, I'd like to deal enough damage to it to give Donadrond an easier time.

"Black Bomb!"

"Nope."

"Aaargh!"

Frustrated, the demon began peppering the entire room with spells. The Dungeon Master shrieked and dove for cover to save his life. It was a good thing we were the only ones in the room, otherwise the explosion of spells may have agitated some high-rank monsters out on the field. We only had the Dungeon Master to worry about, and he wasn't much of a problem anyway.

Hang on a second…

I just had a revelation.

This guy's just a regular monster.

I remembered Donadrond's lecture about dungeon mechanics, specifically about how the Dungeon Master was connected to the Core. Killing a Dungeon Master would have similar effects to destroying the Core, one of which was the annihilation of all monsters living in the dungeon.

Which means if we kill that goblin, this demon will die with it.

"Fire Arrow."

"Wha—hey! That's not fair!"

The demon hurried to protect the Dungeon Master from Fran's spell.

My calculations were correct. The Dungeon Master had a Bracelet of Sacrifice

on him, but that only meant we had to kill him twice. The Dungeon Master couldn't control the demon, but the demon protected him anyway because of his desire to survive.

"Heh."

"You punk, I'll get you for this!"

Fire Javelin!

"What the hell? I didn't even hear her incantation!"

That was because I was the one casting it.

"Fire Arrow."

Tri Explosion.

"Fire Arrow."

Flare Blast!

One explosive spell after spell covered the demon's body.

"Urgh!"

"Aieeee!"

The Dungeon Master wasn't dying, despite being caught in the blast. The demon couldn't afford to move from the Dungeon Master, making him out to be a sad punching bag.

"You idiot! I told you we should've used the room before this as our battlefield!"

"Sh-shut up! This room would be defenseless without you here!"

Thank God the Dungeon Master was an idiot. We chipped away at the demon's health, though his Mana Barrier proved formidable. We'd be the first to run out of mana at this rate.

Fran, change of plans.

"Got it."

I kept up my barrage of double-casting spells as Fran chanted the incantation of the wind spell she had just learned: Level 4 Wind Magic, Sonic Shot. Put

simply, it enabled the user to launch a projectile at high speeds with the power of wind. You could manipulate the angles slightly too.

"I'm ready."

Go for it.

"Ha!"

Fran counted and flung me into the air.

Woohoo!

I accelerated with the help of Sonic Shot. I banked to the right of the demon and went straight for the Dungeon Master.

"Is that Wind Magic?! Smart, but I won't let you!"

The demon couldn't move since Fran continued targeting the Dungeon Master with her spells. Still, he reached out his right hand to swat me away. I was fast, but the demon had no problem seeing me. He failed in his attempt to deflect me, however.

"Wha—gah!"

I went along with the wind channels before using Telekinesis to make a sharp turn. It had been a while since my last Telekinetic Catapult. I stabbed the defenseless demon right in the chest and charged straight through. I amplified my blade with my remaining mana and was ready to fly away just in case the attack didn't work.

"Gah…"

That did it…

I suddenly realized that he had managed to get his left hand between me and his body. If I hadn't charged my blade with enough mana, this would've been the end of me. The demon was defiant to the very end.

"Hurk…"

I had completely cut into his crystal and absorbed it.

"Gaaah…"

The demon roared before falling to the ground, dead.

You have obtained 40 EP.

Nice! I expected no less from a demon's crystal. My crystal counter was at 2699/2800 before, and now it was at 3199/3600, marking a 500-crystal increase.

"H-how did you…?"

The Dungeon Master watched in shock. He'd just seen his unbelievably strong demon get killed by a little girl, so I could sympathize with him a little. Still, it was bad practice to sit defenseless in the heat of battle.

"Ha!"

"Gaaah!"

Fran wasted no time in throwing out an Aura Blade to lop the Dungeon Master's right arm off. The arm fell to the floor, the Bracelet of Sacrifice along with it. Just as the Dungeon Master was screaming in pain, Fran mercilessly cut off his head. He may be a Dungeon Master, but he was still a goblin. He was no match for the raw force of Fran's Aura Blade. The brightly glowing Dungeon Core suddenly dimmed.

And that was it.

Is something supposed to happen now…?

"Teacher, did we win?"

I think so, yeah…

I expected something theatrical to happen when we killed the Dungeon Master, maybe an earthquake or something. But nothing happened. We'd killed the Dungeon Master, right?

Either way, we should try leaving the place. All the remaining monsters should be dead by now.

Oh, is the Daemon's body still there?

I expected the Daemon's body to turn into sand and was relieved to see it was still in one piece. That would've been a waste of materials. We decided not to

take the Daemon's corpse, however. We could've used the materials, but I felt bad for the Guild for rushing ahead. It would've been difficult to hide the corpse because of the Dungeon Core system anyhow.

Anyone could use a dormant Core. Touching it would reveal the list of monsters that had populated the dungeon before its capture. The Daemon would be on that list of monsters should anyone want to reuse the Dungeon, so, as much as I wanted to take the Daemon's materials, we'd have gotten found out no matter what. There was no need to raise further undue resentment.

We were going to have modify the Daemon's body slightly before letting the Guild have it though. I blew up his chest with an Explosion and left a big hole where his crystal should be. If anyone asked, Fran could simply say, "I accidentally destroyed his crystal in the fight. The corpse is all that's left." Fran could say she took the crystal for herself, but I was sure some of the adventurers would complain about her taking too much. We didn't need any of that to go on. Some of them weren't going to buy it no matter what, but oh well. *Good luck proving otherwise.*

We kept the sword though. We might be able to fence it for good money. Alternatively, we could break it down for materials. We took the Bracelet of Sacrifice off the Dungeon Master's detached arm as well. It might come in handy at some point.

"We won."

Fran pumped her fist in the air in a show of victory. We played dirty, but she looked happy that she won anyway.

Fran has leveled up!

Fran has leveled up!

Fran has...

Fran gained eight levels from that one fight!



I'd worried she wasn't going to get any EXP since I dealt the killing blow to the Daemon, but it still counted since she was my User. That also probably wasn't the first time someone killed a monster with a throwing weapon. We managed to win because the Dungeon Master was so weak. Fran gained a total of thirteen levels since she had charged through the dungeon. What a windfall!

The door rumbled, signaling that the seal was now broken.

"Little lady! Sound off if you're still alive!"

"What the hell! That's a Daemon!"

"Are you actually serious?"

Having captured the dungeon, we were on our way back to the city. The adventurers looked as exhausted as they were pleased. We lost ten adventurers today but were fortunate the situation didn't devolve into a calamity for the city.

The guildsmen were happy we had killed the Dungeon Master when we did, since that caused all the dungeon monsters to die out. They were even happier that we didn't hog the Daemon's remains; that was a biggie. Daemon materials had higher value compared to monsters of the same threat level since they only spawned in dungeons. The EXP you got from them was also on a different level. They made for good money, provided you didn't get killed in the fight.

Donadrond lectured us for about an hour when he found us. The image of a champion of the guild scolding an innocent beastgirl was as comical as it was tragic. Fran would've sulked at me if I had laughed, so I managed to keep my steely composure. The lecture would've gone on for longer if the boy who had argued with Fran hadn't stepped in. He'd survived, unlike the mercenaries, and was paying her back for saving his life.

He's a good kid.

"You're not gonna fool me that easily."

Yeah?

"You didn't get yelled at. No fair."

Now, now.

“I took the brunt of it.”

I said I was sorry.

“Then I want beef.”

Okay.

“Roast beef.”

Sure.

“Steak kebabs.”

You got it.

Fran was becoming quite the glutton ever since she sampled Earth cooking. She could have as much as she wanted so long as she’d stop pouting. It’d make for a nice celebration, since she killed a monster that was above her weight class. I was ready to cook her anything she wanted.

Before we reach town, I should take a look at my stats…

The following were my stats before the raid:

Attack: 392; MP: 1650/1650; Durability: 1450/1450

Evolution: [Rank 7; Crystals: 2699/2800; Skill Capacity: 62; Free EP: 9]

And this was after:

Name: Teacher

User: Fran

Race: Intelligent Weapon

Attack: 434; MP: 2050/2050; Durability: 1850/1850

Evolution: [Rank 8; Crystals: 3199/3600; Skill Capacity: 70; Free EP: 49]

Skills: Identify 7; High Speed Self-Repair; Telekinesis; Telekinesis Up (Small); Telepathy; Attack Up (Small); User Status Up (Medium); User Recovery Rate Up (Small); MP Up (Small); Skill Capacity Up (Medium); Identity Protection; Bestiary; Skill Sharing; Mage

Many of my skills had leveled up too. The Hobgoblins and Army Beetles had a ton of skills I could absorb. The Wind Magic I only got a few hours ago was already at Level 7, having gone up by six levels in one day. Sword Arts went from 7 to 8, and Sword Mastery was now at 9 with Abnormal Status Resistance at 3 and Earth Magic at 5. The list went on.

I got a bunch of new skills from the dungeon as well. The ones that seemed particularly useful were: Dark Magic 1; Mana Barrier 1; Black Magic 2; Trap Sense 1; Dark Up; Dark Immunity; Mana Regeneration; and Insubordination. Mana Regeneration would particularly allow me to recover my mana just by equipping it. There was the extra skill, Skill Taker, to boot.

I didn't know what to do with the 49 EP I had on hand, since I wanted to strengthen everything. I could up Sword Arts, Sword Mastery, and some Magics… I had Dark Up now, so maybe I should invest my points in Dark Magic… Summon Minion looked like fun… Then there were Instant Regen and Abnormal Status Resistance which I had foregone earlier. Or maybe I should just dump it all into Skill Taker? There were Superior Skills to worry about now.

Also, Fran was now at Level 25. She had gained eight levels from killing the Daemon since she sucked in all the EXP instead of sharing it with a party.

Name: Fran

Age: 12

Race: Beastman; Black Cat Tribe

Class: Spellsword

Status: Contract

LV: 25

HP: 193; Magic: 127; Strength: 140; Agility: 146

Skills: Goblin Killer; Calm Mind; Expert Carver; Determination; Sense of Direction; Night Vision

[NEW] Insect Killer; Demon Killer

Titles: Veteran; Disassembly Expert; Healing Mage; Skill Collector; Fire Mage; Master Chef

[NEW] Insect Killer; Big Fish Eater; Dungeon Raider; Demon Killer

Insect Killer: Kill 300 insect types in one battle. Unlocks the skill Insect Killer.

Big Fish Eater: Defeat a foe who is above your weight class. Life +20; All Stats +5; slightly increases growth rate.

Dungeon Raider: Kill a Dungeon Master or destroy a Dungeon Core. Increases life and mana regeneration while in a dungeon.

Demon Killer: Slay a demon. Unlocks the skill Demon Killer.

Big Fish Eater? Here was another unlocked title. It was about as strong as the Veteran title which increased Fran's stats even more. She could probably take on Donadrond now. It was scary how fast Fran grew! Although, admittedly, part of it was my fault.

Fran had ambitions, but I doubted that she would ever get cocky. Still, I had a feeling she would want to go to even more treacherous territory soon. I had better support her as much as I could!

To that end, we held an emergency meeting over which skills to level up.

What do you think we should level up, Fran?

"Sword Arts and Sword Mastery."

That's what I thought.

Using magic effectively was difficult. But she'd be able to turn the tide of battle so long as she had her sword. Her sword being me, who took pride in having high Mana Conductivity and MP.

Are you sure about this?

"Yeah."

All right.

I spent 6 EP to bump Sword Arts and Sword Mastery to Level 10.

Sword Arts is now Level 10. You have unlocked Blade Arts.

Sword Mastery is now Level 10. You have unlocked Blade

Mastery.

Sword Arts and Sword Mastery are now at Level 10. You have unlocked Elemental Sword.

Blade Mastery and Blade Arts were clear enough, but Elemental Sword? The skill used magic to apply an element to a blade. We'd have to use it to see how it worked.

Now it was time for Skill Taker:

Skill Taker 1: Choose a Level 1 skill with Rarity 1 or lower to steal. Has a 50% chance of success. Can only be used once per target. Cooldown: 1 day. Effective range is skill level in meters.

Skill Rarity—that was new. Identify only revealed a skill's level up to now.

I'd be able to collect even more skills with this on. Stealing a target's skills also made for good utility, and I could finally get something out of fighting creatures which didn't drop crystals—humanoids—now. I could take their skills instead.

But a 50 percent success rate didn't inspire much confidence. It might not be worth the attempt in the heat of battle. I mulled over it until I remembered I could consult Fran. What would she think of this?

Hey, so about Skill Taker—

I explained the gist of how it worked.

"Sounds good."

You think so?

"It's an Extra Skill. That makes it extra powerful."

Okay. I'll level it up.

I followed her lead and got it up to Level 2.

Skill Taker 2: Choose a Level 2 skill with Rarity 2 or lower to steal. Has a 60% chance of success. Can only be used once per target. Cooldown: 2 days. Effective range is skill level in meters.

Sixty percent at Level 2? *Well, let's see how far we can take this, Skill Taker!* It took 3 EP for every level of Extra Skill. I was down to 16 EP, but I had no regrets.

Skill Taker 10: Choose a Level 10 skill with Rarity 10 or lower to steal. Has a 100% chance of success. Can only be used once per target. Cooldown: 18 days. Effective range is skill level in meters.

I had to wait eighteen days between each Skill Taker use. I needed to think about how I was going to make it viable. We had two attempts between Fran and me, so I supposed we could afford to be more lenient about using it. The only thing left to do was to look up the Rarity 10 skills. Would they show up on Identify if I leveled it up? This skill would be broken if it could actually take Extra and Unique Skills.

I couldn't wait to use it. Not now though, since I was surrounded by my guildsmen. Maybe bandits would come and assault us; not that there were bandits stupid enough to attack so many adventurers at once.

The trip back to the guild was uneventful, but the guild itself was filled with cheer. The adventurers' faces were lit up with the joy of victory and getting paid.

"Come with me, little lady."

"'Kay."

Donadrond led Fran to the Guildmaster's office. The adventurers we passed by weren't surprised to see this; they knew she had contributed the most during the raid. There were rumors regarding Fran's ability floating about the guild, but now there was hard evidence to convert even the most doubtful of skeptics.

"Nice. She must be getting a bonus."

"She did turn things around for us. Couldn't believe it at first."

"She saved my life!"

"How is she so strong at that age?"

"She's a monster. An absolute monster."

"Wonder if she'll join our party."

"God, Fran's so cute."

Fifty percent were thankful, forty percent were jealous, ten percent were scared. That last guy though? He creeped me out.

“Hello, Fran. We’ve been waiting for you.”

“Hey.”

“First, you have my thanks. You averted what could’ve been a disaster for the city. And to think there was a Daemon in that dungeon… It would’ve killed more of our members if we had carried out our original plan.” The GM gave us a businesslike smile. Unlike Donadrond, we couldn’t let our guard down around him. He seemed to suspect us of foul play.

“It was reckless of you to charge ahead like you did. However, it did end up saving us, so I will let it slide this time.”

He’d decided not to take disciplinary action against her after weighing out multiple factors.

“I’ve taken a look at the Daemon corpse you brought in.”

Donadrond must’ve shown him.

“It was a B-Rank monster. Did you really kill that thing by yourself?”

“Yes.”

“If so, that would make you an A-Rank adventurer.”

I was happy for the compliment, but A-Rank quests were notorious for being dangerous.

“I got lucky.”

“How do you mean?”

We wanted to defer our promotion for the moment. So, we told him the truth.

“I see. So you distracted it by attacking the Dungeon Master and killed the Daemon while its guard was down…”

“The Dungeon Master was dumb.”

“I still find it odd that it didn’t die instantly. But, moving on to the matter of

the Daemon's carcass…"

"Yeah?"

"We've determined the cause of death to be a sword through the chest. Now, how many people do you think can penetrate a demon's mana barrier?"

"I dunno."

"Of course you don't… No matter. Now, my real question." The GM sighed before looking right at her. "What happened to the Daemon's crystal core?"

"It's gone."

"You must understand…that demon cores are of extremely high value. Even the government wants them."

"Right."

"You really don't have it?"

"It no longer exists in this world."

Because I absorbed it.

"Oh, fine. I believe you."

We weren't technically lying so I guess we were in the clear…

…or so I thought.

"Hold on! Are you really going to let her get away with that?!"

The door slammed open as an intruder barged into the Guildmaster's office. The intruder was a fat, unhealthy-looking man who somehow still managed to fit into his silver armor.

Who was this? I'd never seen him before. I barely registered his presence, though he had his equipment to thank for that.

Name: August Allsand

Age: 29

Race: Human

Class: Fighter

Status: Normal

LV: 30

HP: 108; Magic: 99; Strength: 52; Agility: 45

Skills: Acting 1; Singing 1; Riding 1; Deception 1; Royal Etiquette 4; Sword Mastery 1; Calculation 1; Sociable 2; Poison Resistance 1; Poison Knowledge 2; Herbology 2

Unique Skill: Essence of Falsehood 5

Title: Viscount; Lieutenant of the Knight Brigade

Equipment: Mithril Longsword; Silver Plate Mail; Red Lion Cloak; Ring of Presence Concealment

The fat man was all over the place. He was Level 30, but his stats were as low as an E-Rank. His skill collection was just pitiful. He probably got Sociable through being a noble. And his Sword Mastery was at Level 1? He was supposed to be the Lieutenant of Knights!

“Let her get away with what, Sir August?”

“You said it yourself. A Daemon’s crystal? You’re going to let that girl walk out of here with a demon crystal?!”

“I see. You must understand that the guild allows adventurers to keep the materials of whatever they could gather for themselves. If there were a crystal left for the girl to keep, then it is well within her rights. Further, she could have picked the Daemon clean of materials by the time Donadrond found her, yet she chose to share her spoils with the Guild. She has been very gracious.”

“Hogwash. She could keep all the hobgoblin materials for all I care. But high-rank Daemon materials are a different matter entirely. She cannot have them!”

The materials were worth much more than I thought. Was he going to try and take them back now?

“That girl committed an act of insubordination by abandoning her post and acting on her own! She broke the chain of command! Do you think she still has the right to claim her reward after such a crime?!”

“Goodness. If we took disciplinary action for the slightest deviation from a spoken command, we’d have to flog the entire guild. I don’t think I’ve ever seen an adventurer who didn’t ‘act on his own’ in such a situation. If you happen to know one, I’d love to shake his hand.”

“I guess that’s the most I can expect out of the lower classes.”

“I’m afraid our rough-and-tumble members are in a different class from you dainty knights.” The GM was smiling, but he wasn’t entertained. I was afraid he’d begin chanting a kill spell any second now. The tub of lard seemed oblivious, and I wondered how thick his skin must have been to not notice such clear, murderous intent.

“Hmph. Let me do you a favor. I’ll have you know that that girl is lying to you.”

Yikes. Was this his Unique Skill?

> ***Essence of Falsehood: See through a target’s lies. Makes it difficult for others to see through User’s lies. Makes it easier for others to believe in User’s lies.***

The perfect skill for the conman, dictator, and cult leader. The skill was powerful, but somehow this regional knight lieutenant was the one who possessed it. I lamented the waste of its potential. Either way, a skill was only as powerful as its user, and he seemed determined to find us out. His next statement however, made me befuddled.

“She said she destroyed the crystal earlier, but that’s a lie! She’s definitely hiding it somewhere.”

Uh, no, that part was true. We really did destroy it.

“Even if that were true, she still has the rights to it.”

“Well, she should have her rights revoked for bearing false witness! Who knows what else she’s hiding.”

“It really got destroyed.”

“She’s lying again.”

What the hell was this guy saying? He had Essence of Falsehood, so he should know she was telling the truth. Wait… That was it. The man was infamous for

having Essence of Falsehood, and for overusing it. So, when he accused someone of lying at this point, people thought it was mere slander.

Right now, though, it looked like he was trying to entrap Fran.

"Huh?"

Fran, just stay quiet for a while.

"Okay."

Your move, big guy.

"We are not in a court of law. I was only talking to her privately. Is it a violation of the law when guild members share a joke with each other?"

The GM was defiant. He hated August so much that he actually covered for us. *I love you, GM. Go for it!*

"She lied to a nobleman. That is a crime in and of itself."

"I repeat, she made a good-natured jest. I haven't been informed of this new law against jests."

"Regardless! I don't trust her. Where is she from? Have you asked her that? What if she's a spy from another kingdom? I motion for her belongings to be confiscated! Do so, and I'll overlook this slight against my name!"

What was he talking about? Confiscate her belongings? *I'd like to see you try, Pork Roast!*

"What are you talking about?"

"You adventurers neglected to contact the Knight Brigade and went on the raid by yourselves. You must've wanted to keep all the goodies to yourselves. Dirty adventurers! Give us the Daemon materials and I shall forgive you."

"Excuse me. We made sure to contact the Brigade before the raid. We even contacted the Knight Brigade on the very day of the raid."

"Hmph! More lies! In any case, give us half of today's rewards, all the Daemon materials, and that girl's belongings."

"*Half* of the rewards and *all* of the Daemon materials? The Knight Brigade has no right to any of it when you didn't even partake in the battle."

“You didn’t contact us! I know how greedy you adventurers get. When you were out raiding the goblin’s nest for treasure, we were protecting the city!”

“Heh. Big talk for ignoring our request to join the raid.”

“What was that?”

“Nothing.”

So that was it. The knights had conveniently ignored the guild’s plea for help because they were afraid of the hobgoblins. Now they wanted the prize knowing the disaster had been averted. He was as dirty as they got.

“I’ll start by taking your sword. Did you steal that too? Give it here.”

The fat bastard approached us.

“Should I cut him?”

Wait, let’s see how this works out.

I was itching to let loose on the guy myself.

“The Knight Brigade has no authority over the Guild. You expect us to hand over half the rewards our guildsmen risked their lives for?”

“I’m only taking what’s rightfully mine.”

My God, this guy was full of it. Even the GM was oozing murderous intent at this point. He put on a mild-mannered smile and I wondered how he refrained from just killing the man. It was very impressive.

“Sign this contract. You just need to put your signature here and we can begin collecting our materials.”

“Has the rest of the Brigade been informed? Does the Captain know about this?”

“Of… Of course.”

“Then you wouldn’t mind if I scheduled a meeting.”

“Uh, there’s no need for that…”

“That’s for us to decide.”

The wind was blowing a different direction now.

“Do you have any objections to a civil conference?”

“How dare you insinuate that I’m lying? Th-this is unacceptable! I’m leaving!”

Bullseye. The fat noble’s stammering betrayed his sham. He was trying to embezzle large amounts of materials by coming here without telling the Knight Captain.

Let’s try it.

What, you ask? Skill Taker, of course. He had an interesting Unique Skill, so the time was right.

I’ll try it first.

I targeted the Unique Skill. This skill would be impossible to use without Identify. Not even the Daemon himself had Identify, now that I thought about it. The Dungeon Master said he got lucky; was that why he had such an odd skillset? Starter skills were randomized, sure, but did the Dungeon Master forgot to give the Daemon Identify? That was a possibility.

“This isn’t over!”

Oh, couldn’t let my mark get away.

Here we go—Skill Taker!

It worked, though I still hated the fact that there was no indication of the skill working. I filched Essence of Falsehood 5 right off him. Now I understood the real terror of the skill. It took all levels of a skill right off a target. You could become immediately powerful if you took a high-level skill. However, it was registered under my own skills, which meant I couldn’t share it with Fran. The opposite was true as well, so we’d have to coordinate next time.

“Skill Taker.”

Fran took her turn as the fat man stormed off, and it worked as well. She took the highest of his remaining skills, which was Royal Etiquette 4. *Hehehe.* If only I could see the look on his face when he noticed he was missing his two best skills!

“Teacher, we did it.”

Yep. We got the good stuff too.

“Can I cut him now?”

Why do you wanna cut him so much?

“I hate him.”

My little girl was becoming more and more dangerous by the day. I doubted Royal Etiquette would help with her manners.

“I’m sorry you had to see that.”

“Who was that?”

“The Lieutenant of the Knight Brigade of Alessa, who is also the son of a nobleman. A brute, really. He’s only stationed there because of his family’s money, which makes him difficult to deal with. He was promoted last year, and he’s been throwing his weight around ever since. The entire city hates him. I will say this is the first time he’s attempted something this preposterous with the guild though.”

“We should file a complaint.”

“To the Brigade? I’m afraid it won’t work. They’re under his family’s thumb. Not surprised, considering how terribly they brought up their son. He also has a skill called Essence of Falsehood which allows him to see through people’s lies, but it’s absolutely wasted on him.”

“He’s weak, but he made Lieutenant. Is money all you need?”

“Take it up with the government. He may be weak, but he’s at a pretty decent level. Apparently, the nobles form parties with hired knights who then kill monsters for them. That way they can level up without ever lifting a finger.”

Literal power leveling. That explained his lack of combat skills. He was a Level 30 knight with zero combat experience.

“I’ll kill him next time.”

“Please don’t. And don’t worry, the Lieutenant may be a brute but the Captain himself is a decent person. I’ll talk to him about this.”

“All right.”

“Thank you. You see, if you did anything to the man, the Guild would be blamed for it.”

A bit selfish, but it was fair enough. I didn’t think we would ever be good friends with the Guildmaster, but a transactional relationship worked just as well.

“Again, thank you for the Daemon materials. You’ve done the Guild an immense service.”

“No problem.”

“So, are you sure you don’t have the crystal with you?”

Oh, come on, GM!

“I jest.”

“That was close.”

“Why?”

“I was about to cut you.”

“Heh, that’s why I’m terrified of you… Take care if you run into that man again. He’s been known to defraud people with his skills.”

“I’ll be fine.”

“Well, if you say so.”

“Can I go now?”

“Yes. Thank you for your time. Oh, and one last thing.”

“Hm?”

“Go to the receptionist for your Rank Up.”

“Again?”

“Yes. You took on and killed a Daemon all by yourself. It would be silly to keep you at F-Rank. You’ll be promoted to D-Rank next.”

“Not E?”

“You’d be at C-Rank if it were up to me. The other branches didn’t approve of

it though.”

Of course. A rookie adventurer killing a B-Rank Daemon all on her own? What kind of adventure novel was this? Being promoted to D-Rank was more than enough.

“Okay. I’ll go to the reception.”

“Please do. You can take your reward money while you’re at it. With your bonus, too.”

“Sure.”

The other adventurers buzzed with excitement when they heard of Fran’s promotion. It was the fastest promotion in the history of the guild, from newbie to D-Rank in just three days. They were betting on whether she would get a promotion, bonus points if she skipped a rank entirely. The crowd roared when she did.

“Haha! You made me double rich, little lady!”

“Damn it! I lost!”

“Wahahaha!”

“How’s about a drink?”

“She’s underage, moron!”

“I’ll take it.”

“Yeah? That’s great!”

“We’ll treat ya to some apple juice to start!”

Fran was officially D-Rank, a solid intermediate adventurer. I wondered if I should reveal myself to the adventurers. We might run into a situation like this in the future, and it wouldn’t be out of place for a D-Rank to have a magic sword. She could tell them I was an enchanted sword which got stronger by absorbing crystals. It’d make things a lot easier for her.

But the part about being an Intelligent Weapon… I’d have to talk to Garrus about that. Most of our guildsmen had assumed Fran hid the Daemon crystal, so it wouldn’t be too much of a problem. The story only changed from “I took

the crystal” to “my sword ate it.”

Good thing we didn’t get greedy with the Daemon carcass. Everyone had gotten bonuses because of it. We should treat the hall to drinks today too. No faster way to build rapport than a mug of beer.

“Today’s on me.”

“What?! We can’t let a little girl like you treat us!”

“It’s okay. I got my bonus.”

“High roller!”

“I’m not high.”

“Hahaha! You’re somethin’ else, little girl!”

“Yes! Time to make up my losses with drink!”

“Bwahahaha!”

We spent 100,000G on drinks that day…

Epilogue

Fran was asleep. She hadn't had anything to drink, but today had been a series of rough battles. The Daemon was strong, and I honestly thought we were going to lose. To think that I actually fought against a Daemon and won… Me, the guy who had an average job a couple of months ago, killing a Daemon in the form of a magic sword. Could you believe it?

It had been a few months since I was reborn as a sword. Time went by so fast when you were out killing monsters. I fought a Goblin, then a Lesser Wyvern, Slimes, Saber-Tooths, and Hobgoblins.

If I had come to this world as a human, the first goblin I saw would've killed me. I was initially shocked by the fact that I was a sword, but I now thought it wasn't such a bad deal. With my magic and abilities, I was a force that only existed in storybooks back on Earth.

Then I met Fran. I couldn't believe it had only been five days since we ran into each other. We had grown so close over such a short period of time. I saved her from slavery and she saved me from the magical forest. She became an adventurer, met tons of interesting people, battled an entire goblin horde, and conquered a hobgoblin dungeon by herself. To top it all off, she had a fight to the death with a Daemon and his Dungeon Master. After all that, it was no wonder we were so close.

It was strange of me to say this as a sword, but I actually felt more alive in those five days than I ever had in my previous life.

"Hmm…"

Fran?

She turned in her sleep. I used Telekinesis to reposition her blanket.

She looked so innocent when she was asleep. No, I wasn't a lolicon. Fran was cute, don't get me wrong. With her black hair, white skin, and fluffy ears, it was hard not to think of her as cute.

But I cared for her the way a parent would. I wasn't sure if this was my dormant fatherhood finally awakening or if this was how all swords felt toward their users. Looking at her peaceful face made me want to protect her all the more.

Five days…

It'd only been five days, but I didn't even want to think about leaving Fran alone. If someone offered to send me back to Earth, I would refuse. That was the conclusion I had come to after being reborn a few months ago and meeting Fran five days ago.

This fantasy world…

I looked out the window at the night sky. The giant, silver crescent was surrounded by four lunar orbs. The more I looked at it, the more it drilled home the fact that this fantasy world was my reality now.

May as well buckle down and enjoy it.

We'll see what this world has to offer us…

Bonus Story:

My First Supper with Fran It was some time after dinner when Fran resumed carving up monster carcasses. I told her to leave it until tomorrow, but she seemed to be getting the hang of it and was enjoying herself. I thought she was a bit crazy for enjoying what was effectively an autopsy, but maybe it was a hobby among the children of a world inhabited with dangerous monsters.

Just take it easy.

"I will."

I took a monster carcass from my Pocket Dimension for Fran to work on. She was getting used to using our Shared Skills. She got rid of the smell with Cleansing Magic, while washing her carving knife clean with the occasional water spell.

I should carve up a monster carcass of my own too. As fine of a monster carver as Fran was, some carcasses were impossible for her to take apart. It was all a matter of tools. Take, for example, the Tyrant Saber-Tooth I had laid in front of me: Its ten-meter-long body notwithstanding, its fur and hide were tough and difficult to penetrate. It took all of Fran's might to get the tip of her small carving knife an inch through it. That was when I knew I had to step in.

Boy was it huge, though. I kept carving and carving, and it felt like there was no end in sight. But I kept at it because Fran needed to eat, and we could use the Saber-Tooth's meat. Back on Earth, the meat of a carnivore would have a stink that turned you off from it. The rules worked a little differently here, where maxing out my Cooking skill had enabled me to judge whether a product was fit for eating. As it turned out, monster meat could be used to make delicacies that were quite delicious.

The Tyrant Saber-Tooth was one of those monsters suitable for cooking. I'd have to get rid of the tough parts, but, even then, the giant cat yielded a large

amount of edible meat.

Disassembly also gave me the ability to judge the value of harvested materials. It made me marvel at just how powerful Skills were in this world. Just equip some and you were an instant prodigy. Disassembly told me the Saber-Tooth's fur and bones could be used to make equipment. The fangs and mane were especially valuable.

I took my time carving around those areas to minimize the damage. Raising Fran was going to take money, and this was the golden ticket. I needed to be extra careful with it.

I was getting used to making fine movements with my blade, something I didn't need to do back in the plains. I was surprised that I could neatly separate hide from flesh to within a millimeter. It took close to an hour, but I was finally done. I looked over to Fran, who was still working on her carcass. She was hard at work, sweat trickling down her forehead.

Fran, you can leave it until tomorrow if you're tired.

"Just a little more."

All right.

If she wanted to do it, well, I wasn't one to stop her. I still needed to make her supper. We took a variety of cooking utensils from the slaver, like a pot, a pan, a chopping board, and a bowl, among other things. I laid them all out while trying to think of what I could cook with them.

As for seasoning, we had salt, pepper, and mock-miso at hand. Mock-miso was the digestive fluids of something that looked like a pitcher plant. It was safe to use as seasoning so long as you cooked it. It tasted like a cross between miso and shoyu, only less salty. *What a fantastic world I live in.* I could also use the flour we took from the cart and some wild herbs we had picked along the way.

We also had some Crush Boar and Rock Bison meat leftover from yesterday. Could we make something with them? Fran had an immense appetite for such a tiny frame, so I doubted they'd be enough. Should I cut them into chunks anyway?

No, I should use the Saber-Tooth meat I carved just now. I'd mix the pork-like

Crush Boar, the beef-like Rock Bison, and the juicy Saber-Tooth steak to make a delicious burger.

I proceeded to mince the three meats and added salt and pepper to the mix. Next, I threw in some diced, chive-like plant into the mix. I then kneaded the mixture with Telekinesis until it all combined and formed into a patty. Meat by itself was good; triple meat must've been three times better.

I wrapped the patties in Rock Bison caul fat and heated my frying pan on a makeshift stove made from Earth Magic and Fire Magic. Was it too big? Not that Fran would mind; she would drool at the sight of it. I used Crush Boar lard as cooking oil. I turned up the heat to get the pan going then turned it down to stop it from burning.

That looks good.

I set the giant patty on a plate and proceeded to make the sauce. I added mock-miso, strawberries, and crushed grapes to the cooking juices to make a slightly tangy gravy.

This was delicious by itself, but I wanted to make it lighter since it was supper. I took the remaining flour and made a thin crepe out of it. I topped it off with some herbs and my Tortilla Hamburger (kind of) was complete.

Fra— "I'm here!"

Well, someone was enthusiastic. Fran was already behind me before I could say, "Order up!"

She stared at the Tortilla Hamburger in awe.

Wash your ha— "Done!"

She put her hands up as if to show me. She'd been waiting for this.

Supper is served.

"Thank you for the meal."

Fran took huge bites out of the burger, and it didn't take long before she devoured it all. She had a big, healthy appetite. I was glad I cooked it for her, but it seemed I underestimated her appetite.

She looked at me expectantly. “Seconds?”

Uhhh, hang on…

I didn’t think she’d need seconds. *Oh well.*

I made a steak from the Tyrant Saber-Tooth this time. Seeing her enjoy her meal was so delightful that I felt I was getting seconds too. When we’d first met, she’d been so quiet because of her life as a slave, but now she was opening up and selfish enough to ask for seconds again. She was regaining her will to do things on her own again. She could ask for seconds now, and I was sure it was the same as when she said she wanted to keep carving earlier. It made me so happy I could just zip around camp.

Didn’t think I’d see the day I’d consider selfishness a virtue.

I had the honor of being the recipient of Fran’s budding trust. I swore I would never betray her.

Afterword Hello, my name is Yuu Tanaka. I would like to thank you for buying this book, first time readers and long-time fans alike. If you bought this on the internet, please recommend it to your friends. If you're reading this in the bookstore, take it to the register and buy it! Why wait?

The revised manuscript for this novel was initially posted on the website *Shousetsuka ni Narou* (*Let's Be Novelists*). I didn't expect it to be published when I first wrote the story. I even joked to my friend, "I'll sign a copy for you if I get published."

Well, the website *is* called *Let's Be Novelists*, so I had an inkling of expectation. Becoming a novelist is my dream and I've worked very hard at it. I had tried once before but it didn't go very well. That's when I found *Let's Be Novelists*.

I didn't need to get published for people to begin reading my work. I thought it'd be good practice since I'd be able to get feedback on my writing. That was all I had in mind when I first posted to the site. I didn't have that many readers for a while, and I was just doing it as a hobby. I'd read the comments people left behind on my stories and I'd be sad or happy depending on what they said. There were even times I got depressed if the comment was particularly harsh.

At some point, I started gaining more readers and began climbing the charts. That was when I first started thinking, "Hey, maybe…"

Then I got published. I wasn't confident enough to say something like, "Now I'm a real novelist!" but it made me certain enough to continue writing. I'm really glad I posted my work on *Let's Be Novelists*.

A final word of gratitude for now.

I would like to thank *Micro Magazine* for looking at my crude work and giving it an award. I would also like to thank my Editor, I-san, for being so patient with me in the writing process. I am forever in your debt. Thank you Llo for making Fran insanely cute; I feel faint every time I see her.

Thank you to *Let's Be Novelists* for publishing this book.

Thank you to my friends and family for being with me when times got hard.

Thank you to everyone involved in the publishing process.

And thank you to my readers who have been with me since this novel was on the internet. I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

See you in Volume 2.

Thanks for reading!



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